

DIACONAL SUNDAY

February 23, 2014

Celebrating witness expressed through service (diakonia) and leadership offered by the ELCIC's diaconal ministers.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. —Matthew 5:44

Pray, Read, Worship, Study, Serve, Give, Tell

Serving our neighbours is an essential element of spiritual renewal, of life in the Church and of sharing the gospel. Internationally, the Greek word *diakonia* is used to discuss and encourage mission expressed through compassionate justice, service, advocacy and development. Along with “Theology & Dialogue” and “Holistic Mission & Relationships,” “Diakonia” is one of the priorities of Lutheran World Federation. Today we pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire and renew witness expressed through service.

Diaconal Ministers are authorized by the ELCIC for a public Ministry of Word and Service. This includes skilled & faithful service to marginalized persons, and a deep commitment to equipping all the baptized for spirited discipleship. Today, we give thanks for the 29 people on the ELCIC Roster of Diaconal Ministers, and for the service and leadership they offer.

The image of Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13) is an example of how Jesus modelled a life of service. His command to “love your enemies” calls us to show active concern for all who are in need. Today we live out our call to be a church *In Mission for Others*.

Prayer for Diaconal Sunday

We give thanks for the many faithful saints throughout the ages who have taken to heart your call to follow the example Jesus gave us for living in the power of God's love. Merciful God, we give thanks for your unfailing love and the grace that we have received through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We give thanks for the new life we have received through our baptism enabling us to live with confidence in the knowledge that we are your beloved people. We are set free to be active co-creators with you in bringing heaven to earth, through the sharing of your extravagant love which we have received. Help and guide us to be a missional people, to love our neighbour, through our words and actions for the sake of the world. We give thanks for those who feel called to serve you in word and service as diaconal ministers whose commitment to serving you is a visible witness of your love through their lives. We ask that you would continue to reveal to us fresh and life giving ways in which we may serve your purposes of bringing about peace and justice and shalom to all creation. Help us to love as you love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

—Prayer by Brigitte McKenzie



Hymn suggestions for Diaconal Sunday

#648 – *Beloved, God's Chosen*

#639 – *When We Are Living*

#725 – *When the Poor Ones*

#358 – *Great God, Your Love Has Called Us*

God of Life by Scott Knarr

(Scott is a candidate for Diaconal Ministry and has generously shared this hymn for Diaconal Sunday available at www.elcic.ca)

Also available at www.elcic.ca

Reflections on the lectionary texts for February 23, 2014

Bible Study on Stephen: Deacon and First Christian Martyr

Children's Sermon for Diaconal Sunday

Diaconal Sunday Resources from Previous Years



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A Bible Study on Stephen: Deacon and First Christian Martyr

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6 NRSV)

The Christian community at the time was made up of mainly Jews. It was difficult for Jesus' apostles to meet the needs of the whole community. Apparently the Hellenists (Jews born outside of Israel who spoke Greek) were feeling less served. Stephan ministered to the Greek speaking Jewish community, some accepted the gospel of Christ but others were not open to it. Stephen did wonders in his ministry to the people. Not all appreciated his gift of service to the community. Some from the community devised a plot to have Stephen arrested. He was falsely accused of leading the people against the customs of Moses. Stephen remained calm as the lies and accusations by the Sanhedrin's were thrown his way. We read, *and all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel* (Acts 6:15). Stephen then had an opportunity to address his opponents. What he said infuriated the council. He was driven out and stoned to death. (Acts 7:58-59) Stephen's last words before his death were to ask the Lord to forgive those who had stoned him. *Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* When he had said this, he died. (Acts 7:60 NRSV)

"We are not likely to face death by stoning, but we may face other kinds of death. If we live the life that Christ commands, we may have uncomfortable decisions to make at work or in our families. We will have to live a life that's unlike the lives we see depicted in popular culture. That's not always easy, but in the end, we can hope the resistance to the most pernicious forms of popular culture will have been worth it." (Kristin Berkly-Abbott *Stephen and the Innocents Blogs* 12/27/2013, www.elca.org.)



Prayer

Gracious God, you have called each of us in service to you. You have laid on our hearts your needs and the needs of the people. We pray that you will use us in diakonia work as exemplified by deacons and deaconesses: Stephen, Miriam, Deborah, Philip, Phoebe and Priscilla. You have called certain people to special ministries in the church, we ask that you bless each in their ministry of Word and Service and you will walk with each as they serve in your name. Dear God send your Holy Spirit on this church to encourage all who serve you, that they might know the world of justice. Encourage your people to take up the call and seek out entry into ministry in the church. The need is great. We thank you for your love and compassion as you accompany us on our journeys. Amen.

Questions to consider:

- What role did the Apostle Paul play in the stoning of Stephen? How was this part of his life a changing experience?
- It was evident that Stephen was a gifted deacon who lived his faith in his community. Compare Acts 7:60 with Luke 23:34, 46. How is Stephen showing his love for Christ and what Christ did for his people?
- December 26th is the day set aside to remember Deacon Stephen and his witness. The ELCIC sets aside a Sunday, February 24th, 2014 to pray for and encourage the diaconal ministry of our church. As of today there are 19 consecrated active diaconal ministers and 10 retired. Search out a diaconal minister and have an interview. Encourage each in their work.
- Deacon Stephen worked with people who were from the fringe of society. Deacons today serve in many different communities. The symbol of diaconal ministers is the towel and bowl. When in the Christian Year is that symbol of the bowl and towel representative of Christ as a servant?
- Discuss with a partner how each can do diaconal ministry at home. How can we reach a stranger? What inclusive communities could we welcome and encourage? How can we be good stewards of creation? How can we encourage justice for everyone? Who do we know that we can encourage to answer the call to be a diaconal minister?

—Study by Deacon Eldon Danielson, Birch Hills, Saskatchewan



Study Notes

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Children's Chat

Greet the children who come up.

Open with discussion about what it is like to serve God and serve God's people. Share a story about serving and invite the kids to think of a way they serve/help those around them. I'm sure each child has a story, given the chance to share.

Ask the children if it was easy for them to serve/help. Who was it they were helping? Was it a loved one? Was it someone they did not know? Was it an enemy?

Read the Matthew text for today (Matthew 5:38 – 48).

Jesus is asking his followers to not only love the people who are easy to love—friends, family. But also those who are hard to love—people who hurt us. People who are mean to us. This is not an easy thing to do. It's not easy for you and it's not easy for us grown-ups.

Jesus tells us that by serving our loved ones and our enemies, then we are doing God's work.

Can you think of some people who you could help who maybe wouldn't expect your help? Who are some people in your life who would be surprised by your service?

God wants us to treat everyone we meet as our neighbour. Our friend. I hope we can each do that today and every day.

Let's pray.

*Dear Jesus,
Help us to look for people to serve. Those we know and love; and those who might be surprised by our help. Help us to be like you, serving all our neighbours around us.
Amen.*

—Prepared by Deacon Gretchen Peterson



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Reflections on the Lectionary for Epiphany 7

February 23, 2014

Lessons:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

Psalm 119:33-40

I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

God calls all of us to diakonia. . .from Leviticus to Jesus to Paul. We are to minister to the poor, to care for the hungry, to become advocates for those who are not being treated justly. Jesus knelt before his disciples in the Upper Room, washed their feet and said: “Do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Jesus showed us how to do diakonia by the way he lived: challenge unjust authorities, feed the hungry, care for the sick and dying, comfort the grieving. That is what our call into diakonia is—a word often translated as service or outreach.

We say that it takes a village to raise a child; likewise, it takes a community to act diaconally. Individual drops in the ocean are necessary. And by working together we can create a tempest. Do you have the courage and impelling desire? That's what it takes to pour out precious time and resources to search out information, choose what to do and then do it. Of course we want to fulfil Jesus' command to “do it!”, and too often we don't know how, so we don't begin. God calls us beyond the boundaries of the familiar, of conformity, so we need each other to have the courage, persistence and freedom to accomplish difficult tasks.

I found that the Old Testament and Psalm are most clearly focused on diakonia. The phrase in Leviticus “I am God” provides a wonderful stance from which to view diakonia—God is deeply involved in our day to day activities. The command in Leviticus is to be a “holy people;” this holiness includes generosity, honesty and fair judgements. I would describe this as



having a “diaconal spirit.” Our witness has greater meaning for people when we embody diakonia in how we move and live as church.

Paul in Corinthians comes to the statement that we are God’s temple, which is holy. If that is so, then caring for those in need is a God-given imperative. Emphasis: God’s Spirit dwells within each of us, thus acting diaconally is natural, if we open ourselves to it.

The Gospel reading is a little more difficult. While it focuses on loving one’s enemies, and not accepting “an eye for an eye” philosophy, one could easily use these words to help listeners know that caring for others does not mean only caring for those who “deserve” our caring! God makes the sun “rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”. So are we to act.

It may even be dangerous to make diakonia the focus of our lives. It was for Jesus and it was for Stephen, one of the first to be named a deacon. (Acts 6-8) Stephen was also the first recorded martyr. Diakonia has never been popular, perhaps because being a servant does not connote power, prestige or wealth. Servanthood was Jesus’ way of life. It is God’s command, clearly part of God’s plan for our lives from earliest times.

I believe that the ELCIC Diaconal Ministry Roster has been given to us for a purpose. We give thanks to God that our church recognizes the need for theologically and professionally trained men and women, called by God to provide leadership and assistance to help us answer the call to diakonia. Our vision is to be a vibrant church, growing in faith and good works. In the midst of this transformative time, we need leadership from pastors, diaconal ministers, lay leaders, and from congregations, small and large.

God calls us all to the ministry of diakonia. When serving each other in community, we also feel the love of God in our deepest selves. Praise God for the trust God has in us to be God’s hands and feet in this world.

—Reflections on the Lectionary prepared by Sister Anne Keffer



Study Notes

Horizontal lines for writing study notes.

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Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Canada
In Mission for Others

God of Life

Refrain: G D Em Bm C G Am7 D

God of Life, God of Love, God of Strength be with us,

G D Em Bm C G D7 G

God of Hope, God of Peace, God of Mer-cy come near to us.

C D7 G Am7 D7 G C

1. God lives a - mong us, in our dai-ly lives shared in the

Am7 D Refrain C D7 G Am7 D7

bread and the wine. 2. God lives a - mong us, in this bo - dy
3. God lives a - mong us, in the mo - ments

G C Am7 D Refrain

gath - ered, shar - ing our pain and our joy.
gi - ven, show - ing the love in our hearts.

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DIACONAL SUNDAY

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Evangelical Lutheran
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God of Life (Flute)

Refrain only:
Melody

God of Life

Scott Knarr

C Instrument

God of Life, God of Love, God of Strength be with us,
God of Hope, God of Peace, God of Mer-cy come near to us.

Descant

Verse Tacet (3 verses)

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