PREPARE

by Rev. Lisa Kipp

Matthew 4:1-11 | The Temptation of Jesus

The season of Lent is a time for reflection and repentance. It isn’t a coincidence that this 40-day season begins with a retelling of Jesus’ time in the wilderness. Led by the Holy Spirit, Jesus spends his days resisting temptation, waiting on God’s next act and, ultimately, declaring his trust in God. Throughout scripture the wilderness often represents a place of preparation, a place to pause and prepare for God’s next action. From time to time, we all experience wilderness moments and seasons.

The people living along the Gandak/Narayani and Koshi river basins on the border of Nepal and India know what it is like to be in the wilderness. In their experience, they regularly wait for the next natural disaster to strike their homeland. The World Resources Institute reports that more than 10 million people in India and Nepal are affected by floods every year. The poverty-stricken villages located along the border river basins are often made up of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups. Most rely on farming to survive and suffer greatly when floods destroy both their crops and livestock.

Lutheran World Relief works in villages along the Gandak/Narayani and Koshi river basins to prepare individuals and families for the next flood season. Together, we have put into place warning systems, introduced flood-resistant crops and taught life-saving survival skills. Jayanti Kewat is a banana farmer in Nawalparasi, Nepal, whose life has been changed by this preparatory work. LWR introduced Jayanti to climate-friendly banana cultivation techniques and provided him with 1,500 banana saplings. Today Jayanti’s banana farm is now able to sustain the extremes of drought and flooding, producing quality bananas year-round for his community. Even more, the success of his farm has allowed him to build a home on higher ground. When the flood waters rise, Jayanti welcomes people from the village into his home until it is safe for them to return to lower lying areas along the river basin.

The diligent work of wilderness study and preparation has been life changing along the Nepal-India border. Instead of living in fear of the next flood, Jayanti and others in his region are prepared, their community has been strengthened, and they live with new hope.

How might God be at work in your life and your congregations’ life during this season of Lent? What preparatory work needs to be done in order to experience a stronger community and new hope? Like Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness, may this season be rooted in hope and marked by a deep trust in God’s mercy.

1) In what ways was Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness a season of preparation?

2) What are some tangible ways that preparing for disaster provides hope in flood-prone areas like the river basins in India and Nepal?

3) What kind of preparatory, reflective work is needed in your life and the life of your congregation this Lent?

For more information about the work of LWR in India and Nepal, visit lwr.org/partnership-india-nepal. To learn more of Jayanti’s story, visit https://youtu.be/RvC1b-2j80c.

To download this and other photos of Jayanti for your sermon, visit https://photos.lwr.org/?c=2576&k=2ff06a6925.
NEW LIFE
by Rev. Lisa Kipp

John 3:1-17 | Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Close readers of the gospel of John come to expect Jesus’ actions to be signs of His divine identity. Initially, Nicodemus doesn’t quite understand Jesus’ identity, but during their encounter Jesus identifies that he has been sent to demonstrate God’s love for the whole world through the gift of eternal life. This new, abundant life will be for all.

Throughout the world, we join hands to give the gift of new life here on earth by bringing clean water to villages through the work of Lutheran World Relief and IMA World Health. Kapinga Eudoxi is from Nsanga-Nyembwe, a village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her family and others living in the village didn’t have any access to clean water. Friends would come to visit and often find them sick in bed for many days. Diseases like typhoid and malaria were common because of the lack of clean water.

Working together as Christ’s church, we constructed new ways to get clean water for thousands of people living in villages like Kapinga’s. We help local leaders teach communities about proper sanitation practices for better health. To date, 1,829 clean water infrastructure projects have been completed and 327,454 people now have access to safe drinking water sources in the DRC.

Clean water has given Kapinga’s family new life. “We are very, very happy with the clean village program because there has been a change,” she shared. “We have good water to drink and this protects us from disease. We are taking charge and we will pass this to our children because this is the only way to help us prevent diseases. It is the delight of our hearts to change our village.”

LWR brings new life to villages around the world through clean water. Each new well and every life changed is a sign of God’s abundant love. Working through the hearts and hands of compassionate people and congregations, we join Kapinga’s joy as villages experience this life-sustaining sign of God’s grace.

1) What vision of new life did Nicodemus receive from his encounter with Jesus?
2) In what concrete ways can you imagine that water provides new life to individuals like Kapinga?
3) What signs of new life do you see in your congregation or community? In what ways is this new life a sign pointing to God’s love for the world?

For more information about the work of LWR and IMA’s clean water projects in the DRC, visit https://youtu.be/wLYDDBrCE and imadrc.org/wash.

LWR and IMA outreach in the DRC has helped individuals like Kapinga Eudoxi and thousands of others take health into their own hands.
Jesus crosses strong gender, racial and cultural barriers through His powerful encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. By engaging in conversation and making profession of who he is, the woman not only receives the good news Jesus has to offer but is given opportunity to bear witness to what she has heard and experienced. As a result of this transformational encounter, the empowerment of this woman and her testimony, the good news of Jesus continues to spread throughout her community.

Not much unlike the Samaritan woman, women throughout rural villages in India and Nepal are often pushed to the outsides of community. Seeking a place at the table, one woman living along the Gandak River Basin in India shared, “The village community doesn’t want female members of the home to take part in any group activities. They often criticize and sometimes negatively comment on our aspiration.”

Lutheran World Relief works to change the perception of women in the communities we serve. As we ensure communities at risk to flooding receive lifesaving tools such as sirens and early warning systems, and that farmers learn to diversify their crops and to plant flood-resistant seeds, women are at the center. After all, it is often the women that are home in the village with children and livestock when the threats of floodwaters arrive.

Chandrawati Devi is a part of a community disaster management committee in her village in Bihar, India. “I was able to sit on a chair next to a man and was able to equally participate in trainings.” she said. “Men are not used to sitting next to women in our society, even now, but we, both men and women, are able to sit together at the same level in these meetings. Some people’s minds have changed because they have seen women contributing equally when they received the necessary and same trainings and inputs as men and when they got the space to express and demonstrate their abilities. A woman can do what a man does.”

Women in the program give flood early warning information to others or engage in rescue work.

“People listen to my opinion, and I feel heard and well respected,” she said “Now, I have an identity in society.”

Jesus calls us to reach out to those who have been pushed to the outsides of our communities. As we do, lives are changed, we strengthen our communities, and the kingdom of God comes near.

1) What difference did it make in the city of Sychar that Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman at the well?

2) Chandrawati was given a place at the table and empowered to partner with LWR in the life-saving work in her village. What impact might this opportunity have on her life? On her community?

3) Who are the outsiders in your community? How might you empower your congregation to reach out to those on the margins of society?

For more information about the work of LWR in India and Nepal, visit lwr.org/partnership-india-nepal.

To download this and other photos of Chandrawati for your sermon, visit https://photos.lwr.org/?c=2577&k=1b06688ca9.
NEW OUTLOOK
by Rev. Lisa Kipp

John 9:1-41 | A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

Having just identified Jesus as the light of the world in John 8, the gospel writer recounts a story that bears witness to the new outlook Jesus brings as he heals a man born blind. Making our way through the narrative of John 9 we discover that Jesus’ healing reveals not only God’s love, but God’s desire to bring an end to human suffering.

The work that Lutheran World Relief and IMA World Health engage in together seeks to join in the healing work of Jesus by building healthier communities. In Tanzania, this work involves treating individuals suffering from trachoma, a disease that causes one’s eyelashes to turn inward, scratching the cornea and causing intense pain and light sensitivity. It is the world’s leading cause of preventable blindness. Trachoma affects the world’s poorest communities, spreading quickly through personal contact or by insects.

Sophia Mohamed and her family know too well the effect of trachoma on daily life. Several years ago, Sophia’s mother underwent surgery to reverse the effect of the disease. Suffering from similar symptoms, Sophia went to an eye screening held in her village. Surgeons partnering with IMA examined Sophia’s eyes. A twenty-minute surgery (performed on the dispensary porch to allow for better lighting) was the beginning of Sophia’s healing process. While she may always experience some light sensitivity, Sophia is no longer in pain or at risk for permanent blindness. Thanks to the work of the church, Sophia is able to live a better life and care for her three children.

Jesus declared that the man in John 9 was born blind “so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” We rejoice in the work of our partners around the world that give witness to God’s love and share the light of Jesus by giving a new outlook to women, men and children suffering from diseases like trachoma.

1) What kind of new outlook does Jesus offer the man born blind, the disciples, and the neighbors along his way?

2) How might patients like Sophia get a glimpse of God through their encounter with IMA healthcare professionals?

3) What kind of new outlook might Jesus be offering your congregation during this season of Lent?

For more information about the sight-saving work of IMA World Health in Tanzania, visit imaworldhealth.org/sightsaving-surgery-a-family-story-2.

To download this and other photos of Sophia for your sermon, visit https://media.imaworldhealth.org/?c=211&k=fc04446a90.

Sophia Mohamed, age 20, was given a new outlook on life by IMA World Health surgeons and caregivers.
HOPE
by Rev. Lisa Kipp

John 11:1-45 | Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

The death and resurrection of Lazarus, Martha’s declaration of faith in the midst of her grief, and Jesus’ own grief all point us toward a God who shows up in the dark and broken places of our world to bring hope and healing.

In 2019, Lutheran World Relief and IMA World Health joined forces to break the cycle of poverty, build healthier communities, and increase our capacity to join Jesus in bringing hope and healing to every neighbor. Reaching out with compassion in communities experiencing not only poverty but devastating health crises is part of the restorative work God calls us to do.

Katembao Mastaki Barnabas is from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa, a region at the center of the world’s longest-lasting Ebola outbreak. Barnabas was intimately aware of the effects of the devastating disease, having experienced first-hand the deaths of several of his friends from the outbreak. He knew too well the grief that Martha and Mary experienced as they watched their brother Lazarus lose his life to illness.

To compound his grief, Barnabas soon fell ill himself. Like so many others in the DRC experiencing headaches, chills, and diarrhea, Barnabas assumed he was coming down with a case of malaria. Imagine his fear when staff from the local hospital entered his room with masks and protective clothing, asking about his contact with those who had contracted Ebola and ultimately diagnosing him with the same disease. Thankfully, new vaccines and treatments being delivered by IMA World Health helped Barnabas and more than 1,500 like him to survive the disease. After 12 days in the hospital, Barnabas’ symptoms slowly began to improve. He is still working on regaining enough strength to be able to farm, but is grateful that he was able to return home.

Jesus and his disciples visited Lazarus’ family and offered care, compassion, and ultimately new life. Throughout the DRC, IMA World Health and local partners are joining Jesus in bringing healing, wholeness, and hope to people who know the impact of the Ebola virus as part of their daily life. When God’s people join hands together and follow Jesus into the darkness of our world, suffering never has the final word.

1) At what moments and in what ways did Jesus offer hope to Martha, Mary, Lazarus and others?

2) Barnabas experienced both grief and fear in the face of Ebola. How do you imagine the current Ebola outbreak in the DRC impacts the lives of those living in affected communities?

3) In what places is God breaking in with hope and healing amidst individuals suffering in your congregation and community?

For more information about Barnabas and the ways IMA World Health is joining with other partners around the world in fighting Ebola, visit imaworldhealth.org/in-eastern-congo-the-battle-against-ebola-moves-house-to-house.

To download this and other photos of the fight against Ebola in the DRC for your sermon, visit https://media.imaworldhealth.org/?c=212&k=6f1aab0889.
REMEMBER
by Rev. Lisa Kipp

Matthew 21:1-11 | Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Today marks the beginning of a powerful week of remembering. We will remember the last time Jesus gathered around the table with his disciples, how he washed their feet, was betrayed in the garden, and was sentenced to death. We will tell and retell stories that many of our people know well. But before we recount the passion of Jesus in Jerusalem, we remember how he entered into the city humbly mounted on a donkey as crowds of people gathered along the roadside. With shouts of, “Hosanna!” onlookers grabbed what they could find near them – coats off their backs and branches from the trees surrounding them – to welcome Jesus.

Many congregations will enter into this story today and remember by waving high palm branches and celebrating the one who comes in the name of the Lord. At Lutheran World Relief, we give thanks for congregations across the country that will also remember their brothers and sisters living in poverty through the purchase and use of eco-palms.

Carmelita, a community in the Peten region of Guatemala, is just one of the communities that has been transformed by the harvest and sale of eco-palms. Sofia Maritza Hernandez lives and works in Carmelita. It is her job to sort and inspect the palms for any imperfections. “The sale of xate (eco-palms) is changing my life in different ways – it is supplemental income to what my husband earns and I invest it in my children for the most part, spending it on their education, school supplies, and clothes … I would like for churches to know that we are benefiting greatly when they buy xate, not just me as a mother, but the whole community.”

As you gather with your community this Sunday and remember Jesus’ entry into this holiest of weeks, we encourage you to remember those around the world like Sofia Maritza Hernandez and Desly Marisol of Carmelita who play an important role in retelling the story of Palm Sunday.

1) What questions do you suppose lingered in the minds of those gathered along the streets of Jerusalem as Jesus made his way past them?

2) Palm Sunday is celebrated by Christians around the world. Is it important to you or your congregation to be connected to communities like Carmelita, Guatemala? Why or why not?

3) What do you hope your congregation experiences or remembers as you enter into the story of Palm Sunday?

For more information about LWR’s eco-palms, visit lwr.org/eco-palms.

To download this and other photos of Sofia for your sermon, visit https://photos.lwr.org/?c=2578&k=676795bfbaa.