



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Freed in Christ to Serve

2011 Churchwide Assembly Bible Studies
Community Conversations with John, Galatians, and Isaiah

Twelfth Churchwide Assembly

August 15-19, 2011
Orlando, Florida

2011 Churchwide Assembly Bible Studies

Welcome to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly Bible studies, three days of community conversation centered in God's written Word. In our time together we will be gathering around three passages.

Our text for Tuesday, John 4:3–29, is the Gospel for Wednesday's worship. Our text for Thursday, Isaiah 55:1–12, is the Old Testament reading for Friday's worship. These two times of study will help prepare us for worship the following day.

Wednesday's study text, Galatians 5:1–14, contains the theme verse for this year's assembly:

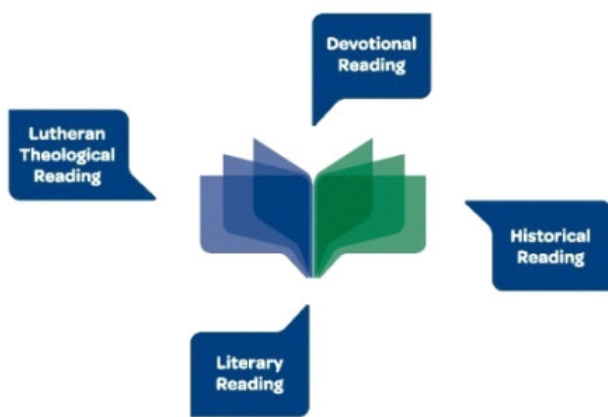
For freedom Christ has set us free . . . only do not use this freedom as an occasion for self-indulgence, but serve one another in love. (5:1, 13)

This time of study invites us to put the theme into its original context and to be engaged by Paul's exhortation to new and struggling congregations.

Each of these three days we will begin with a few minutes of general introduction to the day's passage. Then we will hear the passage as told to us by our biblical storytellers. In the remaining time, each group will gather around the text at their tables.



In the ELCA’s Book of Faith initiative we have encouraged people to read and explore the Bible by asking four different kinds of questions.



Devotional reading invites all of us to set aside our expertise or our lack of knowledge and invite the passage from the Bible to seep into our hearts, minds, and souls both personally and in community.

Historical reading grows out of the understanding that our Bible is, among many other things, an ancient text, written in a different time and place by and for people with sensibilities and experiences quite different from our own. We can gain insights for our present context through better understanding the ancient context.

A **literary reading** is one in which we look at a passage as a written text. We attend to the details and nuances of the text, believing that meaning can be found deeply within it.

A **Lutheran theological reading** brings questions to the text rising out of particular insights from our Lutheran heritage that can help us engage the Bible anew in each time and place.

In these three days, we suggest that each group begin with devotional questions and end with theological questions. In between we suggest historical and/or literary questions to help us better hear, explore, and interact with the passage and with each other. The suggested questions are found before each passage.

Welcome to Group Post or Twitter

One final adventure to note—we are asking groups and individuals, whether present at the assembly or participating in the Bible study from home, to share reflections with one another by answering the Group Post/Twitter question each day. You can write these Tweets on the paper at your table or, if you are able, tweet them to “bookoffaith.”

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R = take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use **Empathetic** listening

S = be **Sensitive** to differences in communication styles

P = **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak

E = **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep **Confidentiality**

T = **Trust** ambiguity, because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

Eric Law, Kaleidoscope Institute, www.kscopeinstitute.org

Tuesday, August 16

A Biblical Conversation with John 4:3–29

Questions:

- What word or phrase strikes you, and where does it take you?
- What confuses or challenges you?
- Are there implied historical realities that could shed light on this passage? What would you like to know about the original context?
- What did you notice particularly about the Samaritan woman?
- How might others hear this story, especially people from cultures, traditions, or age groups different from your own?
- How does this passage move us from God’s salvation to our vocation?

Group Post/Twitter Assignment (group or individual):

Write a “Tweet” of 140 characters or fewer addressed to someone new to your congregation. Tell that person how the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman invites us into God’s mission.

The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. . . . A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a cardinal without it.

– Martin Luther, quoted in “Martin Luther—The Early Years,”
Christian History Magazine 2:34, Christianity Today International, 1993:28.

John 4:3–29

³ [Jesus] left Judea and started back to Galilee.
⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
⁶ Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.
⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”

Your Reflections

John 4:3–29 (continued)

¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

Wednesday, August 17

A Biblical Conversation with Galatians 5:1–14

Questions:

- What word or phrase strikes you, and where does it take you?
- What confuses or challenges you?
- What are different ways, positive and negative, the law is spoken of or used in this passage?
- How do you understand the “offense of the cross” (5:11)?
- How do you hear the gospel in this passage?
- What is the good news for our church and world today?

Group Post/Twitter Assignment (group or individual):

Write a “Tweet” of 140 characters or fewer addressed to a young person in your family, congregation, or community. Talk to that person about what Paul is teaching us in this passage concerning freedom in Christ.

The Holy Scriptures require a humble reader who shows reverence and fear toward the Word of God, and constantly says, 'Teach me, teach me, teach me' The Spirit resists the proud.

– Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 54: Table Talk, 379.

Galatians 5:1–14

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

² Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. ⁴ You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

⁷ You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth? ⁸ Such persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough. ¹⁰ I am confident about you in the Lord that you will not think otherwise. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty. ¹¹ But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. ¹² I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Thursday, August 18

A Biblical Conversation with Isaiah 55:1–12

Questions:

- What word or phrase strikes you, and where does it take you?
- What images, stories, or memories come to mind?
- Underline the repeated words or phrases. What do you notice?
- Notice what God does. What do you learn about God?
- Notice what we are asked to do. To what vocation(s) are we called?
- What promises are made to us?

Group Post/Twitter Assignment (group or individual):

Write a “Tweet” of 140 characters or fewer addressed to the people in your neighborhood telling them how this passage speaks to us of the promises of God.

These are the Scriptures which make fools of all the wise and understanding, and are open only to the small and simple, as Christ says in Matthew 11:25. Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies.

– Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:
Prefaces to the Old Testament, 236.

Isaiah 55:1–12

¹ Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

¹² For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

