



FROM PASTOR SUE

# Cultivating the Wilderness

People think it's strange to like Lent. After all, it's a penitential season, and who enjoys penitence? The very word "penitence" brings to mind images of monks sitting in dark rooms fasting and praying for hours. Liking Lent seems as crazy as being a masochist. It sounds as if you enjoy going over every frustrating detail and failure of your life and living in guilt for six weeks.

But Lent is not all about penitence or mistakes or guilt. Entering into Lent is to enter into a time of introspection, but its ultimate purpose is beyond penitence. Lent is an annual invitation to come closer to God. It offers us a chance to look at ourselves, not so we can punish ourselves, but so we can identify the obstructions that keep us from God. By moving them gently away, we come closer to the Love that gives us life, the Love whose triumph we will celebrate on Easter morning.

Lent gives us time to see our current state of affairs in complete honesty, to compare this present snapshot with an image of where we would like to be, a place God wants us to find. Self-scrutiny is part of Lent's process, but we do not observe Lent for the self-scrutiny alone. To wallow in guilt and shame would go against the gospel message, "for freedom Christ has set us free."

Christ's message is one of newness of life and forgiveness. To arrive at newness of life, we first name the parts of our lives that are shrouded in darkness, the parts of ourselves where life does not flourish. If we picture all the obstructions between us and God as a wilderness, Lent presents us with time to clear and cultivate a part of that wilderness, to create an open space in it. In this newly opened space, we can transform this wilderness. As Isaiah says "I will may a way in the desert and rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19)



## Lenten Schedule

### Feb. 22

Ash Wednesday worship with imposition of ashes, 7:30 p.m.

### Wednesdays

### Feb. 29-March 28

Lenten worship; soup and salad dinner 6:30-7 p.m., worship 7-7:30 p.m.

During our Lenten worship we present the video "Living the Questions: Saving Jesus," a lively, engaging exploration of the relevance of Jesus for the 21st century. Dinner and worship will be held in the Timothy Stocks Fireside Room.

### April 1

Palm Sunday with annual potluck brunch in Kimball Hall (theater) following worship.

### April 5

Maundy Thursday worship, 7:30 p.m.

### April 6

Good Friday worship, 7:30 p.m.

# Our Demons Come Without Special Effects

By Pastor Sue Wolfe Devol

*Pastor Sue's sermon for RIC/Pride Sunday, Jan. 29, 2012; (Mark 1:21-28); reprinted by request.*

Outside our apartment on Lankershim - high on the building above Panera- is a digital advertising billboard. Since late December, whenever I

walk or drive by it, I have to look at the horrifying picture of an old woman with a blue face, tongue sticking out and face contorted. It is an ad for the movie "The Devil In-

side." The movie was made for under a million dollars, but I'd like to know what the advertising budget was. That devil-woman picture is every-

*(Continued on page 4)*

**ASK HILDY**

# Breaking Down the Breaking Bread Ministry

Dear Hildy:

I have a question regarding the lunch that is being served now after church. I think it is a real nice idea but if a person was looking for something in particular to eat, what could they do to get that on the menu, so to speak?

– Ready to Order

Dear Ready:

I am so glad that you asked! The Breaking Bread Lunch Ministry has really been a wonderful way for so many busy congregants to gather, slow down and connect with and nourish each other.

The best way to get that favorite or special item “on the menu” is for you to take a moment to review the sign-in sheets in the narthex (the church lobby) for upcoming themes, the menus and needed items. If there is something you’d like to see served, sign up for that item, prepare and bring it to St. Matthew’s with you before worship. Check in at the kitchen in the Timothy Stocks Fireside Room. Lillian Parker, Ursula Black or Elizabeth Loken can assist you with any questions you may have.

Your question reminded me of the miracle of the loaves and fishes we read of in Matthew 14:13-21. You will remember that there were 5,000 gathered in a remote place and Jesus blesses the five loaves and two fishes and sends the basket containing the food out into the crowd. Everyone was fed and there were 12 baskets of leftovers that returned.

I have always thought that perhaps the love and devotion of the 5,000 for Jesus produced this miracle. I can imagine that there were many who, in the presence of our Redeemer, forgot their own fear of hunger and opened their sacks and satchels to

**BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS**



Photo by Steve Devol

**Jackson the dog joins Kari Marie Anderson in the St. Matthew’s choir during the service on Jan. 15. Jackson joined a variety of other dogs, cats, and a parrot (both real and virtual) for a blessing by Pastor Susan Wolfe Devol.**

generously place all that they had with them in the basket as it passed so that all could be fed. Their generosity overfilled those baskets.

As we are called to be the hands and heart of Jesus in this world, it is wonderful that you and so many others can continue to see that there are many opportunities to feed those who gather in Christ’s name and respond with, “I am ready” through the Breaking Bread Ministry, making sack lunches for the homeless on Saturday mornings and donating food and/or resources to the Valley Lutheran Social Services Food Pantry or any food-related initiative or program. There is always a need and during Lent providing soup, salad or bread can also be a special part of our practice. Thank you in advance for your delicious service.

— Hildegard Von Gelischen-Kirche

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St. Matthew’s worships on Sunday mornings at 10:30. Worship services are provided in ASL for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. St. Matthew’s is a member

of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA and is a part of the Reconciling-in-Christ program of Lutherans Concerned/North America.

## ST MATTHEW'S CONNECTS

# Ways to Seek God in a New Way This Lent

**By Kenny Callaghan**

*Music and Outreach Coordinator*

During February we enter the reflective season of Lent. The 40 days of Lent is a time of spiritual renewal; to reflect and reconnect with God, our neighbor, creation and ourselves; to remember Jesus calls us to follow, to pray, to serve and to discover what it means to us to be and live as children of God. At St. Matthew's there are many opportunities to seek God in a fresh, new way this Lenten season. Invite someone to join you and be prepared to meet the living Christ.

**February Food collection** for Lutheran Social Services is baby food and diapers. Donations may be placed on the table in the front of the church.

**Adult Forum:** Join Pastor Sue every Sunday at 9:30 a.m. in the Timothy Stocks Fireside Room for Bible study, discussion and coffee.

**Koinonia Prison Ministry** needs new and used greeting cards and postage stamps. Donations may be placed on the table in the narthex. See Kenny if you'd like to be a pen pal.

**St. Matthew's Choir** rehearses Wednesday evenings 7:30 to 9 p.m. in the church. A potluck snack begins at 7:10 p.m. Join us as we pre-

pare special music for Lent and Easter.

**Lutherans Looking Forward Breakfast** is Saturday, Feb. 4 at 8:30 a.m. At Woodland Hills Country Club, 21150 Dumetz Road, Woodland Hills. Join us for this event as Lutheran Social Services names the congregation and Lutheran of the Year awards. Come enjoy guest speaker Chris Kimball, president of California Lutheran University, and entertainment provided by the Bops from Los Angeles Lutheran High School. RSVP at [stmatthewsnoho@gmail.com](mailto:stmatthewsnoho@gmail.com).

**Growth Group** meets Thursday, Feb. 9 and 23 from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the church narthex. For discussion: Ronn Kerr's book "Christianity & Islam." For more info. or to join this group see Kenny Callaghan.

**Great Events Lunch Bunch** will gather Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 11 a.m. at the church to car-pool to NoHo's Magnolia Grill for lunch, followed by a tour of the Homestead Museum. Called "one of California's true historic treasures" by the Smithsonian Institution, the Homestead Museum provides a unique way to look at Southern California's history from the 1840s, when this land was still part of Mexico, through the 1920s, when Los Angeles came to be known worldwide as a major metropolitan

city. Admission is free. Sign up on the poster in the narthex/lobby.

**What happens when faith and finance meet in the real world?** Thursday, Feb. 16, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in Timothy Stocks Fireside Room. Occupy Wall Street caught our attention and expressed the deep discontent many of us feel with the current economic and political conditions in our nation. But what really is the problem holding our economy back? How did we get to this point? What can be done to change things? What resources does our faith offer? One of our members, Jim Loken, is a financial planner and investment advisor by profession and is offering a chance for you to participate in a process of reflection and dialogue on these important issues. Jim will present some basic aspects of how the economy works and what is going on today and invite you to be part of an ongoing dialogue. Food and beverages will be provided. Questions: See Jim or email him at [j.loken@sbcglobal.net](mailto:j.loken@sbcglobal.net). Sign up on the poster board in the narthex/lobby.

**A Word the World Needs: Lutheran Theology for Today and Tomorrow**, Saturday, Feb. 18 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Join us at California Lutheran University's Lundring Events Center, 60 West Olsen Road, Thousand Oaks, for this lecture/

discussion led by the Rev., Dr. R. Guy Erwin. What can "being Christian" mean for Lutherans today in an increasingly complex world? How can Lutheran theology meet the challenge of a cultural reassessment of sexual norms, human relationships, and moral life — can the old wineskins still hold today's new wine?

**Emotional Eating and Yoga**, Sunday, Feb. 19, noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Church Library. Join the Feminine Sacred Circle as Bonnie den Bleyker discusses how meditation and yoga relieve emotions that lead to emotional eating. Mind and body techniques lead to self-awareness and can help you get in touch with your body and your true feelings of hunger and over indulgence. All are welcome.

**Book Club** is Tuesday Feb. 21, at 7:30 p.m. at Pastor Sue's home. For discussion: "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" by Mark Haddon.

**Feed the Homeless** Saturday Feb. 25, 9 to 10:30 a.m. Meet in the church kitchen to make sandwiches and lunches with nonperishable food items. We are grateful this ministry has been blessed with a grant from the Thrivent Financial for Lutheran Care Abounds in Communities program to help us broaden our outreach.

# Condemned by a Handful of Verses

*(Continued from page 1)*

where!

Imagine my surprise when I read that the movie set a box-office record for any movie opening during the first weekend of January. If you haven't seen it, like me, I wouldn't worry about it because according to the movie reviewers at Rotten Tomatoes: "It is a cheap, choppy, unscary mess, featuring one of the worst endings in recent memory." The truth is, I really am curious as to why so many people like movies about demon possession. So I did what all university-trained people with a Master's degree do ... I Googled it. Why do people like movies about demon possession ... and a link came up on Yahoo Answers! Great, I thought ... but when I clicked on it, it said this post has been removed.... Internet demons? I leave the conclusion up to you.

In our text for this morning, Jesus goes into the synagogue at Capernaum, which is along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He astounded the people there with his teaching. The text tells us, "He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Then a man with an unclean spirit cries out to him, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Jesus tells the man to be silent, and commands the spirit to come out of him. He convulses and screams, and the unclean spirit left him.

And it left Jesus' audience amazed...and his fame began to spread in the region of the Galilee.

I think the first thing we think about when we hear a story like this, is, "I wonder what those demons were?" Jesus performed exorcisms — even his enemies acknowledge that, some of them even accused him of being in collusion with the devil. People in the 1st century people assumed that there were good and evil powers at work in the world. All sickness was attributed to the devil, Beelzebub, who was the ruler of the demons, including birth defects. Jesus was not the only exorcist or miracle worker of his era. Some scholars argue that Jesus' uniqueness was that he did not use elaborate incantations or techniques. In his presence, his authority came from words and deeds that were consistent, a power not easily explained. He was not born into the priestly class; he was not educated like a scribe.

Still, in some manner, God's power filled him with authority and people were healed. Jesus' teaching led to freedom from bondage, whatever bondage a person found himself in. In words ascribed to the Apostle Peter, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Perhaps our first inclination is to try hard to find theories as to what the demons

were ... were they from fever, or epilepsy or mental illness? What the demons looked and sounded like is not the point here. As curious as we are, the demons in the 1st century would probably have looked very familiar to us, not surprising at all.

The people who make movies like "The Devil Inside" seem to be caught up in a medieval view of a vengeful God of torture and punishment. What I worry most about with those movies is the medieval portrayal of Christianity they sell. In a country where 38% of the people are certain the Old Testament was written a few years after Jesus' death, and 10% believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife, we can't afford this nonsense.

The point of this text is not really for us to imagine the demons. I think most of us do not need to look very far to see the demons we struggle with. The point of this text is to show that in the presence of Jesus, people held captive by their demons were set free, liberated, and came to know freedom in their lives.

In August 2009, some of us were in Minneapolis when the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (the national church of which we are a part) voted to fully include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in the life of the church. The vote meant that gay clergy who were in same-sex relationships could serve as pastors. That day, a tornado swept through downtown Minneap-

olis and knocked over the steeple of Central Lutheran Church, whose building was right next to the convention center. The Rev. Tom Brock, an ELCA minister from northern Minneapolis, declared on his radio show and in his video series that it was a sign from God that true Bible-believing Christians should break away from the ELCA.

Brock regularly gay-bashed and told people they would go to hell if they lived in same-sex relationships. Brock was the very popular senior pastor of a church that had close to 1,000 members. He wasn't an evangelical trained at Oral Roberts University, he was one of our own, brought up in the Lutheran educational system, a graduate of a Lutheran seminary... which made this hate speech more painful for those of us who call ourselves Christian.

But what makes the Rev. Tom Brock even more tragic was that some weeks after the ELCA vote, A gay Minnesota reporter snuck into a 12-step group for Catholics who had the gay "disorder." At least group members were required to call it that -- as they struggled with their feelings, and tried to live celibate or in opposite-sex relationships. And guess who was there? Tom Brock, confessing his struggle with his attraction to men.

When it all came out, he told his congregation he is attracted to men, but that he's not a hypocrite because he

*(Continued on page 5)*

# Faith Must Be Shared to Free Others

(Continued from page 4)

has never acted on his urges. He doesn't consider himself gay because he never acted on it. "I am a 57-year-old virgin," Brock told the Hope Lutheran congregation, and he confirmed that he sought counseling and enlisted another minister as an "accountability partner" with whom he frequently discussed his struggles.

When he stepped down as senior pastor at Hope Lutheran, he said he did not believe people were born gay. "I think we're all born heterosexual actually, and then stuff goes wrong." Brock said even if scientists were to establish definitive proof that homosexuality is genetic, it wouldn't change his views. Brock still believes people who engage in homosexual acts will go to hell. "My message doesn't change at all," he was quoted as saying in the paper. "Because I struggle with it doesn't make it right." He had hoped to take his radio broadcasts to a wider national audience with a new message: "You can have

this struggle with same-sex attraction, say no to it, and still follow Christ." But it never happened.

I mention this because I cannot imagine any demon more powerful than this kind of self-hatred that Rev. Tom Brock and so many others live with, self-hatred which says I cannot be myself, love and be loved by a person I choose, and still live a life pleasing to God. Only seven of the Bible's 1 million verses refer to same-sex behavior in any way. None of these verses refer to homosexuality as it's understood today, because there was simply no word for that, not in Hebrew or in Greek – none of the words translated as "homosexuality" in the Bible refer to relationships between loving, consenting adults.

In July 1999, Matthew Williams and his brother, Tyler, murdered a gay couple, Gary Matson and Winfield Mowder, in their home near Sacramento. Speaking to his mother from the Shasta County jail, Matthew explained his actions in this way: "I had to obey God's

law rather than man's law," he said. "I didn't want to do this. I felt I was supposed to. I have followed a higher law... I just plan to defend myself from the Scriptures."

On Sept. 22, 2000, a 55-year-old man named Ronald E. Gay, angry for being teased about his last name, entered the Back Street Cafe in Roanoke, Va., a gathering place for lesbians and gays just a few miles from Lynchburg. Confident that God's Word supported his tragic plan of action, Mr. Gay shouted, "I am a Christian soldier, working for my Lord." Claiming that "Jesus does not want these people in his heaven," he shot seven innocent gay and lesbian people. One man, Danny Overstreet, died instantly. Others still suffer from their physical and psychological wounds.

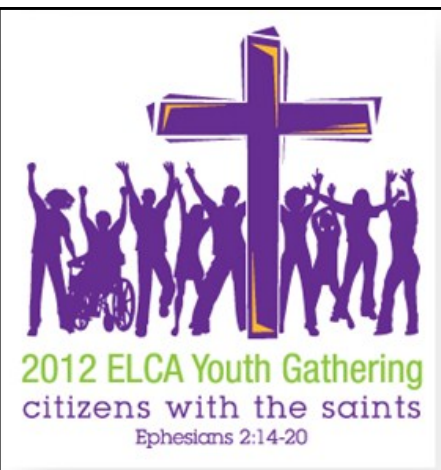
Mark was a young man who accepted his sexual orientation, then he found a church community where he really felt God's presence and community and he wanted to be a part of the congregation. Then he was told that he couldn't be both a Christian

and a gay man. At the age of 26 Mark committed suicide and wrote this suicide note to God: "I just don't know how else to fix this."

Friends, what we have learned about God through Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, is we have authority in God's name. We are called to bring healing and hope. Our faith is not a personal spiritual exercise. It's a matter of life and death. And it must be shared if it is to free others.

I join with the Rev. Mel White who said: "I'm pleading for the lives of my lesbian sisters and gay brothers who are rejected by their friends and families, kicked out of their homes, fired by their employers, denied their civil rights, refused full membership in their churches, and kill themselves or are killed by others -- all on the basis of these six or seven Bible verses."

I think most of us here have seen demons rear their ugly heads, no special effects needed. Let us not be timid in sharing our faith, so that all will know God's love and God's peace. Amen.



## Help Send Kyle, Dylan to the Big Easy

A rummage sale will be held to help send Kyle and Dylan Jensen to New Orleans for the ELCA Youth Gathering.

The sale will take place on Saturday, April 14, from 8 a.m. to 4:40 p.m. at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. You may drop off donations for the rummage

sale at the Sharing Hands Office after March 10.

We're accepting: Clean clothing; hangers appreciated; Christmas items such as cookie containers or regifts; toys (clean please); broken items requiring minor repair; garden and woodworking tools; kitchen utensils; dishware;

books; DVDs; CDs; jewelry; antiques; furniture; small appliances, etc.

Volunteers are needed to price out items for "theme tables," set up, and assist during and after the sale.

If you can help, email [stmattskenny@gmail.com](mailto:stmattskenny@gmail.com) or [judyhoewisch@gmail.com](mailto:judyhoewisch@gmail.com)



**St. Matthew's**  
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