



# NEWSLETTER

## *Wilderness*

The wilderness is an important biblical theme. There are two different ways to interpret the wilderness in scripture. One is as a place of barrenness and temptation and testing. There's a sense of separation from God and even that the wilderness is a consequence of sin. It's something to survive and get through.

Another interpretation of the wilderness is that it's a place of profound encounter with God...something that can change you forever. Like the actual wilderness, it's not a place of ease and comfort. But it's not something to just survive either.

Most of the biblical stories about wilderness have elements of both interpretations.

You may have also heard "wilderness experience" used as a metaphor for experiences in our lives that are especially challenging.

How wilderness is viewed is connected to our own spirituality. Early Medieval Christianity in the Roman church developed into the hierarchical and structured religion based in cathedrals that were designed to evoke the transcendence of God. It was a religion heavily focused on sin and avoiding eternal damnation. The early church father we most associate with this view was Augustine. Martin Luther grounded much of his thinking in the teachings of Augustine. Wilderness in that school of thought would be more often thought of as spiritual barrenness or separation from God brought on by sin. In Christ, God would remove that separation and the barren, desert places would be remade into the lush garden of first creation.

But in northern Europe a type of Christianity developed that's associated with the Celtic people. It's foundation is in the notion that God can be found in all creation...that God's spirit, or breath, is imbedded not just in humans created in the divine image, but in all the natural world. That makes the wilderness into a God-soaked place rather than a place of separation and its cathedrals are the towering forests.

Indigenous people in our own land also developed a spirituality rooted in the natural world. Unfortunately, a more rigid and Augustinian sort of Christianity was brought to America and had a profound and usually negative impact on Indigenous spirituality.

Wilderness will be our theme for Lent Midweek services this year. We'll read some of the wilderness stories from the Bible. We'll have a chance to share some of our own experiences with the actual, physical wilderness. We'll learn some natural-based contemplative practices. And we'll explore what those wilderness stories and practices might have to teach us about our metaphorical wilderness experiences.

Christ's peace,

*Pastor Kris*

## Information Sharing

Sharing information is important in any organization. It's going to be even more important as we work on this four congregation shared ministry. With more and more ways to communicate, it can seem like we're flooded with information and end up just tuning it out. I've worked to find effective ways to let folks know what's going on without contributing too much to overload. Here are my thoughts about how we can make sure everyone knows what's going on and still keep it manageable.

### Old-fashioned newsletter

Bethlehem and Zion have long had a monthly newsletter. When I set up their websites, I began posting them there and only printed newsletters for those not online or those who wished to continue getting a print version. Others receive a link to the posted newsletter. The newsletter contains an article from me on a seasonal or other topic as well as calendars, contact information, service opportunities and so on.

I plan to continue to do a newsletter, but I'm going to do a single newsletter that will be for all four congregations. I'm also going to switch from monthly to bimonthly. It will include information that is for all four congregations. If you have something you'd like in the newsletter, please send it to me.

**Also, this newsletter needs a name. Bethlehem Star and Good Tidings from Zion will be no more. Send me your best ideas for a name!**

### Website

Bethlehem and Zion have each had their own website for a long time. During our trial, I'm not going to change that. But if this arrangement becomes permanent we would discuss taking down one of the websites and change the other one to a single website for all four. This would be a shared cost if we decide to go ahead with it. The website is where I post the newsletters, upcoming events, sermons, links to the worship livestream, and various reports.

### E-mail and texting

During the pandemic, I began sending out a weekly eNews by e-mail to the congregations with important upcoming events, service opportunities, links to worship recordings, invitations, reminders and so on. I have continued that practice ever since. I rely heavily on email for communication, but texting is also useful in some situations. At Grace and Czech Presbyterian, this will probably evolve as I get to know you all better and learn what works best.

Phone calls and texting remain the best options for short-notice things like a weather-related cancellation.

### Social Media

Bethlehem, Zion, and Grace all have Facebook pages. I think social media can be a part of communication and outreach, but it's pretty dependent on whether or not people in the congregation actually use it or it is in an area where it can be an outreach tool.

Zion and Bethlehem use their Facebook page to livestream worship. They both also have a YouTube channel. I will usually post something at the beginning of special seasons, like Lent or Advent as something of an outreach tool. I'm also on the Davey Community Facebook page and the Ceresco Community Board page. I've connected pretty often on the Davey page, less so Ceresco.

Bethlehem has an Instagram page but I've not made much use of it.

If anyone is interested in helping with the use of social media for us, let Pastor Kris know.

## Communicating with Pastor Kris

I have both a personal Facebook and Instagram page. I will accept friend requests from congregation members, but have fairly recently decided not to send them. I do occasionally post political things there.

The telephone is still a great way to communicate one on one – either a phone call or a text. Email is also great. Here is my contact information:

Email – [krisbo90@gmail.com](mailto:krisbo90@gmail.com)

Phone – 402-499-4993

Please call if someone is hospitalized or is admitted to hospice or for any urgent or emergency pastoral concerns.

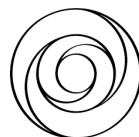
I'm also glad to meet face to face anytime. I plan to do some visits like that to get to know folks at Grace and Czech Pres.

## Lent Midweek Service Format

Our Lent midweek services will be a dinner church format. The schedule is on the last page of the newsletter with other scheduling information. The pattern will be roughly as follows:

- Opening song and prayer
- Meal prayer
- Meal and cleanup—the meal will be provided by the host congregation.
- Message/discussion
- Prayers for others and for the world
- Closing song

Our offerings for Lent Midweek services will go to Oaks Indian Mission. Oaks is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It's a residential facility on Cherokee land in Oklahoma for children in need of more support to grow and thrive. Originally a Moravian ministry for the Cherokee survivors of the Trail of Tears, Oaks now serves children of all races, although the emphasis on native children remains.



Have you ever put on someone else's eyeglasses? Chances are good that you realized it right away because your eyes probably did not need the same correction as the other person's. This is how our view of life is as well. We all view life from different sets of lenses. It's not that uncommon to sit and watch something with other people and feel surprised to hear how their experience was different from yours. We are also different spiritually and view God from different lenses. Some of us see God best by learning the theology, while some of us like the "feelings" we get when God is experienced or contemplated. Some of us need proof of God and some of us love the mysticism of God's immense being.

There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these spiritual lenses. It is how each of us is and we need each other's views to make a church a dynamic and diverse place of worship. It takes all ranges of "corrective" lens's to help each of us see God together, as a community of believers. We need those who are energized after hearing the readings of the scriptures and the Pastor/lay person's sermon. We need those who are energized to provide music through their gifts of playing an instrument or singing. We need those who are constantly looking for the presence of God in the every day world. We need those who have a strong and courageous faith to believe what they can not see and to share that with others.

As we begin this 4-point ministry, I have been so encouraged by each church's willingness to sharpen their focus on who they are as the church and being open to new visions of community.

Virg Unverferth is part of the 3 year, certified spiritual direction program offered through the Nebraska ELCA. Spiritual directors are trained to companion with others as they seek to engage more with the spirit inside them. Through spiritual practices and reflective readings, she is learning how to cultivate a deeper relationship with God and has begun to companion and help guide others in their lives as a Beloved child of God. She is currently in her second of three years of training before she is certified and would be open to answer any questions you might have regarding spiritual direction. (402-326-0122)

## ***Schedules and Things***

### **Worship Times**

Zion—9:00 am

Grace—9:00 am

Bethlehem—10:30 am

Czech Presbyterian—10:30 am

**Communion** 1st and 3rd Sundays at Bethlehem and Zion, 2nd and 4th Sundays at Grace (2nd only during summer,) 5 times per year at Czech Presbyterian.

Links to livestream worship at Bethlehem and Zion can be found on these website pages:

<https://www.zionithaca.org/worship>

<https://www.bethlehemdavey.org/worship-in-person-and-online>

(The music is much better on Facebook live than YouTube.)

### **Preaching schedule through Easter:**

March 2: Kevin Whitcomb G/CP

Pastor Kris B/Z

March 9: Pastor Kris G/CP

Diane Sabatka-Rine B/Z

March 16: Megan Patent-Nygren G/CP

Pastor Kris B/Z

March 23: Pastor Kris G/CP

Virg Unverferth

March 30: Fifth Sundays will be a joint worship. On March 30 worship will be at 10:30 at Grace with a potluck to follow.

Pastor Kris preaching and leading worship

April 6: Miranda Kliment—G/CP

Pastor Kris B/Z

April 13: **Palm Sunday**

Pastor Kris G/CP

Annie Mumgaard B/Z

April 20: **Easter**

Pastor Kris—B/Z

Pastor Heidi Wallace—G/CP

### **Ash Wednesday and Holy Week**

**Ash Wednesday:** 3/5/2025 with communion

6:30pm - Zion

8:00pm - Bethlehem

(Czech Pres and Grace may choose which service to attend)

**Palm Sunday:** 4/13/2025 (2nd Sunday)

Pastor Kris at Grace and Czech Pres – communion at Grace

Lay Ministry at Zion and Bethlehem – no communion

**Maundy Thursday:** 4/17/25—Grace Lutheran 7 pm with communion  
(all 4 churches attend at Grace)

**Good Friday:** 4/18/25—Bethlehem at 7 pm with no communion  
(all 4 churches at Bethlehem)

**Easter:** All four will have their own service according to usual Easter schedule

### **Lent midweek Services:**

Wednesday March 12 at 6:30 at Bethlehem

Wednesday March 19 at 6:30 at Zion

Wednesday March 26 at 6:30 at Grace

Wednesday April 2 at 6:30 at Bethlehem

Wednesday April 9 at 6:30 at Zion