

Wednesday, March 16, 2016  
5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday in Lent  
Micah 6:6-8

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!  
Amen.

Well, here we are – the fifth and final Wednesday. As I spent some time today reflecting on our Lenten journey together this year one word continued to come to the forefront of my mind. Joy! Yes, I know this is Lent and often we don't associate joy with Lent – a season, which has many themes running through it. It is a season of acknowledging our limitations, our brokenness, and our need for God's reconciling and redeeming actions through the death and resurrection of our Savior. It is season often clouded by the darkness of Jesus' death. The church even buries the "Alleluias." (Alleluia literally means "Praise to God") further adding to the fact that Lent often doesn't seem to carry with it much joy. That joy is ultimately withheld and comes to fruition on Easter morning. Yet, this Lent I have found great joy and I hope you have as well and together we can spread that joy within our wonderful community of faith each of us is called to be a part of and also beyond these doors into our families, community, work places, schools, and the world.

That joy is found in our time together. Yes, it's there Sunday morning. However, there is just something different, unique, and special about our Wednesday journey this year that I can't quite put my finger on. Yet, I have felt it and I hope you have as well. It's about us being together. Our focus has been on faith practices God has equipped us

with in Baptism in an effort to help us remain connected to God, a way in which God draws us closer to God self and into full union with God. Perhaps, by spending time simply reviewing these five practices and further engraining them in our minds, hearts, God has in fact drawn closer and this joy gushes forth because I (we) have indeed entered more fully and had an encounter with God. Regardless, it has been a wonderful five weeks and I want everyone for your presence.

Now, just a bit about our final faith practice each of us affirm to uphold in our baptisms. I said last week there would be a quiz, so here it is. What are these five practices?

1. Live among God's faithful people
2. Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper
3. Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed
4. Serve all people following the example of Jesus
5. Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

You will notice these are posted on the wall where they will remain for a while. When people ask, who may not have joined us during these worship services, you all will be able to give voice to and proclaim how these five practices are a gift from God keeping us connected to God and also equip us to live out our baptismal identity. In May, we will have several youth affirm these five practices and I hope these five weeks have assisted them in recognizing that what they are affirming are not five chores or things to do if there is free time in the schedule; but rather, are truly five gifts from God

to help them continue on their faith journey and a way in which God draws them closer to God self and also utilizes them to being God's hands doing God's work in the world.

In conclusion, I finish with an excerpt from the document we have been using and working through titled, *Faith Practices in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Living our Baptismal Covenant*.

“Along with all citizens, Christians and others have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being and good order.” (ELCA Social Statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” 1991, page 5)

We celebrate the abundant blessings that are a part of this world. But we also walk in the struggle of human existence where we face our own sin, our self-centeredness, and the collective sin of human institutions, for example, the church, governments, the nations. In this struggle however, we meet the suffering God who bears the sins of the world and sends us out, as ones who are joined in the crucified Christ and in his solidarity with the pain of the world. As believers in Christ we are called to be about the work of justice in our personal and public life. We recognize that God's justice is something deeper and purer than our own best understanding of justice. And yet, we are called to love our neighbor as we would love ourselves.

We speak the truth in love as we participate in God's mission of abundant life for all. With a deep awareness of our sinfulness and the sin of our society, with humility we speak with respect and promote change. And God calls us to speak out. An enemy of justice is silence. A justice mindset is one key way we practice our faith. A mindset and a heart filled with peace is faith in practice. Practicing our faith is something that we may never master. We always have more to learn. The focus of our practice is our gracious God, not the practices in themselves. Our faith practices are always an offering of response to our gracious God. May God work on you as you practice your faith in the midst of life in God's church and God's world.

As we seek justice and peace in all the earth we:

- Pray for peace among nations and peoples
- Host an after-school, summer or weekend feeding program for children and families
- Begin a “Go Green” Initiative in our congregation and community  
[www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)
- Forgive as we have been forgiven by God
- Organize a community march against family violence
- Challenge the systems that perpetuate poverty
- Contact the ELCA Advocacy Office about joining with other Lutherans to speak to public officials about the difference your congregational ministries make in your community
- Sign up for the ELCA Advocacy Network to receive information and other alerts
- Love all of humanity, respecting everyone, and seeing differences as a gift from God