

Craig Sanders (LLN participant; LC of the Good Shepherd) Lectionary Ministry Story

As Christians, discipleship is what we are called to do. In this space each month, we will share stories and testimony of disciple-ing told through the voices of Synod parishioners. This week's testimony and reflection is by **Craig Sanders of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd** in Duluth. The idea for the story began with Craig writing amazingly helpful "Adult Sermon Notes" that he shared this Spring with the [Lay Leader Network \(LLN\)](#). Craig was inspired to write these lectionary notes each week through participating in a **Northeastern Minnesota Synod ministry, [Lay Leader Network Yearly Intensive Series](#)**. The LLN Yearly Intensive Series is an educational and lay leader development program inspired by Luke 4:18 "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, has anointed me. . . sent me. . . to proclaim good news to the poor.*" LLN Yearly Intensive Series is designed to connect Spirit with lay leadership and ministry in an ever-changing world. Biblical knowledge including reading/comprehension techniques are primary in the curriculum to better understand the Bible and apply its wisdom. Here is Craig's story and testimony via a letter:

To answer questions about my motivation or intent for creating Lectionary notes, I would like to summarize the overall intent in writing these lectionary notes.

My childhood was spent in a Methodist Church. We had to go to church. Church was something you just did. I learned that people should be good. God likes that. But I couldn't quite get the spirit. Besides, I had a gripe. Why did God create me with a visual handicap? I had some rebellious issues. I really couldn't remember anything about grace through faith. I don't remember a mention of the Apostle Paul and his thorn in the flesh, "a messenger of Satan to torment me." I spent several years away from church in college and shortly after.

My faith began to grow in my early 20s thanks to a woman in a bank. I was hired by the National Weather Service in Minneapolis. I went into a bank branch to change my account closer to where I lived. The woman in the bank did the paperwork, but at the end of the work, she said, "This isn't part of the bank account, but we'd love to have you join us at church if you'd like." Her name was Gloria, and no one has been so aptly named. I thought, 'Maybe it's time.' So, I went to Trinity Lutheran Church of Minnehaha Falls. She saw me each week and introduced me to people. I felt like I belonged. One day, she said, "Wait right here a moment. There's someone I'd like you to meet." She dashed up the stairs to the choir loft and came down with a beautiful young woman named Debbie. Over the next year or so I attended Trinity and listened to deeply moving sermons that touched my soul. I would go with Debbie sometimes. Her faith was deep. People in the church were so on fire that they didn't hesitate to share their faith with me. They did it without shame or intimidation. They were simply spirit-filled. People have often said that Trinity was more of a Baptist church than Lutheran. They had world missions and local mission work.

On a few humid nights I found myself watching some Billy Graham Crusades on my 13" black and white TV. I began absorbing what he said and I could feel myself squirm a bit when he would say things like, "Whenever Jesus called anyone, he did it publicly" and "I'm going to ask you to get up out of your seat and come down in front. Your friends will wait for you." The background music playing was [Just As I Am](#) (song begins @ 1:00 minute mark). "We'll give you some literature, and we'll pray with you." I mention this because I reflect back on those times quite often, even these days. I'm still moved by the loving invitation and my expected response.

To finish the Trinity connection, I must say that Debbie later became my wife. That NEVER would have happened without the loving intervention outreach of Gloria. Debbie and I had three children and we took part in an evangelism program. Debbie conducted choir and I taught 1st grade Sunday School for a time.

But through it all, I found that I wanted to learn more and try to remember more from the sermons on Sundays. Even reading the Lectionary each week, I still failed to make the connections and overall purpose. To be honest, when I've heard people read the Lessons, they often don't do it with enthusiasm. It seems like just another thing that we do during worship. I've wanted to hear God's Word with enthusiasm and inflection to awaken my spirit. After 70 some years of doing all of that, I decided I would see if a printed review of the Lectionary would help people remember or if it would spark their curiosity to read more (to see a sample of Craig's Lectionary Notes see the Synod website/[Lay Leader Network Ministry Sharing and Learnings](#)).

I'm a visual learner. I have taught weather classes to pilots and forest fire fighters. I have done technical writing as well. I know what helps people learn and what sparks interest.

Tell me, and I FORGET,
Teach me, and I REMEMBER,
Involve me and I will LEARN.

I've found that short, succinct writing with appropriate graphics is a very effective strategy to learn. That's why I started the Lectionary Notes as an experiment. It got me off dead center, something I've wanted to have happen. I have bought a whole slew of books to help me learn. There are Commentaries, Dictionaries Study Bibles, my huge Concordance, Atlases, Timelines, and other books that offer brief overviews. I'm loving the process learned by virtue of the LLN Yearly Intensive Series. I've found that other people enjoy it as well.

Overall, Lay Leader Network training has proven that the future of the church will not rest with a weekly sermon from the pastor(s) as we fight the secular trends. [Andrew Root](#) has said that people look for stories of our individual lives to serve as evidence of what God has done in our lives. For me, I've been led to try and answer the question posed in Matthew 16:15, "But what about you?", Jesus asked, "Who do YOU say that I am?" Perhaps my Lectionary Notes will help others begin to form their own answer to that question. For church members, perhaps they will begin to find their own answers.

My story is not one of being chosen by God and given success, nor has our family been without deep trauma. I suffered a career catastrophe after working hard to advance only to find I did not have the personal skills and patience to bring cohesion to an office. I asked to be removed from the position that I had coveted for so many years to attain. I was deeply depressed, and I asked God, "Where were you when I needed you?" immediately after that a new Befriended Ministries was started at [Good Shepherd](#). To serve, I needed to understand how people needed spiritual uplift. I could not have learned all that from a book. I had to learn it through trial and pain. Later, I became a Hospice volunteer and learned more from the people I was visiting.

Then in 2019, our family was devastated by the suicide of our middle child, Pete. I know full well that his death was not God's will. It was the result of a disease. I could have given up and walked away from the church. But what really made such a huge difference was the personal outpouring of love...deep, abiding love, born of people's spirits. I learned they have had catastrophes as well. In those tragedies, there was real faith and resilience.

So to conclude [Monica Bruning editorial: with how to share Craig's Lectionary Notes/ministry via LLN and more broadly], I think we have to give people a copy of the Lectionary notes so they can read it over at home or refer back to it during the week. It could be a common reference, if they wanted to take about the sermon around the dinner table or during some other appropriate time. I just feel urged to do something different, time consuming, and complicated. People have their outreach missions in hunger, housing, homelessness, and addictions, and that's wonderful. But in those interactions, how do we bring Jesus to people in a meaningful spiritual way that complements their other work? Perhaps we can all begin to form our own responses based on scripture. Perhaps Lectionary Notes will help.

Craig Sanders