

“Lifting our Vision Poster and Synod Guiding Principles” (modified for use during Easter Cycle A, 2008)

© Rev. Robert W. Kenyon

Rationale: Our congregation is using the Lifting our “Vision” poster during the Easter Cycle. The lessons and Guidelines work well together, and will help us build interest in the Synod Assembly in April in Spokane.

You may want to consider using something like this for your congregation.

Here are some “priming” thoughts....We will use the resources for teaching children both as Sunday School lessons and as a children’s sermon.

March 30th- Easter 2

Lessons: Acts 2:14a, 22-32

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

25 David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Peter’s sermon gives a good place to focus on “Jesus, first, last and always”. Jesus is the Messiah, and though crucified, the risen Jesus is now enthroned forever.

I Peter 1;3-9...

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he *has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you,

5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7 These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

”Living hope....the was, and is now and will be forever ours, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

John 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

(NIV)

The Risen Jesus appears to his disciples, offering them *a benediction, a commission and the gift of the Holy Spirit* "As the father has sent me, even so I send you", Jesus tells them. So, it turns out that this is a (co)missional event, and the event begins with Jesus' coming, with his resurrection, and now with our commissioning. Thomas' confession

and Jesus rejoinder about ‘those who have not seen and yet believe being our context within which to give our profession.’ Tie in into the statement that hangs over the door as people leave the sanctuary at Immanuel, Moses Lake: “Worship is over. You are now entering your mission field.” The benediction just given to you is really meant for you to give to someone else. Do you know for whom it is to be given?

Tie to the Guidelines: “Our effort is all about Jesus. In him we have been drawn to the deepest trust of our lives. We want to follow him, in word and service. This ‘man for others’ call us to become the ‘church for others’.

(taken from Lifting our Vision-Martin Wells).

Other wonderful sermon ideas are contained in the bible studies that Martin has written. They correspond to the numbering of the guidelines in the poster.

Sermon ideas....”for fear of the Jews”...fears have a certain timely flavor. See the list of fears in the bible study Bishop Wells has written. Is not our time a time of ‘terror’...but haven’t we always been at a war with terror...the terror of life, death and purposelessness. The terror of sin’s grip on our life. The terror of disease, and our own limited mortality. At least the disciples can name their fear...of the Jewish leaders, the very same who put Jesus to death. ‘Can we name ours? Naming our fears is part of the grace of facing them. Confession before forgiveness, in the assurance of a gracious Lord.

Jesus faced all of life’s terrors, and the terror of death with an assurance that he would triumph over them. “After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” In an age of terror, we are vulnerable to ‘security’ issues. The disciples hope came despite their own attempts at ‘security’...doors shut for fear. But Jesus came not as one to take away fear, to grant joy by his presence in the midst of it. It has always been so, is now, and will always be: Jesus....first, last and always.

Just think of all the times that an angel, the God of Israel, or the Lord Jesus told people: “Don’t be afraid...” or some form of it appears over 70 times in the bible. Do you get the idea that God is trying to tell us something?

But We are more than a ‘crutch for those who lack security”. We are a church with a mission into the very heart of terrified souls with the presence of a living hope....which has overcome ‘sin, death and the power of the devil’...but ‘not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order (so that—purpose/mission statement) that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.” (Small Catechism, 2nd article explanation.)

Want homeland security? You can’t get better than 1 Peter 1:3-5. Salvation is kept even from the terror of our meddling and saved from where you place security in this life....In God we trust, or the FDIC, or Soc. Security? It is an inheritance,

a gift, usually following a relationship with the giver. It is a prize possession, carefully passed down to those who can be entrusted, and who will appreciate it. Our mission is to pass this relationship on to others, so they can receive the gift.

The sermon from Peter lays the whole issue of ‘a secure hope in our lifetime’, arguing that being a witness means bearing testimony in our lives to what was, and is and will always be—our relationship with Jesus begun in grace, fostered in loving service and granted as an ‘inheritance’.

This leads us to the missional part...being sent, as the father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us. God’s mission (in sending Jesus) is our mission (we are sent). The reconciliation of a defiant and lost people with God, by way of Jesus is our mission. This reconciliation is for all people, for all of life. (parentheses are my additions, not Martin Wells)

Here, the words of Craig Van Gelder are so powerful “God’s passion is for the gospel to go everywhere, so that everyone might be invited to receive redemption that relates to everything. In God’s plan, the church is given the incredible privilege of sharing this good news about new life in Christ with all of the church.”¹

Children’s Sermon is “Jesus, First, last, and always” from Pr. Helga Janson’s handout in the materials that came with your poster. One of the other ideas is to take the Synod logo, put in onto cardboard, cut it into a jigsaw puzzle, and let the children put it together talking about each person adding their ‘piece’ to the puzzle to ‘get the whole picture (mission)’. The logo is available from our synod website (resources).

Talk about facing our fears with a missional stance !Read “Closing a Church’s Doors” by Jodi L. Dieke in the Jan/Feb 2008 edition of Lutheran Partners. Powerful piece on self-determination of a congregations mission, even in closing the church building, ministry continues, and perhaps rather than closing the building, change it’s mission to something else: community center (to house scouts, AA, etc...), or a counseling center, or retreat center or something. Ministry can take many shapes..

Hymns: #290 Go Tell it on the Mountain...rewrite as an Easter hymn
“Go tell it to the nations, into the streets and neighborhoods,
Go show it to the people, that Jesus lives today!”

Vs. 1 While disciples sat in darkness, waylaid by their tears,
Jesus came and stood among them, and joy transformed their fears. (refrain)
(Text and words in the common domain—no copyright infringement)

#579 Lord you give the great Commission ELW

808 Lord Jesus you shall be my song as I journey ELW

¹ The Evangelizing Church, Craig Van Gelder, pg. 52

576 “We all are one in mission”—(alternative tune --if unfamiliar to congregation: The Church’s one foundation # 654)

581 “You are Mine” ELW...could be a great song for a month long learning process...

I invite you to use the song: “Rejoice in the mission” as a theme song for the series of Easter A cycle. It was sent to you in the materials with the poster.

At our place, we use a hymn or chorus as the ‘prayer echo’...a song that begins the prayers of the church, and is played during each petition, and the verse is sung as the petition ends...the idea of never ending prayer and song offered to God. Good prayer echos...808, 513, 886, 402, 809, 814.

April 6, 2008 Easter 3

Guiding Principle #2—“Gratitude, Gratitude” Our power source is gratitude for the life we have been given and given (again) in Jesus. We are servants of this gratitude; servants to all. This is the way the Holy Spirit gives us breath, hope and calm when it all spins so fast. We pray to remember how to breathe for God’s inspiration, and to calm our hearts.”

Lessons:

Acts 2:14a, 36-41—

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call."

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Conclusion of Peter’s sermon from Pentecost—“gratitude could be the effect of repentance and coming to faith.” When we understand how much we have been graced and loved by God in the death and resurrection of Christ, we begin to know how to help others see that in their lives as well. Soren Kierkegaard said: “our response to Christ’s love toward us should be a striving borne of gratitude toward all people”. As Bishop Wells quotes Karl Barth: “gratitude follows grace like thunder follows the lightning”.

Gratitude here is not a feeling or emotion, but a quality characteristic of a faith-filled response. It is one that starts slow, and begins to grow...and never stops growing. It is also a response that comes even amid difficulties and challenges, for we know that ‘without pain there is no gain’, but the outcome of this struggle is not in doubt. So we give thanks even for the struggles, for as Paul reminds us, “

Rom 5:1-5

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.
3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.
5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
(NIV)

In fact, one might point to the lack of ‘passionate spirituality’ in our congregations as a sign of the lack of gratitude in our discipleship. ***How grateful are we*** for all that our lord does for us? Do we understand the tremendous gulf between “God’s act in Christ” and “the hope that is within us, that calls for a response in a life of repentance borne of gratitude.”

The analogy here may best be the one our ELCA board of Pensions is trying to get us to do: “embodying wellness”. Through a deliberate and honest assessment of our clergy’s fitness, we are then challenged to “putting our physical , emotional, spiritual house in order, so that (purpose) we might be more effective witnesses and models and examples to our congregations of ‘the gratitude of a wonderful creation which we embody”.

1 Peter 1:17-31

7 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.
18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,
19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.
20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.
21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.
22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.
23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the
grass withers and the flowers fall,
25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached
to you.

Peter counsels us to "live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. " Reverent fear is like holy awe, or a sense of all of life being the gift of a gracious loving God. And so, our focus can still be on gratitude for all the gifts we receive while in 'exile', and most of all for the gratitude that we have a focus, a hope, and a faith that makes living in exile purposeful while we wait for our homecoming...or more likely, the second coming of Jesus. Though we are 'not home yet' we are still effective and at home in 'Christ', and his people. And our job is to live lives of gratitude that will help us grow in witness to that 'other kingdom'.

A good analogy here is that of a gift card. We are given gift cards when the person wishing to gift us doesn't know what else to purchase, or when they wish to gift us and let us choose the appropriate gift. The stores love gift cards, because an estimated 30% of them remain unredeemed (that is paid for but unclaimed). That is for a variety of reasons, not least of which is, 'laziness of the donor'. Is there a parallel here? Redemption here means we have to use the card, exchange it for merchandise or services, rather than just open the present. And then there is the whole idea of saying :thank you. Often, thank you notes are a lost art...replaced by a hasty email. My side of our family has a rule: No thanks expressed...not future gifts given. Simple enough. Thank God he doesn't follow that rule, but he could. Enough said!

Luke 24:13-35—

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.
14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.
15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;
16 but they were kept from recognizing him.
17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.
18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"
19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.
20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;
21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.
22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning
23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.

24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."
25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"
27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.
29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.
30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.
31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.
32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"
33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together
34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."
35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Emmaus' story is so rich with the idea of gratitude...

For Jesus presence, even when we don't recognize him walking with us; for the long tradition of understanding what they could not comprehend in the scriptures; for breaking bread, and making himself known to us; and for a community who cherishes the grateful stories passed down and witnessed by us. Gratitude becomes hope that find it's home in our faith.

In this electronic age in which we live, often images are flashed at us from internet, TV, magazines and we get a picture but not necessarily the story behind it. It takes a community, or an editor at least, who can help us to reflect on what the story behind the image means, and how we can be more reflective. Perhaps one of the reasons for our lack of gratitude is that we have become too busy to take time to reflect on the old stories' meaning in our lives. Jesus joins two person who have been too busy experiencing to remember the tradition behind the events of the last days. These two disciples had been traumatized by the events of the week. And their hope is crushed, because they are only caught up in the events. "We had hoped...but now their hope was snuffed out along with Jesus' life.

How often have we as pastors had this type of person in our offices. And we have all sorts of therapeutic tools to use to help them assuage their guilt, or feel better about their loss. But we, without ourselves, have no way to offer hope. That is the product of faith alone. And it is Jesus, who joins them in their walk, and begins to breathe back into them the hope they lack, and then, takes their hope to a new level, one reborn in resurrection,

when he breaks bread. And it is then that suddenly, all of the teaching and reflection comes home, and they cannot contain themselves, but get up that very night, and run home. Gratitude for the lord's presence, even in their mourning, has become the half--mark of their preaching and sharing.

How often have we thought of the Lord's supper as a meal of remembrance...but that remembrance is also a missional meal. We are being empowered, served, and restored so that we can go and do the same for others. I usually remind people at the rail that the benefits of this meal are given to them not as possessions, but as provisions for someone else. The forgiveness received tangibly is to be given away tangibly, the promise is to be shared with another, perhaps someone whose hope is gone, and the presence in the meal is to help them know they are never alone. Dr. Paul Harms, in my baccalaureate service from seminary told us: 'and now since we have a lot of work to do, let's have a little lunch'. And before we ate, we gave remembered he gave thanks (eucharisto), and then, in gratitude and preparation, we ate.

A fuller expansion of this topic is in Bishop Wells' bible study, #2.

Hymns: WOV # 771, #781, ELW-#840,#836, #823, #821, #817, #723, #251

As our gospel acclamation for the whole season, we use "Thanks be to God" taken from "Israel in Egypt" by G. F. Handel. It lifts up many of the themes of these guidelines.

April 13, 2008—Easter 4

Guiding Principles #3—No Fear! Transformation!

Many are afraid because the world is changing so fast. We are not afraid because Jesus and his life anchor us in confidence. Together we seek the transformation that is God's constant will (Romans 12:2). Our anchor holds true in Jesus and we wonder where he is leading us." (Wells)

Lessons:

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Ps 23:1-6

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my
head with oil; my cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell
in the house of the LORD forever.

This new community, based on apostolic teaching and Eucharistic remembrance, begins to expand and find its message and ministry. Bishop Wells, in his study, draws upon the clothing and slogan “No Fear!”. It is especially appealing to those who are into extreme sports, but also as motto for those who live their life to the fullest. But I think there is a change for the church to note. It is the change noted in Ps. 23. “We fear not, ***because he is with us***”. Our fear is not in the face of evil, for who should fear evil, or those who are practioners of it. Christians fear not, even in the midst of trouble, because he is here with us. And this Psalm is a great place to talk about gratitude....”my cup overflows, even in the presence of my enemies”.

Perhaps another angle on this is that too often, the church’s message has always been about ‘comfort, soothing fears’, to the point where our services soothe rather than excite, and promote calming rather than stirring us to do something.” Rather, with the presence and leading of Jesus, our shepherd, we worship and prepare: “I shall not want...shall not fear...I shall live...forever.”

1 Pet 2:19-25

19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.
20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.
21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.
22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."
23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.
24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.
25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The difficulties and hardships we face are not to be seen as signs of ‘failure, but perhaps as inevitable reactions to the fear of the world changing. But Christ is both a model of courage, as well as of transformation through endurance and loyalty to God, particularly in the face of adversity. We are wedded to a means, a method, a hope, or a tradition, not matter how beloved. We are ‘healed of our wounds’, and that always implies a break with the past. We are people who have been transformed, and thus, live an alien presence in the midst of this culture and every culture.

I like and would highlight Bishop Wells words on transformation in his study, especially the words of Eugene Peterson in **The Message**: *“Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.” In other words, the goal is not accommodation, but transformation; the task is to evangelize without having to legitimize our existence; to be free “to keep the DNA of the gospel while we change the presentation of it’s incarnation within us today.”*

John 10:1-10

1 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Good shepherds help calm fears through clarity and integrity. Fear motivates only more fear, but transformation knows no fear! Its destination is the mind and heart of Christ, the good shepherd. The tie in here is vs. 3-5: He knows his own by name....they know his voice...he going ahead...leads them out (no fear)...they recognize no stranger’s voice (transformation).

How often in this world are we presented with the voices and cries of others: whether it’s in our phones, emails, text messages or in person, we are bombarded daily with calls. Be this, do this, help me with this, pray for me in this, teach me this. How do we stop amid these calls, and listen for the master’s voice in our own heads and hearts? How do we find time (or make time) to be alone with the master, before we are asked as shepherds to lead others to their shepherds. Sometimes, I will admit, I feel more like the gatekeeper than a sheep...”saying yes to this, no to that, and admitting I don’t know what to say to others.” Yes, it’s a dizzying array of choices before us. And we are tempted many times to follow the voice most tempting, rather than wait for the one voice we can know for sure. What do you do to get to know the Shepherd’s voice better.

“knowing the voice of the one who calls” reminds me of the struggle we have when computer viruses are sent and get into the servers system. Not only do they cause damage to software, but they love to mess up address books, and send thousands of messages to everyone in your address book. The experts advise: “don’t open anything if you don’t know who its from.” John counsels: “ because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” Part of that also means knowing what his voice sounds like. Sometimes, scams and fraudulent emails try to get us to give information, or to claim a ‘prize’, or something else. Often, they disguise themselves as official government or banks seeking ‘confirmation of personal information’. Identity theft, resulting in part for such frauds, is one of the fastest growing crimes in the country. All the more reason to ‘know what his voice sounds like, rather than just the sound”.

Hymns: use 388 ELW as a Gospel Acclamation; Other ELW #s: 764, 611, 796, 618, 504

April 20, 2008—Easter 5 (While this is the Synod’s Assembly Sunday, you might be preaching at home, or need to write a sermon for someone else to give to those who can’t come to the Assembly. This material is prepared with that in mind. If close enough, let’s try to get to Spokane, and fill the steps along the riverbank)

Guiding Principle: #4 Miracles of Hope

“We confess we have lost or forgotten our capacity for hope in miracles! We have forgotten that God invites us to personal transformation. We pray God will open our eyes, lift our vision, restore our hope! Rekindle in us the power to move mountains! Remove our lesser loyalties and our fears. We will be people of miraculous expectation and personal transformation!” (Wells)

Lessons:

Acts 7:55-60

55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stoning of Stephen after he had given a great sermon. I’ve made people angry, but thankfully not that angry! All people can expect miracles of hope, even in the midst of death and destruction. Perhaps like Stephen, we will not see the miracle until the moment is darkest and most destructive, but our faith calls us to see it anyway. (Ps. 31 ties into this with vs. 5)

Often, the problem is not that the miracles do not occur, but that we have trained ourselves not to see them when they do occur. We have become so set and stayed in our practices that we cannot see the new thing that God is about. And when someone from the outside comes to talk with us about ‘the new vision God has given them’, do we receive them gracefully or do we say: “We’ve always done it this way before. That won’t work here?” And God gives the miracle to someone else who will at least try.

1 Pet 2:2-10

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"

8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

(NIV)

Christ is the cornerstone of God’s saving work. We are those who ‘continuously celebrate and declare the mercy of God we experience through Jesus Christ.’ (Sundays and Seasons). Can miracles be far behind? The more we keep our focus on Jesus, first, last and always, the more we are open for miracles he may send. And keep in mind that the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand happened as they did what Jesus told them, as at Cana, and the healing of the lepers. The paradigm is thus set: “do what he tells you to do, and watch for what you can never expect.” We would rather have Jesus come and present it to our outreach or evangelism committee, before we ever act upon it. But miracles happen as people trust God in Christ, and reach out in his name to others. Then, and in the process of obedient action the miracles happen.

John 14:1-14

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

- 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."
- 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"
- 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."
- 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."
- 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
- 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.
- 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.
- 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.
- 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.
- 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Jesus promises to go before the disciples and act on their behalf. Miracles of hope are the expectation of people who know Jesus presence deep within us. We are given a promise: "ask, and if it brings glory to Christ, he will grant it." The question is perhaps asked: "Do we believe this?"

I was recently able to help two "lost boys from the Sudan". They were stranded in Ritzville when one of their companions became ill on the Greyhound to Seattle late Saturday night. It was remarkable how quickly our conversations turned from 'our problems' to 'God is good'. Their answer to every kindness was God is good. They said it so it required you to respond "Yes, God is good".

I took them to Spokane to catch a bus to Seattle, then a boat to Alaska. They had been told, "If you get to the dock by this time and day, I'll take you with me. Be late, and be sorry". Then, their friend became ill. As we raced to catch the bus to Seattle, we engaged in wonderful conversation. By the end of our travel, we were all saying: "God is good!" (it's contagious, try it!) When we arrived at the depot, we had not tickets. The ticket counter would not be open for two more hours. But then, suddenly, someone pointed out a bus which was going to Vancouver, B. C.. Yes, but we still needed tickets I thought. They turned to me and said, "But pastor, we have the tickets the driver gave us when we got off the bus last night....will those work". Still skeptical, I waited. The driver came in and said: "I have 18 seats and I have at least 25 people who want to ride. Anyone arguing with me can stay for the next bus. He called a boarding number...and no one moved. Then more numbers. Still no one moved. Then he called 16, and that was one of the numbers of my friend's ticket. He went forward, and the driver told him to get

on the bus. The next number was my other friend's ticket...he got on. And we mouthed to each other as I waved good bye...."God is good". Miracles!

Hymns: "I Believe in Miracles- JW Petersen", #856 ELW, #612 ELW, #484 ELW, #400 ELW,

April 27, 2008 Easter 6—

Guideline # 5—Yes, everyone Come!

"Ours is a geography in transition, racially, economically and culturally. Maintenance of our ministries has led us to dig in, and try to hide from these challenges. Our vision is One Body, One church in many languages and colors, gifted by all. We will be the church of Pentecost!" (Wells)

Acts 17:22-31

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.

23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.

25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-- an image made by man's design and skill.

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

We live in a day becoming almost as 'vacant of knowledge' about Christ as ancient Athens and Mars Hill and the altar to an 'unknown' god. We are people who are 'over-talked and under-acted' when it comes to faith. What a great place to start to talk about 'invitation, ya'll come, no barriers' rather than 'who is qualified' or 'who knows the truth'. We can introduce them to one who is the truth.

I have been doing a lot of reading in the "Emergent" church material. It seems to me that they have the sense we are lacking. We are 'attractational' models, trying to find

ways, even ‘reaching out’ to bring people in. The word is that Jesus is here....come and get it. The goal of our reaching out is to add one more to our number.

Which is why I like the emergent model better...outreach is outreach...and the goal is to do ministry wherever you are. It maybe a place others know or somewhere no one ever heard of before. And the goal of outreach here is to ‘be church’ wherever we are...to bring the grace and love of Jesus in the work and words we say, being the hearts, head and hands of an ‘unknown’ or ‘misunderstood’ god in the culture we have today.

Emergent churches talk about our type of church as a ‘bounded set’, which leads to a selection or ‘whose in and whose out’, whose welcome and whose excluded, and an adoption of a culture that is largely unintelligible to the younger community in which we live. They offer instead a centered set...wherein the goal is to move people from the outside of the group to the inside, by mentoring, coaching, helping them come to know this ‘unknown’ god in Christ.

1 Pet 3:13-21

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison

20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Christians have an extra power—that of baptismal grace. Thus, transparency is the greatest invitation to others...let them see ‘Christ’ in all our behavior, private and public. Let them see the hope that is ours...and then be prepared to speak about the reasons for it. Lutherans have done things for too long without explanation. The people were left to imagine why we did it. We need both to serve, and to tell why, to work and to witness.

But it also doesn't mean we are to meet everyone's need. We can welcome all without having to meet everyone's need. We can do this because we are not asking everyone to come and meet us, but “come and see Jesus”. Jesus can sort out and met their need. Our job is to invite, and to model this Christ to whom we seek to introduce them.

John 14:15-21

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--

17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

—Obey my commandments and watch for the spirit leading. Then, follow the spirit, into keeping my new commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you. We also are told "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Vs. 23

Sometimes when I meet people, they have a litany of problems longer than Santa's wish list. And I recently looked at one dear saint and said: "It must be a burden to have to run the world?" They smiled and we laughed together for the first time in the conversation. It helped her gain perspective. What a burden we place upon ourselves when we think we're the only one who gets it, or can sell it, or wants to do it! Sometimes, the whole spiritual existence of life seems to land upon me, I think. Then I'm an idolater, as well as a fool.

Isn't it a joy that we can simply introduce everyone everywhere to the Jesus we know and love. We can bring all the needs and concerns, problems and cares to the Lord who can meet and greet them, and we have done our job. We don't have to run the world, or even suffer for it, or even redeem it...we can just give it to the one who already has, and is, and always will be the world's savior and Lord. This guiding principle leads us back through the others ones we're already covered...

Hymns: ELW #: #720, #671, #551, #729, # 715, #708, #641

May 4, 2008

Guideline #6 Come, Lord Jesus!

"Finally, it is not our effort; it is not our vision. It is God calling us to enact and incarnate the Kingdom of God now. We are all ministers of this vision! It is our calling and vocation. This vision shapes our courage. We are not afraid to fail in this trust. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Wells)

Lessons:

Acts 1:6-14

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The final word is "wait till you get told what to do". And it wasn't very long after that when the Spirit came and said: "Now, get going..." The task ahead was to be a witness, to testify to the truth as you know it, so help you God. Nothing else matters. We are not there to convict, though that may be the result of our testimony. We are not there to convert, though that too may result from our testimony. We are asked to be Jesus' witnesses...in the power of the spirit...to say what we know to be the truth. That's all!

Our other task is to keep reminding people that he promised he would be back. Our prayer, in the interim between his leaving and his coming again is the prayer of the church of all time..."come, Lord Jesus".

1 Pet 4:12-14

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

We trust God's grace will strengthen and guide us, no matter what, but especially in times of persecution. The ancient ones taught, "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church". The answer to persecution was to 'witness with one's life', and that spoke of the deep core convictions of the people involved. What they lived for they were willing to die for.

We run little risk of dying for our faith, due to persecution. But often, we are asked to make other sacrifices and other struggles. Come Lord Jesus means that we live by faith, whether we meet him at the end of a good long life, or as he returns to us. We are the ministers of this vision, not the visioneers; this vision is not ours, but that of God. And we pray that not only as Jesus kingdom comes on earth as in heaven, that it also comes to us. Then, we will meet and greet him when he comes.

John 17:1-11

1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one.

(NIV)

John 17:1-11—On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father, asking for unity among those who will keep his work going. The vision and the guidelines are not contentious, and not difficult to keep. They are the goal and desire of Christians everywhere. “Come Lord Jesus” is a prayer of welcome, as well as a confession of a heartfelt presence. Come in your fullness, come in your glory, and come to defeat these forces with which we fight so long and so hard.

And this prayer reminds me of one of the growth principle in Natural Church Development...that of interdependence. Everything Jesus did was connected with who The Father and the Spirit was and is, and everything we are to do is also connected to Jesus and God’s work in the world. We are the ones who join God’s mission...the mission does not necessarily run automatically through our church. What other partners do you have in this inter-connected dependence that you haven’t even tapped or asked for help? What new ways of doing things does this partnership suggest...and are you open to the coming of Jesus in a new way? And interdependence says there is more than one way to look at a problem and thus more than one way to think of a solution...do something in one place and it will change and move in yet another...maybe one you have not yet thought of.

Hymn ELW #s: 752, 676, 745, 712, 793, 501, 527, 808. Use 535 as a post-communion song...or a final hymn.

One Final word:

We invite you to be creative, and to think through the guidelines and what they mean in your setting and for your congregation. “Lifting your vision” means to seek new and innovative ways rather than just the same old thing. Remember to bathe all plans with constant and strong prayer, and then set to work in your way and place. Let your worship committees and musicians have fun creating their own season of festive Easter worship around the synodical guidelines, the Easter A cycle text and its missional meaning in your spot.