



PILGRIM PAPERS

Mt. Zion Lutheran Church

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"May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion." Ps 134

Did you know that the "Zion" is another word for Jerusalem? The ancient city of Jerusalem sits on top of a very prominent plateau, surrounded by valleys on all sides. So anyone traveling to Jerusalem must hike up the road. For generations, worshippers from many miles away journeyed to Jerusalem in order to visit the Temple and make a sacrifice to the God of Abraham. The word for a person who makes a journey for religious reasons is a "pilgrim". For centuries, Jewish pilgrims journeyed from their home cities and towns to the city of Jerusalem (perhaps once a year or only once in their own lifetime) so that they might worship the God of their ancestors in the temple. While they journeyed, they would have sung songs of praise. Many of these eventually became some of the psalms, including Psalm 134.

As we think about our own congregation, it seems fitting that the founders who built this church on a hill overlooking the Valley thought to name her Mt. Zion. Every Sunday morning, we are all pilgrims making the journey up the hill to worship and sing psalms.

But in-between our weekly pilgrim journeys to worship at Mt. Zion, may this quarterly newsletter, our Pilgrim Papers, encourage you in your own discipleship journey. Here you will find congregation news, ministry updates, synod and ELCA news, and (I hope) Spirit-filled wisdom to feed your faith in the God who calls us and claims us.

Do not forget that we are all pilgrims in this life. We are all on a spiritual journey, discovering where God is at work in our world and in ourselves. God is with us when we gather for worship on the ridge at Mt. Zion, but God is with us on the road back home as well. Christ our Lord is with us on the road!

-Pr. Kristen

Bread of Life Series

The Lectionary is a fancy word from Latin that means "a schedule of readings", and it refers to the three year cycle we use in the ELCA of all the assigned Scripture selections (as printed in the weekly Celebrate bulletin insert). The concept of a lectionary in church is very old, perhaps going all the way back to the 5th century A.D. But our current lectionary, called the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), was developed by several Protestant denominations in the United States and published in 1992. Lutheran Churches in the U.S. and other countries always had some kind of lectionary, but before the RCL, there was no standard that everyone agreed on. The Revised Common Lectionary is used widely in the ELCA, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church USA, United Methodist Church, and various other Protestant denominations. The Roman Catholic Church has their own lectionary but it is very similar to ours.

The three-year cycle in the Revised Common lectionary is listed in the front pages of the Evangelical Lutheran Worship Hymnal, so you can look up the weekly readings and Prayers of the Day. You will notice that each of the years is labeled "Year A", "Year B", and "Year C". Each year corresponds with a Gospel. Year A focuses on the Gospel of Matthew, Year B focuses on the Gospel of Mark, and Year C focuses on the Gospel of Luke. But where does John go? Because the Gospel of Mark is so much shorter than the other three, readings from John also appear in Year B.

If you have been paying attention, you will realize that this year we have been reading from the Gospel of Mark most Sundays, and so this is Year B. But starting on Sunday July 28th and continuing on for the four Sundays after that, the Revised Common Lectionary will give us readings all from chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. It is called the "Bread of Life" series, because for five Sundays, every Gospel reading is Jesus talking about bread! Many pastors joke about the Bread of Life Series, planning to be gone on long vacations so that they don't have to struggle to preach about bread every week. Indeed, finding ways to make bread interesting for five Sundays is certainly a challenge, but I think it is a gift for us in the church to meditate on this one topic for an extended period of time. And while we wrestle with what Jesus means when he says, "I am the bread of life" it is also a good time to focus on all of our church ministries, here at Mt. Zion and through the wider church, that are dedicated to feeding the hungry.

During these five Sundays of bread this summer, I encourage you to dig out your favorite bread recipes and try a bit of baking at home. It may be hot outside, but fresh bread is good any time of year! And while you mix the ingredients and knead the dough, consider how the Holy Spirit is calling us to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry in this world. Christ our Lord is the bread of life, and through him all people are fed, spiritually and physically. And it is Christ our Lord who invites us to join with him in feeding the world.

I hope, like yeast in dough, the five Sundays of bread readings in the Revised Common Lectionary expand your faith. Let us give thanks for our daily bread, and look to the Spirit to inspire us to feed our neighbors in need!

ELCA World Hunger Turns 50 Years Old:

More than 820 million people or about 11% of the world's population are hungry. Honoring our call to be servants of God, especially to those in need, the Virginia Synod is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the ELCA World Hunger, our denomination's collective effort to address the root causes of hunger and poverty at home and abroad.

The Virginia Synod aspires to have 100% congregational participation, no matter how large or small the offering! Please send designated hunger offerings through the Synod office so that we can track our progress. You can donate directly using the Virginia Synod website or write "ELCA World Hunger" on the memo line of a check made out to Mt. Zion Lutheran Church and place that in the offering plate. Our congregation will send the donation on to ELCA World Hunger.

Shenandoah Valley Lutheran Services and Luke's Backpack

Luke's Backpack started more than ten years ago in 2011 as a cooperative effort between ELCA congregations here in Shenandoah County to make sure local school children would not go hungry at home. But since then, this shared ministry has grown so large that it has birthed Shenandoah Valley Lutheran (Local) Services, a non-profit organization. With its own board and a director, it is amazing to see how large an impact all the Lutheran congregations (and other participating congregations from different denominations) can have in helping those in need in Shenandoah County.

Shockingly, 79% of students at Shenandoah County Public Schools qualify for the Luke's Backpack program. In 2023, Luke's Backpack volunteers distributed more than 6,000 bags of food. The program stands in need of volunteers to help collect, pack, and deliver food to each of the schools. If you would like to learn more, you can check out the SVLM website or talk to Pastor Kristen. www.svlm.org

Minnick School and enCircle

Another important ministry that we support as a congregation of the Virginia Synod is encircle (formerly known as Lutheran Social Services in Virginia). While the names have changed over the years, these collective Lutheran efforts to help the neediest people in our state date all the way back to 1888 and the founding of a Lutheran orphanage in Salem Virginia. Today, our closest enCircle ministry is the Minnick School in Harrisonburg. The Minnick Schools are private day schools designed to help students who, for various reasons, are failing to thrive in the public schools. If you would like to know more about this important ministry, you can visit the website at www.encircleall.org

Our Mt. Zion congregation has been supporting the Harrisonburg campus for years by providing food pantry items that the students stock themselves and take home. Like the students of the Luke's Backpack Program, teachers at the Minnick School discovered that the specialized help they were giving their day students often wasn't making the impact that they had hoped because so many of their students were also experiencing food insecurity. Providing the students with a pantry of food for them to take home has been an important support so that they might continue to meet their educational goals at the Minnick School. Mt. Zion member Brenda Rice has been a key leader in organizing and running our partnership with Minnick. If you would like to learn how you can help, please don't hesitate to talk to her.

Other Hunger Ministries and Mt. Zion Lutheran:

Amazingly, Mt. Zion Lutheran Church members are doing even more work to help feed the hungry in our county! Funded by Shepherd's Hand ministry, Steve Kipps regularly keeps our little outdoor food pantry stocked. On average, \$300.00 worth of groceries is passing through our outdoor food pantry a week. Who is taking all this food? We have no idea. But that is the beauty of this ministry! Our responsibility is to give freely and to give often, without judgment, practicing the kind of divine grace that Christ Jesus our Lord gives us first. There are probably many folks in our community who might be embarrassed to ask for help from family or friends, or to show up to the local food bank. Because our outdoor food pantry is anonymous, we hope

that those who are ashamed (although no one should be ashamed if they are struggling!) are still able to supplement their weekly meals.

And don't forget that the Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry is every third Thursday afternoon of the month at Manor Memorial United Methodist Church in New Market. There is a whole crew of Mt. Zion members who volunteer their time there each month.

**"Share everything with your brother. Do not say, "It is private property."
If you share what is everlasting, you should be that much more willing to share things which do not last."**

The Didache (The Teaching) 1st century A.D. (the oldest Christian catechism)

"Holy God, gracious and merciful, you bring forth food from the earth and nourish your whole creation. Turn our hearts towards those who hunger in any way, that all may know your care; and prepare us now to feast on the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen"

(ELW hymnal page 129)