



Lectionary Connections with Forward Together in Faith October – November, 2015

Dear Partners in Ministry,

In order to help you share the story of our Forward Together in Faith campaign, our Synod Communications Team has prepared some references and ideas for linking upcoming lectionary texts with our themes of equipping, innovating, communicating and networking. We'd appreciate your help in lifting up the new ways of being Synod together to help your congregational members see how we are moving forward together.

We hope that you are able to use some of these suggestions to reinforce the important concepts that are the foundation of this initiative. If your congregation has identified campaign connectors, it can be very effective if you coordinate reflections on these themes in your sermons with your connectors' effort to share the story.

These suggestions can also be used in adult forums, council devotions, and other faith formation settings as you see fit.

This is the first time that we have produced this kind of resource, so we would appreciate your feedback about how to improve future versions.

We would also appreciate it if you would share the ways you are able to use these ideas, by sending us copies of sermon texts, or links to audio or video clips, so that we can share some of them on our campaign website, forwardtogetherinfaith.org. Send links or texts to Bob Fisher at rfisher@sepa.org.

Thank you for your partnership as we move Forward Together in Faith!

Bob Fisher
Assistant to the Bishop, Communications/Mission Interpretation

Forward Together in Faith *themes:*

Forward Together as Networks

SEPA Synod is a network of congregations, leaders, and partner ministries. Our vision is to connect people in innovative ways to release the power of the Spirit. With more than 40 teams making our shared ministries happen, we do more together than we can alone. With resources raised through Forward Together in Faith, new networks will form, networks already in place can be strengthened, and we'll help congregations collaborate.

Forward Together as Equippers

Our vision is to equip leaders with new skills for 21st Century mission, and to provide more financial assistance to seminarians. In the last year our Synod has made it possible for 20+ congregations to receive a mission assessment to identify their readiness and passion for mission. We've brought in experts in stewardship, preaching and "dinner church" and co-sponsored a ministry resource day with the seminary. As we raise funds, we will make the assessment process available to more congregations, and develop new ways to equip leaders through group learning, online courses and more.

Forward Together as Innovators

Our Synod is a leader in the ELCA in developing innovative ministries among people living in poverty - Welcome Church's "church without walls" with people living on the streets of Philadelphia, Living Gospel's outreach to persons returning from incarceration, and Rhawnhurst Turning Point's Christian youth center. Our vision is to start even more imaginative faith communities, support ministries on the margins that are not self-sustaining, and be ready to respond to the as-yet undiscovered opportunities that God will bring us. With the campaign's proceeds, we'll continue to launch new faith communities and provide resources to help congregations create new forms of church.

Forward Together as Communicator

We have been a leader in sharing our stories in digital media and in equipping congregational communicators. Our vision is to leverage technology and build relationships to help congregations engage their communities. Through Forward Together in Faith we will provide resources for congregations to improve digital communications and innovate with new platforms and channels to keep ahead of rapidly changing technologies.

Produced by SEPA Communications Team

OCTOBER 4, 2015

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:2-16 (NRSV)

⁶ But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,^[a] ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

NETWORKING - God created us and desires us to be in relationship with one another.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12 (NRSV)

¹ Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

COMMUNICATION - God speaks in many and various ways and sustains all things by His powerful word.

OCTOBER 11, 2015

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV)

²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

EQUIPPING - God makes it possible for us to do what we cannot do on our own.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 4:12-16 (NRSV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

INNOVATION - Grace both beckons and enables us to boldness.

OCTOBER 18, 2015

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:35-45 (NRSV)

⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

INNOVATION – Jesus encouraged His disciples to think outside of the box and to deviate from the status quo--even to the extent of turning normalcy topsy-turvy, such as the master serving rather than being served.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 5:1-10 (NRSV)

⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰ having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

EQUIPPING - Christ, having been designated and made perfect by God and having learned obedience through his suffering, was equipped to be the source of eternal salvation for all.

OCTOBER 25, 2015

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:46-52 (NRSV)

⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

EQUIPPING - With his sight restored, the blind man walked *Forward Together in Faith* with Jesus.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28 (NRSV)

²⁶ For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself.

INNOVATION - In contrast to the high priests of the day who offered sacrifices day after day for their own sins and the sins of the people, Christ innovatively granted eternal salvation freely for all and for all time through His death on the cross and thereby ushered-in a new covenant between God and His people.

NOVEMBER 1, 2015

Gospel Reading: John 11:32-44 (NRSV)

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³

NETWORKING - Jesus spoke to God and affirmed his faith in front of others so that they would also see and believe in Him as the Son of God and declare the glory of God.

2nd Reading: Revelation 21:1-6 (NRSV)

²¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

INNOVATION - God makes all things new. What was is no longer and what is will also pass away. Hence, we need to be diligent in taking notice and responding to what is new and different in God's Kingdom.

NOVEMBER 8, 2015

Gospel Reading Mark 12:38-44 (NRSV)

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

INNOVATION - Jesus once again is getting us to think about and do things in new ways--in this case, in relationship to money and giving. Here he contrasts giving large sums of money publically and haughtily and out of abundance with giving a meager amount humbly and without fanfare yet in greater proportion and out of scarcity.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28 (NRSV)

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

INNOVATION - Paul reminds the Hebrews yet again that Christ freely sanctified them once and for all by shedding His own blood on the cross which was wholly new and different from the repetitive sacrifices made by the high priest with blood that was not their own.

NOVEMBER 15, 2015

Gospel Reading: Mark 13:1-8 (NRSV)

⁶ Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

EQUIPPING - Jesus tells the four disciples how they will know the day of reckoning is near and warns them about being duped and led astray by others who claim to be Him.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 10:11-25(NRSV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

NETWORKING - Jesus implores us to meet together so that we may move and encourage each other to love and doing good deeds.

NOVEMBER 22, 2015

Gospel Reading: John 18:33-37 (NRSV)

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my

kingdom is not from here.”³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

INNOVATION - So that Pilate doesn't feel challenged or threatened, Jesus tries to get him to think outside of his box, outside of this world, in his understanding of King and Kingdom. Unlike an earthly Kingdom in the here and now where the designation of King is conferred by mortals because one wields power or privilege, the King of the other-worldly Kingdom that is yet to come is conferred by God and is granted because one speaks the truth.

2nd Reading: Revelation 1:4-8 (NRSV)

⁷ Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. ⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

COMMUNICATION - John reiterates the second coming of Christ and the infinite nature of the Almighty.

NOVEMBER 29, 2015

Gospel Reading: Luke 21:25-36 (NRSV)

³⁴ “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

EQUIPPING - Jesus implores us to be prepared for, in this case, the day of reckoning. He asks us to be watchful for the signs of what is and what is to come, to unburden ourselves with the worries and ways of this world, and to pray for the strength to stand for and before God.

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (NRSV)

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

NETWORKING - Paul is longing to be with his fellow Christians, the Thessalonians, and prays for God to bring them together, to increase their love for each other and for all, and to strengthen their faith in and devotion to the Lord.