

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
January 19, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year A John 1:29-42

Let us pray. Grant us, O God to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Do you remember a time when you started a new role in life and you thought, "Oh my gosh! Am I really qualified to do this?" I felt like that my first day of teaching...and many teaching days after that! And I certainly felt like that when I became a pastor.

Maybe you worried about whether you could live up to your role as a husband or wife. Most parents wonder if they are being the kind of parent their child needs.

Whenever we start something new there is always a lot to learn, no matter how much education or training or experience we have. Each setting and each group of people is unique, and we can only use what we already know to adapt as best we can.

Often, the thing that makes our new roles in life daunting is the sense of expectation we feel from those around us. We want to be responsible to those we work with. We don't want to let down our patients or clients or customers...or our family. Sometimes those expectations are clearly stated in a job description. And sometimes we guess at what others expect from us.

I wonder if Jesus felt that weight of expectation when John pointed him out to the crowd and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

We cannot know what went through Jesus' mind at that moment. The title Lamb of God is only used in this gospel. It is clearly a title of power, and John declares a powerful job description to go with it.

We know that before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed in the garden that God would remove that responsibility from him. Ultimately, he remained faithful to God's purpose to take away the barrier of sin that kept people and creation from a full and loving relationship with God.

The beginning of Jesus' ministry sets the stage for revealing Jesus as the One we follow with faith into all aspects of our lives. In these Sundays after Christmas Jesus is revealed to us in different ways. As we learn who Jesus is, we must also recognize how his identity informs our identities as Christians.

Over the past year and a half or so we have been focusing on how our congregation can be more intentional about faith formation. This is not just for our children and youth. It is important that we are all mindful of how our faith in Jesus Christ is growing and evolving over our entire lifetimes.

Using a document published by the ELCA, we have adopted a model with four practices that form Christian faith over time. Those are Respectful Relationships, Spiritual Practices, Guided Learning, and Faith-filled Service. Our gospel reading today gives us a glimpse into these four practices. Then, for the next four weeks we will look at each one more closely.

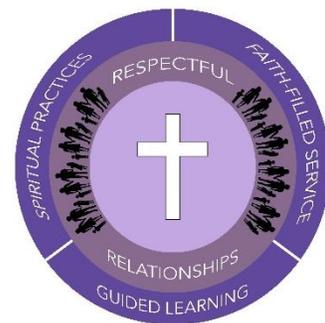
Now, here we are back at expectations! I can hear some of you thinking, “I’m doing the best I can to address the needs of my family, friends, work, and self-care! Now Pastor wants me to do MORE to pay attention to my faith.”

I get it. I really do. I have been examining my own faith practices lately, wondering if I am doing enough, whether I am serving in the community enough, praying enough, and reading the Bible as much as I should. And who is setting the bar for all these expectations, anyway?

Here’s what I want to say to you today. We are called to follow Christ within the ebb and flow of our daily living. You may choose to take on a new practice, but I think we can also learn to see how our everyday lives can be woven with faithful words and actions.

We have included a graphic to help express the four faith formation practices. You can look at that with me as we go along.

With Christ at the center, our first practice is that of Respectful Relationships. Notice how that practice receives its own full circle. It is the foundation of Christ’s relationship with us and flows to our relationships with our neighbors.



We see respectful relationships with John and his own disciples in our gospel today. These men, and probably some women too, had been listening to John. They believed that he would be the one to point them to the promised Messiah. As the gospel says in its prologue, “[John] came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him.” (1:7)

John’s disciples understood who John was and who he was not, because John was clear with them about that. So, when John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, their relationship with John helped them to trust what he said about Jesus.

It’s likely that you came to know Christ because of someone who loved and cared for you. It is through our respectful relationships that we also make Christ known to others.

Let’s look at Spiritual Practices next. John and his disciples, and Jesus himself, have just come from the river for baptism. This is also our entry into a life of faith, whether that happened when you were an infant, a child, or an adult. Baptism is a spiritual practice that joins us to God’s family of the faithful and reminds us of who we are and to whom we belong.

Our weekly worship is a good example of a spiritual practice. Worship is centered around the Word and the Sacraments. Here we receive mercy in the words of forgiveness that were promised to us Holy Baptism. Here we receive spiritual nourishment from Christ’s body and blood in the Holy Meal. This hour each week gathers us as God’s people and renews us with the power of the Holy Spirit.

We’ll move around the circle to Guided Learning. As John’s disciples turned toward Jesus, they asked him, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Rabbi means teacher, we are told. These

people are not just wondering where Jesus is sleeping at night. They want to know where he hangs out, who he spends time with, because they want to learn from him.

Again, earlier in the gospel we read, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us...” (v. 14) The words “lived” and “staying” come from the same word which we could also translate as abide or dwell. Christ dwells with us as we spend time learning together in worship, study groups, or listening to faith-based podcasts as one of our study groups does. In our guided learning Jesus calls us as disciples to “come and see” who he is and how a relationship with him can bring God’s light and life to the world.

With that invitation to “come and see” Jesus leads his disciples into lives of Faith-filled Service. As Jesus’ new disciples stay with him, they will follow him to people and places in need of God’s love and grace. Staying with Jesus can be challenging and uncomfortable at first. But we see again and again how this One who is the light of all people transforms suffering and challenges into hope and life.

Jesus invites us, too, to come and see what God has in store for those who believe in him. In every part of our lives we are given the opportunity to engage in Faith-filled Service. It’s how we relate to our family members, how we support and encourage our coworkers, and how we engage in our communities to work for justice and renewal.

This may seem like the most daunting of all the faith formation practices. Faith-filled Service is just how we live day to day. Giving it a title like this reminds us that all aspects of life are opportunities to reflect the light of Christ shining in us and through us.

The life of faith in Jesus Christ does not need to be overwhelming. Jesus comes to dwell with us first. As we learn and grow and live in community with other believers our faith guides us to give witness to the One whose life, death, and resurrection takes away the sin of the world, bringing us into loving relationship with God.

May we grow in faith toward God and in love for one another, as we follow Jesus Christ, our light and our life.

Thanks be to God! Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Called together through water and the Word, we boldly pray for the church, the world, and all who long to hear God's voice.

*A brief silence.*

Faithful God, thank you for the testimony of disciples throughout the generations and for opportunities to proclaim your mercy. In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, strengthen the bond of Christians in communities and around the world that the love of Christ would be revealed in our common proclamation of word of life. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creating God, we marvel at the abundance of the world you have made. Restore places where natural disasters have struck, especially Puerto Rico, India, and Australia. Give us confidence in our calling to be stewards of the earth so that our lives are in fellowship with all creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, we are thankful for all who have marched for justice and advocated for peace, especially your servant Martin Luther King, Jr. whose life we remember this week. Entrust our elected leaders with strength, wisdom, and a discerning spirit, so that both our words and our actions serve you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of hope, thank you for your constant presence as you walk with your children through challenges of joblessness, homelessness, grief, and sickness. Gather your community around all who need your healing power, that they find strength in you, especially...  
Kathie, Jessie, Kyle, Rodney, and Loyd Bowen  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of persistence, we glory in the gifts of our church leaders. Bless and strengthen our council members, staff, worship leaders, and all those who offer their gifts to this community, that our work together would serve your mission. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Living God, we give thanks for the whole communion of saints, each called in their own time to serve you. Inspire our lives with their testimony. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We place our prayers before you, God, united in your Spirit; through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**