



“Giving as a Way of Living”

Lent 2010

Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of February 21 by Pastor Beth Halvorsen:

We begin this season of Lent with the beginning of our Life Groups and mission or theme of
“Giving as a Way of Living.”

What are your gifts and talents? The ELCA offers a 10-minute survey which can be found at:
<http://archive.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/assessments/spiritgifts.html>

1. If you have taken the assessment, share what emerged. If you have not taken it, reflect upon your life experiences and share what you consider to be your God-given gifts. How well are you drawing upon these your strengths?
2. With what attitudes, words, and actions do you acknowledge God as the Giver of your gifts? To what extent does your relationship with God foster a “willing heart?” What are you truly looking for from God?
3. What influences you the most in deciding how to use your time and talents? To what extent do you seek God’s guidance before responding with a “yes” or “no?” Sometimes what is most pleasing to God in a particular situation to use our gifts; other times it is not. How well are you listening for God’s call in each time and place?
4. With what temptation do you struggle with the most?
 - I don’t have any gifts...others have better gifts than me,
 - Look at what I accomplished! It’s all about me, me, me! My gift is the best!
 - What does God really have to do with my life? Spirituality is not for daily living.
5. To what degree do you recognize the gifts of others? Share some examples of other people’s gifts that we take for granted too often. Think of ways to recognize them.
6. What do you value, according to the statements from your bank or your credit card company? What kind of conversations do you have with your loved ones about the connections between your values and money?
7. How do you seek to give of yourself so as to embody, “Blessed to be a Blessing?”



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**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of February 28 by
Pastor Steve Quill:**

We begin this season of Lent with the beginning of our Life Groups and mission or theme of
“Giving as a Way of Living.”

What are your gifts and talents? The ELCA offers a 10-minute survey which can be found at:
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1. Please read Genesis, Chapters 13-15. Then discuss the following questions:
 - How would you describe the relationship between Lot and Abram?
 - Do you have any family relationships that mirror Abram and Lot and if so, describe those relationships?
 - How would you feel about the words of God to Abram in Genesis 15: 12 – 16 if you were Abram?
2. Describe how your family talked about money and possessions when you were a child. Was it talked about at all? Hardly ever?
3. Did your parents talk about “giving,” and if so, how was it presented to you?
4. Can you give some concrete examples of how you have experienced “Giving as Worship” in your everyday life?
5. What do you remember most about the sermon and why do you remember that part? Did it make you uncomfortable? Enlightened? Other?
6. Can you think of one thing you might do this week to experience “Giving as Worship?”



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**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of March 7 by
Pastor Steve Quill:**

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What are your gifts and talents? The ELCA offers a 10-minute survey which can be found at:
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1. Please re-read Luke 13:1-9
2. The gospel text speaks of two disasters: one by the hand of Pilate, and one as a natural disaster? Which seems more difficult to deal with and why?
3. Is there any one thing that you most agreed with or disagreed with from last week’s sermon? What was it and why?
4. Discuss the tension between the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness. Is repentance a requirement for forgiveness? Or, does the promise of forgiveness empower one to honest repentance?
5. What are some of the “Blessings of Giving” that you have experienced in your life?
6. If you were to tell someone why you give to the church and other ministries, what would you say?



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Lent 2010

**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of March 14 by
Pastor Emmanuel Jackson:**

We continue on in this season of Lent with the beginning of our Life Groups and mission or theme of
“Giving as a Way of Living.”

What are your gifts and talents? The ELCA offers a 10-minute survey which can be found at:
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1. Today, our focus is drawn to the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32), specifically, three characters: a father, an elder son, and a younger son. There are many themes at work in this story: unfailing love, reckless living, waste, hurt, abandonment, forgiveness, alienation, second chance, greed, entitlement, etc. How would you characterize the family dynamics of the story of the prodigal son?
2. What characteristic traits do you most/least admire in the:
 - a. father
 - b. elder son
 - c. younger son
3. How would you evaluate your Christian walk in light of this story? Would you say your Christian walk is more aligned with the character of the father, the elder son, the younger son, or a little of all?
4. In more ways than one we see God at work in this story. How do you see God at work? How does this story speak to you personally, and how does it speak to you about the character and nature of the God we serve?
5. Growing up, what were some of the dynamics of your family? And how have you seen God at work in your own family dynamics?
6. How is this story relevant in the 21st century of our Living Word community?



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What are your gifts and talents? The ELCA offers a 10-minute survey which can be found at:
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1. Please read John 12: 1-8. Please also read Luke 14: 12-14; Micah 6:8; and I John 3:17. Try and hold these passages together as you gather in your conversations.
2. If you ignore verse 6, what is your opinion of Judas’ argument about Mary’s lavish extravagance?
3. Have you heard this argument before in the church (giving to the poor versus building new building) and how has that happened?
4. Do you think that Jesus statement about “the poor you will always have with you” has been used by Christian communities to ignore the plight of the poor and how do you see that play out in our time?
5. Pastor Quill used the term “extravagant generosity” as an equation of “social justice.” Do you find that helpful and if so, which term do you like better? Should they be held in tension? Do those concepts help keep the gospel of “sacrificial love” from become lost in our mission and if so, how?
6. Where do you see the church in America losing its sense of “sacrificial love?” Where do you see it being retained?
7. Our final Lenten theme in “Living as Giving” is being “Stewards of the Mysteries of God.” What does that term mean to you and how do you envision Living Word as a faith community living out its call to be “stewards of the mysteries of God” as you move forward in your call to discipleship?



“Giving as a Way of Living”

Lent 2010

**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of March 28 by
Pastor Steve Quill:**

We continue on in this season of Lent with the beginning of our Life Groups and mission or theme of
“Giving as a Way of Living.”

What are your gifts and talents? The ELCA offers a 10-minute survey which can be found at:
<http://archive.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/assessments/spiritgifts.html>

1. Read the Processional Gospel, Luke 19: 28-40. Was the contrast between the processions of the Caesar's and Jesus' procession informative and what does it say to you in terms of today's world?
2. What is one thing you'd like to talk about from the processional gospel?
3. Read Phillipians 2: 5-11.
4. What do you think Paul is saying about "humility" as exhibited in the life of Christ? Is that a helpful image for our lives?
5. If you don't have time to do this as a group you can do this on your own as a devotional: Read the Passion narrative from Luke: 22:14 - 23: 56.



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Easter 2010

**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of April 4 by
Pastor Emmanuel Jackson:**

Please Read Luke 24: 1-12

Paul the apostle, when writing to one of the many Christian communities said, (I’m paraphrasing Paul) “if Jesus did not resurrect, then our faith is in vain and we are the most wretched of the human race.”

What a powerful statement! Paul elevates the authenticity of the resurrection as the “make or break” of the Christian faith.

1. What do you make of Paul’s statement? Should the resurrection of Jesus be “make or break” of our faith?
2. How do you and your family understand the resurrection story, and what does it mean for you today?
3. In a recent survey by the Barna Group—a Christian organization that monitors and surveys trends and patterns around our country, reports that:
 - a. 67% of American describe Easter as a religious holiday.
 - b. 42% of Americans said that the meaning of Easter was the resurrection of Jesus or that it signifies Christ’s death and return to life. (<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/356-most-americans-consider-easter-a-religious-holiday-but-fewer-correctly-identify-its-meaning>)
 - c. Ponder these numbers in your small groups and what some of the possible implications are for the church. What does it mean to identify Easter as a religious holiday vis-à-vis the resurrection?
4. What if any, would you consider personal and communal faith benefits of the resurrection?
5. From the sermon: What is your understanding of the ancient creed “Christ is Risen?”

I wish you and your family a blessed Easter. Have a great small group gathering, and remember that because Jesus lives, we have hope in our future, and the future of our world.

Happy Easter!!! Christ is Risen!



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Second Sunday of Easter 2010

**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of April 11 by
Pastor Steve Quill:**

1. What one thing in the sermon surprised you?
2. Do you identify with Thomas and if so, how?
3. Do you have “skeptical or doubting” friends? How do you address their skepticism or questions?
 - a. Do you try and provide answers?
 - b. Do you invite them into a deeper conversation?
 - c. Do you invite them into a community where doubts and questions are not only allowed, but encouraged?
 - d. What works best and why?
4. Can you recall times where fear seemed to engulf your life? How did you deal with it? What got you through those fearful times?



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Third Sunday of Easter 2010

**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of April 18 by
Pastor Beth Halvorsen:**

1. When has it felt like you have “fished all night but caught nothing”?
2. In the number of fish caught (153) and in the description of the net not being broken, Christ brings a “fullness” to life. How would you describe this “fullness” that he brings?
3. How “awake” are you to “smelling the breakfast that Jesus is cooking” for us? Share a way in which you glimpsed God at work in your life in the last week.
4. What does it mean to be “caught by Jesus”? Walt Bouman, taught us: “To say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ is to say, ‘I believe in Jesus’ way of being in the world, as my way of being in the world.’” How would you describe this way of being?
5. Following Jesus involves an ongoing commitment (feed lamb, tend sheep, feed sheep) that lasts a lifetime (mention of Peter’s old age) and involves sacrifice (foreshadow of Peter’s martyrdom). As you follow Jesus, what might your next kind of commitment?
6. So then how do we “catch” people? How do we invite people to be “in Christ?” How do we invite them into Christ’s way of being in the world? In particular, how do you fish for people?
7. Give thanks for our synod, for this group of congregations walking together, doing together what we cannot do alone:
 - Together we train pastors and lay leaders for ministry.
 - Together we send missionaries.
 - Together we support a complex network of global churches.
 - Together we respond to disasters and provide Lutheran Social Services.
 - Together we congregations find pastors through the call process.
 - Together we help congregations in crisis or conflict.



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Fourth Sunday of Easter 2010

**Questions for Life Groups and individuals for the week of April 25 by
Pastor Steve Quill:**

1. In the past week where have you “seen God at work” or “sensed the presence of God at work”?
2. Read Psalm 23 again and also the gospel lesson, John 10: 22-30.
3. What are some other names for Jesus, beside that of a shepherd that you remember from scripture (good and bad connotations)?
4. Did you hear anything in the sermon that made you look at the 23rd Psalm differently than before and if so, what was it?
5. Do you sense within your own life and the American ethic that people are expected to be consumers? How does that feel to you?
6. How does it strike you when Alan Greenspan characterizes our society as one of “infectious greed”?
7. Discuss these verbs from psalm 23 as it relates to a congregation’s mission and ministry: leads, restores, guides, walks, comforts, prepares, anoints, and fills.
In other words, how can pastors AND parishioners live this out as God’s people in mission?