

SIX PACK BIBLE STUDIES

A program to engage students at the
University of Nebraska, Lincoln,
in peer-led Bible study

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Included on these pages are samples of Bible studies based on the pericopes for Sundays in the church year, an email invitation to service, a covenant of study and leadership, and an outline of the program.

E-MAIL INVITATION TO POTENTIAL LEADERS

Hi [name]

I'm sitting here doing some work in preparation for our "Six Pack" Bible Study Leader's meeting scheduled for tomorrow night and the thought dawned on me that YOU WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT SIX PACK BIBLE STUDY LEADER!

Have you thought about that as a possibility? *If not, think about it now*--I think you would be great!

The philosophy of our Six Pack Studies is to gather six students together for a weekly Bible Study based upon the scripture passages that will be used in worship on Sunday mornings. One of the six students serves as the leader and meets weekly with me, the Intern, and other student leaders. We review the material and discuss the study that the Intern or I have written. The student leader then takes that material and gathers together the others in his or her group and leads the study in much the same way it was led in the "leaders group."

THEREFORE:

YOU ARE INVITED TO A MEAL

tossed green salad, lasagna, garlic bread, dessert

**TO HEAR MORE ABOUT THE
SIX PACK PROGRAM!**

**TOMORROW NIGHT
TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 16, 2003
5:30 P.M.
LUTHERAN STUDENT CENTER**

**HIT THE REPLY KEY RIGHT NOW AND
TELL ME IF YOU ARE INTERESTED AND CAN MAKE IT.**

**I'LL BE GOING OUT TO GET THE FOOD ITEMS RIGHT AFTER LUNCH ON
TUESDAY AFTERNOON.**

Covenant of Study and Leadership

We, the leaders of the Lutheran Student Center's Six Pack Bible Study ministry, in signing this covenant, do hereby promise to attend all meetings of our group, understanding that our participation is vital to the overall success of this ministry, and that this group is seriously weakened without the active participation of each member.

Name _____ Name _____

Name _____ Name _____

Name _____ Name _____

Name _____ Name _____

Campus Pastor _____

**This is our promise, before God, ourselves, and each other:
to support, encourage, and inspire each other through our
words, our actions, and most importantly, our consistent
presence in this ministry.**

Solo Deo Gloria

SIX PACKS BIBLE STUDY

1. Intent of the Study

- A. To help students learn more about the Bible.
- B. To help students integrate Biblical teachings into their daily lives.
- C. To develop a sense of Christian community.
- D. To be a Christian Support Group.

2. Structure

- A. Six members in each group. One member serves as the leader.

3. Leader Expectations

- A. Meet with the Pastor and all of the other "Six Pack" leaders each week to go over the next week's material.
- B. Meet with your "Six Pack" group each week at an agreed upon time and lead the discussion.
- C. Pray for each member of your group regularly and encourage them in their spiritual journey. I will pray for each of you in my devotionals.
- D. Encourage the members of your "Six Pack" to worship regularly and to receive the sacrament.

4. Recruiting Members

- A. Recruit among your friends, members of the Lutheran Student Center community, and acquaintances on campus.
- B. The Lutheran Student Center has a list of people looking to join a group and will help you develop your group.

5. Six Pack Meeting Times

- A. Arrange an initial meeting and then sit down and work out a time that will be agreeable with all of the members.
- B. Be sure to let them know how important it is that everyone attends each week. If one person misses, it disrupts the entire "sense of community."

SIX PACK BIBLE STUDY EPIPHANY 3

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

(12) For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (13) For in the one Spirit -we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (14) Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. (15) If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, "that would not make it any less apart of the body. (16) And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? (18) But as it is. God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. (19) If all were a single member, where would the body be? (20) As it is, there are many members, yet one body. (21) The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you, "nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (22) On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (23) and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; (24) whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, (25) that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. (26) If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (27) Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (28) And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. (29) Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? (30) Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (31) But strive for the greater gifts.

DIGGING INTO THE TEXTS:

1. This week's text from 1 Cor. begins with Paul's well-known analogy between the human body and the body of Christ. Paul uses the body imagery to affirm both the diversity and the unity inherent in Christ, without ever wholly subsuming one aspect within the other.
2. Paul celebrates the diverse gifts present in the body of Christ in general and is not interested in transforming the wildly, richly diverse Corinthians into some bland homogeneous conglomerate.
3. Paul declares they all have one thing in common, "in the one Spirit we were all baptized." This common experience overrides all else.
4. Variety is affirmed as a God-given gift (v. 18) but variations in function and design are wholly attributed to God—not to any inherent superiority of one body part over another. All must be celebrated.
5. Paul is acting as an authority for the Corinthian Christians, and thus he places his role—that of an apostle—in a position of undisputable authority.
6. The series of rhetorical questions Paul cites in verses 29-30 again reinforce that the church's diversity of gifts is to be noted and celebrated, not quarreled over.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Paul sees the church at Corinth in a very specific way. Do you think that we today dare to apply those specifics to our modern Christian churches?
2. Paul makes mention in verse 13 that through Baptism we are all equal in the body of Christ. Do you think that is actually true? How about the perceived differences between ordained and non-ordained people?
3. Paul was fighting both superiority and inferiority complexes in the Corinthians Church. Those who had the gift of tongues thought that they were much better, spiritually, than those who did not. Many of those who did not have a discernable gift felt as though God was surely cursing them, for some reason or another. Do those kinds of things still happen in our churches today?

Luke 4:14-21

(14) Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. (15) He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. (16) When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, (17) and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: (18) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, (19) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (20) And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. (21) Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

1. In this reading we have a revelation of just who Jesus is which took place in the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth, just after his 40-day fast in the wilderness and his temptation by Satan.
2. Whereas Matthew and Mark put the synagogue scene in Nazareth quite late in Jesus' Galilean ministry, Luke puts this incident right at the very outset of Jesus' public ministry. However, Jesus himself refers to a previous ministry in Capernaum (v. 23) indicating his "return" to Galilee might not have been as direct as Luke's summary statement seems to suggest.
3. For Luke, Jesus' public ministry is anchored in his Jewish roots. Apparently, he regularly read in synagogue on the Sabbath, which means he had been trained to do so.
4. Jesus does not read the Isaiah passage, at least according to Luke, exactly the way it appears in the O.T. Text; he omits the part of v.2 about "the day of our God's vengeance." Thus, we see that he is emphasizing the beneficent aspect of God's coming -- good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and a year of favor from the Lord — as well as his own role: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me."
5. Jesus announces to the attentive synagogue-goers that today this passage has been fulfilled as they listen! The clincher in Jesus' sermon is clearly the word 'today.' "Today this scripture has fulfilled in your hearing."

6. For most of us, Christ's words are a kind of Utopian dream, "someday idealism." The words he reads and comments from Isaiah certainly express our hope that someday prisons will be empty, etc.

7. Jesus says, however, "Today!" And we, like his first hearers are appalled. If our idealism can be aloof and postponed, we can live with the message of the gospel. But, if it confronts us in our middle of the road lives, disrupts our indifferent attitudes, knocks over the walls of placating principles, we are terrified. We aren't ready for tomorrow's dream.

8. Yet Christ has come. And if Christ is the "living Word" revealed among us (i.e. Epiphany) then we are living in the today he inaugurated. Therefore, our job is clear. Today is when we are called to bring good news to the poor and release the captives. Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. For today we have been set free, we have heard the good news, we have been given our sight, and we have been set free.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. When the *Cold War* was still hot and communism still had a grip on Eastern Europe, Queen Elizabeth of Belgium made a state visit to Warsaw. She was assigned a Polish protocol officer to accompany her to Mass. As they traveled to the church, she asked him, "Are you a Catholic?" "Believing, but not practicing," he replied. "I see," she said, "Then you must be a Communist." "Practicing, your majesty," he said, "but, not believing." Does the officer's reply strike a chord with us? Do we not also believe things we fail to practice? And do we not also practice things we no longer believe?

2. Right now the Presidential campaign in Iowa is having a debate as to whether the candidates should bring their religious beliefs into their campaigns. What do you think?

3. Right now the debate has been whether it was more moral (Christian) to go into Iraq to "free" the people from Saddam militarily or whether it would have been more moral to continue diplomacy. What do you think?

SIX-PACK BIBLE STUDY EPIPHANY 4

OLD TESTAMENT: Jeremiah 1:4-10

1. The prophet Jeremiah witnessed some of the best and some of the worst times in ancient Israel. 1 Kings 2:26, tells us that he was of the exiled priestly house from Anathoth. He watched Judah sink inexorably into a political and spiritual decline from which it would never recover. By the end of his career, Jerusalem was destroyed, and he himself was exiled into Egypt.
2. Verses 4 & 5 tell us that God had plans for Jeremiah even before he was born. God defined the role he would play. Even before he came out of the womb, God had consecrated him to be a prophet. "What's this say about "free choice?"
3. Jeremiah protests his unworthiness in a way similar to Moses' response to his call (Exodus 4: 10-15) and Solomon's prayer to God for guidance upon assuming the throne (1 Kings 3:7). Moses protests his inability to speak with eloquence and Solomon begs for God's assistance because he is a mere "youth."
4. God's answer is merely a DIRECTIVE that Jeremiah WOULD go where God sent, and he WOULD say what God commanded. God does say he wouldn't have to fear because he would protect him and even put the divine words directly into his mouth. God literally touches his lips.
5. The content of Jeremiah's prophecy is outlined in verse 10.pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.....

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

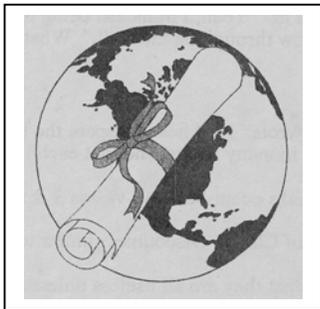
1. Since 1996 there has been a national campaign (The National Pledge Alliance) asking graduating college seniors to take a pledge to be conscientiously selective about for which companies or organizations they would work based upon ethics: "Ideals before dollars." The pledge says: "I pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve those aspects of any organization for which I work.." If you were offered a job with a company you knew practiced unethical business standards, but they offered you a great salary package, would you take the position?
2. Eighty percent of Americans think volunteering for the good of others is something we all should do—yet—only 49 % actually volunteer. It's easy to endorse something like volunteering, but it's harder to figure out, "Where am I going to find those five extra hours a week?" What do you think is the largest deterrent to following through on God's call to serve others?
3. Jeremiah was a young man and tried to tell God he was too young to serve. There is a piece of that mentality going on in the church today when it comes to people heeding the call to full time ministry in the Church. The response most often heard is: "Yeah, I think I'm being called, but I want to go out and work for five to ten years before I follow through on the Call." What do you think of this kind of reasoning?

SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1. Here we have probably the best known words Paul ever wrote. Paul has just spent the last chapter convincing the Corinthians that spiritual gifts come in many forms, and that each is valuable and worthy as any of the others.
2. There are three distinct sections to the chapter. Style breaks occur between verses three and four, and again between verses seven and eight.
3. What is interesting about this chapter is that there is no mention of Christ. Discourses similar to this occur in Plato and in the wisdom literature, 3 Ezra 34-40.
4. Verse 1-4: Paul lists a bunch of spiritual gifts, but states that they are all useless unless they are accompanied by Love.
5. Verses 4-7: Paul gives not a definition of love, but a description of the ways of love.
6. Verses 8-13: Here Paul sets love and the various spiritual gifts against each other, and his time frame becomes eschatological (dealing with end-times.) In the fulfillment of the end times, love's pre-eminence will become clear. The mind of God will become clear.
7. Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to understand that their concern over proper beliefs and the distribution of spiritual gifts "comes up short" if they operate without the component of "love" in their community. Love flowing through the community is the lifeblood of everything they do with their spiritual gifts and their theology.
8. The Hebrew word AHEB: (means) God's love—human love for God—human love for neighbor—sensual love.
9. There are 5 Greek words for our single word LOVE:
 1. EPITHYMIA: Sensual love—this is sexual desire.
 2. EROS: (English-erotic) Yearning for unity, passion or sex, "falling in love."
 3. PHILIA: Platonic love; shared by good friends & companions—a close feeling that develops when two people have many things in common.
 4. STORGE: Family affection. The kind of love shared by parents and children.
 5. AGAPE: Self-giving love. The love Jesus had for us. Devotion that other receives regardless of whether they deserve it or not.
10. A good marriage needs all five of these types of LOVE:
 1. Strong sex interest
 2. Respect and admiration: strong mutual attraction
 3. Friendship and fellowship: couples need to be "best friends"
 4. Affection: we all need sympathy, empathy, and to have a shoulder to cry upon
 5. Self-giving devotion: all of us have unlovable traits and faults

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Even though Paul doesn't mention marriage in this passage, but rather is dealing with fractious fighting in the Corinthians community, why do you think this is the most often read Bible passage at weddings? What appeal does the passage have for you?
2. Americans put so much value into "falling in love," it seems the whole marriage is based upon that single attribute. Why, then, do cultures where marriages are "arranged" is there a significantly lower divorce rate than in the U.S., which is, I believe, the highest in the world? If we have love, what is the component in relationships that is missing, thus causing so many divorces?
3. What makes love last?



Graduation Pledge Alliance

I pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organizations for which I work.

Signature _____ Date _____

** The above design is used at some schools in the form of a certificate that

Pledge signers keep as a reminder of their commitment **

GOSPEL: Luke 4:21-30

1. It is important to note that this reading is a continuation of last week's Gospel passage and recounts Jesus' first public appearance in the synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. In many ways, it makes no sense without some recognition of its context. This part of the story shows the start of the path of rejection that leads to the cross.
2. Vv. 21-22 - Verse 21 is repeated from last week's reading. Jesus seems to be making a claim of honor in relation to the ready from Isaiah. Initially, the crowd accepts his words; their only problem was attempting to reconcile how such an honorable teaching could come from one born to a lowly artisan.
3. Vv. 25-27 - The Hebrew prophets Elijah and Elisha had already shown the unexpectedly limitless nature of God's mercy by touching the lives of non-Hebrew people (1 Kings 17:1-15; 2 Kings 5:1-14) considered outsiders and outcasts. Luke's mention of Jesus' reference of God helping non-Hebrews reflects the author's special concern for the Gentiles and helps illustrate the character of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' words, however, were immediately recognized as a condemnation of Israel and a serious insult to the honor of those assembled.
4. Vv. 28-30 - The congregants cannot let Jesus' challenge to their honor go unanswered. A recent study has noted that during Jesus' time "the death of the challenger (was) a worthy response to public dishonor. . . , making the game of challenge and response . . . literally a matter of life and death" (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1992, pp. 309-10)

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What caused the abrupt shift—from "all spoke well of him" to all of them being "filled with rage" and trying to kill him—in the people's response to Jesus?
2. Some say that the shift came because Jesus challenged their idea of themselves as the sole participants in God's covenant and their assumption that God's wrath is for outsiders and God's mercy is for the elect of Israel. How do most Christians feel about that message?
3. What does it mean to freely share God's grace?
4. Although when Jesus expands the boundaries of God's love, he doesn't do away with the old covenant; his community still can't stand it. Do we sometimes find it so hard to share God's grace even when it doesn't take away from our benefits? Why?
5. How bold will you be in describing the concrete ways we dismiss and discredit the prophetic voices from within our own families, hometowns, and local parishes? What are those voices saying to us that we refuse to hear?
6. What kind of support, education, and challenge do many of us need in order to move from narrowly confining the gospel to our own people and needs, to living it as a liberating word for all?

SIX PACK BIBLE STUDY

EPIPHANY 5

Isaiah 6:1-8

Historical Background: The text says "in the year that King Uzziah died," This would be about 740 b.c.e. It is not clear whether Isaiah's vision took place before or after Uzziah's death. According to Isaiah 1:1 the prophet was active during the reigns of Uzziah (783-742 b.c.e.), Jothan (742-735 b.c.e.), Ahaz (735-715 b.c.e.), and Hezekiah (715-687/6 b.c.e.). Uzziah and his contemporary Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom reigned over a time of great, but unequal prosperity. Social abuses are criticized by Amos in the north and Isaiah in the south.

Unlike any other prophet, Isaiah receives his prophetic call in a vision during Temple worship. Jews believed that God "dwelled" on earth (i.e., the place they knew God was present) in the Temple. They also believed that the Temple itself was a mirrored image of God's heavenly court. In Isaiah's vision, the Temple does indeed become God's Holy court.

Literary Background: The common belief was that in the presence of God's moral perfection, the sinner could not help but see one's own sin. With this vision Isaiah finds himself able to recognize his unworthiness and the unworthiness of his fellow Israelites. His lips (Scripture frequently uses the symbol of the lips "the tongue or the mouth - as revealing what is in the heart.), have long displayed his corruption. The question is, can Isaiah's guilt, and more particularly, the guilt of the people, be washed away?

One of the seraphs takes a coal from the altar and touches the mouth of this man with "unclean lips." The altar represents the perpetual fire of sacrifice where atonement is made by a gracious God for an unworthy people. Isaiah is forgiven. Forgiveness leads to reconciliation. Isaiah, the man with unclean lips, unable to hear God or speak with him, now hears God speak of His purpose and is able to respond and participate in it. "'Send me!' He says, 'Go.'"

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. In this text Isaiah is presented with a vision of what God looks like. What is your vision of God?
2. Isaiah understood that when he was closest to God, his sin was most visibly exposed. Is this a feeling that you can relate to?
3. Is the call Isaiah received one that you have also received? Are you able to respond, "Here I am, send me," to God's call? Or are you content for God to send someone else?
4. Do you think that the average Christian today is eager to respond as Isaiah did? Or would you see the average Christian as Peter Marshall described, "Many Christians are like men dressed in diving suits designed for many fathoms deep, marching bravely forth to pull plugs from bathtubs"?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Historical Background: Paul's congregation is denying that Jesus was ever resurrected from the dead. Therefore Paul's argument in this section is meant to convince them that the resurrection of Christ actually happened. Paul bases his argument on the fact that story of the resurrection has been passed down among Christ's followers who actually witnessed the resurrection. Paul himself never actually encountered Christ face to face, so he also relates to them that Christ has also appeared to him through this passing on of the gospel.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. How is it that Christ appears to you?
2. Do you ever have questions or trouble believing in the resurrection?
3. Who were the people that passed on the story of the gospel to you?

Luke 5:1-11

Historical Background: When the soon-to-be disciples encounter Jesus in Luke, they have heard something of him before. This is contrary to the call of the disciples in Matthew and Mark where the disciples get up and follow Jesus with no prior knowledge of Him. The crowds are following closely trying to get a chance to hear him preach. Jesus gets onto the boat of these fishermen and pushes away from shore so that he can preach without being overwhelmed by the crowd. When he is done preaching, Jesus commands the fisherman to put their nets into the water on the other side of the boat, after doing so they come away with an enormous catch. By placing the call of Simon Peter and the other fishermen after this miraculous catch of fish, Luke provides a psychologically plausible account of why they would leave everything to follow Jesus.

Theological Significance: Peter's response to the miracle of the abundant catch fits nicely with the Old Testament and Epistle lessons:

- Isaiah 6:1-8 tells the story of the call of Isaiah, who protested, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" We might consider this story a model for the Gospel lesson. Both Isaiah and Peter feel the magnitude of their unworthiness in the presence of the holy. Both protest their unworthiness. A seraph cleanses Isaiah lips with a burning coal, and Jesus has a cleansing word for Peter. Both Isaiah and Peter prove faithful to the call.
- In 1 Cor 15:1-11, Paul pronounces himself "the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. The fishermen were given tangible reasons to follow Jesus (the enormous catch of fish) what are your reasons for being a follower of Jesus?

2. What are the qualifications for following Christ? Have you ever had the feeling of being unworthy?

3. This text comes to us during the season of epiphany (meaning *give light to*, or *make known*.) Christ was "made known" to these fishermen. Paul speaks of the Gospel "appearing" to him, and Isaiah experienced God through a vision and a call to ministry. How is Christ made known to you? Do you have an epiphany experience?

SIX PACK BIBLE STUDY EPIPHANY 6

GOSPEL: Luke 6:17-26

1. The Disciples are called — and — their first opportunity for learning is that Jesus brings them down from the mountain where they have been in retreat (Luke's choice for retreats) and teaches them the Beatitudes on a "level place." Matthew uses the mountain for teaching, and Mark uses the sea.
2. Even after Jesus elevates them by appointing them the 12 select, he then levels the playing field for all when he teaches. Luke makes note of the fact that Jesus looks specifically at the disciples when he begins to teach. However, Jesus makes no move to withhold the information from the general throng.
3. There seem to be three types of individuals that make up the multitude. First, there are those specially chosen known as the apostles. Second, there is a larger group who has declared themselves disciples and has already committed themselves to Jesus and his witness. Third, there is a portion of the crowd that is as yet uncommitted to Jesus in any way. There was also more than likely a broad spectrum of folks representing all economic classes. Hence, the blessings and the woes.
4. Jesus' move down to a level place puts him smack dab in the midst of this needy crowd, squarely in the center of the sick, possessed, smelly, milling crowd.
5. Today's text gives us the first of five sections which make up Jesus' sermon on the plain. Luke gives us four blessings and four woes, while Matthew is a little more upbeat—he lists nine blessings and no woes.
6. Jesus offered "cures" in verses 18 & 19. In the following verses he simply begins to diagnose human sickness, analyzing the root causes of our infirmities.
7. Luke's beatitudes differ from Matthew's in a significant way. In Matthew, the "poor" are the "poor in spirit;" "The hungry" are those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness;" those who "weep" and will "laugh" are those who "mourn" and will be "comforted." This difference in character is augmented by Luke's placement of Jesus squarely in the center of the crowd. Likewise, the blessings he offers are of a distinctly physical nature. For Luke, Jesus is in the business of dealing with reality.
8. It is perhaps surprising to the disciples that being hated and rejected are signs of blessing. The "woe" that they are warned away from is the experience of being accepted, the disaster of having "all speak well of you." Jesus' blessing reassured his followers that their personal rejection is no reflection on their genuine witness of the Gospel.

BRINGING THE TEXT TO LIFE!

1. O.k. I admit it—I have a confession to make! Father, forgive me for I have sinned! One of the beauties of having interns is that I get to pick the Sundays I want to preach and which Sundays the Intern should preach. I HATE PREACHING ON THE BEATITUDES!! Usually, when I sit down to make the assignments each semester, I look ahead to see which Sunday has the Beatitudes and then I make sure the Intern gets that Sunday. This year I didn't pay attention and I messed up! I think I detest the Beatitudes because the "woes" nail me every time. I see no personal grace in these passages. The

rich, the well fed, the happy: that's me and I like being that way! I also love it when people tell how great I am as a Pastor, Preacher, Father, Husband, and Person. Why couldn't Jesus just have kept his mouth shut that day? Why did Luke have to report those "woes"? Why couldn't he have been more like Matthew and ignore them? Life would have been a whole lot easier. Now I have to preach something to my students, and my ordination says that I have to preach the Word "rightly!" Oh Hell—Father, forgive me for I know not what I do!

2. Speaking of Hell, I have another confession to make. There's a piece of the LBW liturgy that I absolutely detest. It's contrived, it invades my personal space, and it interrupts the flow of the liturgy. You can't believe the awesome grace I experienced when Patrick Kiefert (Luther Seminary Professor) stated at a campus ministry conference that the worst thing a parish with lots of visitors could do is to "Pass the Peace!" Since we have at least a 25 visitor rate at the Lutheran Student Center each week, I immediately dropped the practice like a "hot potato" and never looked back. However, Lenard Sweet (editor) in Homiletics Magazine way back in 1992 writes about a rather unique idea that merits consideration, especially in light of the Beatitudes.

The "Ritual of Friendship" or "Passing the Peace" or whatever else that period of enforced sociability might be called is a practice of problematic significance. A large percentage of congregants cringe and steel themselves while they plaster on a phony smile and breathe their most sincere prayer of the service—that this ritual will get over with quickly! In fact it is not unreasonable for you to assume that a significant number of those who attend your smallest, earliest services do so precisely in order to avoid this whole procedure.

What would be your congregation's reaction if this Sunday you told them to stand, turn to their neighbor, grasp hands firmly, look each other in the eye, and say, "**In the name of Jesus Christ, go to hell!**"

Wilfred Bailey and William McElvaney have offered this rude sounding remedy for another Sunday of mumbled, meaningless "Peace be with you's" in the book, Christ's Suburban Body. But Bailey and McElvaney are not just prescribing shock therapy. Their recommendation is carefully considered and theologically based. Where does the Apostles Creed tell us Christ went those three days before the resurrection? **To Hell**. As the hands and feet, eyes and mouth of the Christ-body community, where should members of every congregation find themselves instinctively being drawn? **To Hell!** Pumping your pew-mates hands while earnestly urging them to "go to hell" is a way to reclaim and revitalize the mission and message of the Church.

It doesn't take much imagination to uncover the hellish holes that we all walk by, listen to or read about everyday. Drive through a poverty-stricken, drug-plagued neighborhood and you see hell on the street corner and alleys. Look into the faces of the drifting, mentally-maimed homeless, and you will see hell in their eyes. Even cruise through the local mall and note the aimless, empty wanderings of the well-off, walled-off ("high salaries and high fences go together"), and see hell in the all-consuming consumerism which has sold off their souls.

Jesus recognized all the hellish holes into which human beings can fall. In this week's gospel lesson, he takes special note of those who are both in a material hell—the poor and the hungry—and those who appear to be in superb circumstances — wealthy and well-fed, carefree and chic. Jesus predicts dire consequences. It is to those we would surely perceive as "blessed" that Jesus intones a somber "woe to you."

For Jesus, the issue is one's relationship to God and God's kingdom. It is easier for those who are meek "pushovers" or impoverished to realize the need for God's strength

and support in their lives. For those who are enjoying the strength of a healthy body, home and bank account, the need for God's intervening hand is not so obvious.

We cannot allow God into some portions of our lives and exclude God from others. Jesus went to hell to bless the unblessables. He calls his disciples to do the same.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. How do the values Jesus talks about here compare with the values you are sold every day on TV? Which set of values do you and your family buy in to?
2. Which promise means the most to you now? Why?
3. Which warning seems most personal? Why?
4. If you could add another "blessed" and another "woe" to counteract the values of TV, what would you add?
5. What is your reaction to someone saying that God has a "preferential option for the poor?"
6. What would you say if a preacher interpreted Jesus' reference to the "poor" as a reference to people who acknowledge their need for being saved by God? Do you think you have the right to be critical of what is preached in your worshipping community?
7. Do you think most Christians you know speak with you "on the level" like Jesus does in the Sermon on the Plain? Or do most of us dress up what we say so it doesn't offend? Do most of us hide behind Hallmark card moments instead of addressing the real issues of human existence?
8. So, how about being hated, excluded, reviled, and attacked on account of Jesus and the Gospel? Have you or has someone you know ever been in this position? What would you have to say or do for that to happen to you?
9. Should Christians ever be in deep cooperation with the leaders of worldly power?
10. Who are the "false prophets" of our current age? How do they agree or differ with what you believe?

**SIX PACK
BIBLE STUDY
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY**

GOSPEL: Luke 9:28-43

1. This text marks the close of the Epiphany Season. All our Epiphany texts have focused on the manifestations of God in the life of Christ.
2. Between Jesus' birth and crucifixion, there is arguably no more astonishing epiphany than the mountaintop Transfiguration of Jesus — an event that graphically reveals who Jesus is and gives us a glorious glimpse of who he will be.
3. Yet, for all its drama and power, this transfiguring event appears to play a very limited role in the rest of Jesus' ministry or in the disciples' immediate perceptions of Jesus. (Even today, the church seems less comfortable claiming the miracle of the Transfiguration than it does other events in Jesus' life.)
4. Transfiguration has a definite connection with Jesus' Baptism, for these are the only two times that God's voice is heard out loud in referencing the person of Jesus.
5. Notice that for Luke, anything that something significant is about to happen, prayer is involved. (When Jesus is praying after his baptism the divine voice comes, and in this text while he is praying the divine intervenes.) Can that teach us anything important about the power of prayer?
6. Jesus' Transfiguration also relates to the epiphany Moses experienced on Mt. Sinai (see the Exodus passage for this day.) As Jesus prays the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white! When Moses descended from Sinai after his long exposure to God he, too, is significantly altered in his physical features, "the skin of his face was shining." From then on, he had to wear a veil. Here Luke is successful in drawing a powerful connection between an established Jewish tradition and the startling event in Jesus' own life.
7. His connections continue to unfold as both Moses and Elijah—representatives of the great Jewish traditions of the Law and the Prophets—appear "in glory" with the now dazzling Jesus. Only Luke's Gospel reveals the content of the discussion between the three men, that is, Jesus impending departure or "Exodus" from earth.
8. Peter's words serve to inform the reader that Moses and Elijah were no hallucination. They were as visible to Peter, James, and John as they were to Jesus. Peter's offer stems from the Old Testament tradition of offering food and drink (hospitality) to the traveling stranger.
9. SUDDENLY THE CLOUD DESCENDS (another event connecting with Sinai) to rest on the mountaintop signifying the approach of the divine. Little wonder they were terrified. The words God speaks are uttered in the third person specifically for the disciples to hear.

10. The Disciples are struck "dumb" and are silent, too overwhelmed to say a thing; so they kept silent and told no one the things they had seen. Even witnessing all this glory, Jesus still talks about suffering and dying. WHAT KIND OF A MESSIAH IS THIS ANYWAY?

11. How can Jesus be the Messiah, the Son of Divine, at home in conversation with the likes of Moses and Elijah—and yet be doomed to the suffering and death he has revealed to them? What kind of a Savior is this? Confused beyond reckoning, the disciples choose to say nothing and let the future unfold without their commentary.

12. Ironically, while Jews and Christians have both been characterized as various times in their histories as a "people of the book," we have always been drawn to the power of the visual image.

A. Aaron and the golden calf

B. John Calvin became so concerned he stripped all Reformed churches of their alter icons and paraments.

C. The "Shroud of Turin"

D. Every time the "image of Christ" or of the "Virgin Mary" appears on the side of a building, etc., it becomes an immediate tourist attraction.

13. While our spiritual ancestors in the faith clearly met God face to face at their own risk, today our sense of awe and our "fear of the Lord" appear to have dissolved. Why do you think we hunger to see the face of Jesus today? Where should we look?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What does your face reveal about Jesus (your relationship with him) to others? Can people see Christ in you?

2. Where have you experienced Christ in an unusual way? If you could freeze that moment, what would it be? What happened?

3. When it comes to "listening" to Jesus, how hard of hearing are you right now?

4. When did Jesus become more than just a name in the history books for you?

5. What is it about the "face of Jesus" that attracts you to him now, as a college student?

6. Peter's well-known impulse to build three chapels on the peak is usually derided by scholars, theologians, and preachers. "We mustn't linger on the peaks, but return to the valley of service." One can't live in the rarified atmosphere of a mountaintop; we're meant to live in the valleys of human experience and suffering. Why is it that we do not see the holiness of the moment most often in the mundane "things of life?"

7. According to the Barta Research Institute, eight out of ten Americans in their 20s say they have a strong faith in God. However, only three out of ten say they worship God regularly in church (less than one in ten ELCA twenty-somethings.) For those that believe, but do not worship — where do you think they look for the "face of Christ?" Do you think they find it?