

Lifeline 2006-07 Journal

Date: 9/21/2006

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"But the LORD answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her.'"--Luke 10:41, 42



Jon Glenn

Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we spend all of our time getting worked up about things that are of no real use and value in the long run when there are plenty of people who can be ministered to right now?

For the past two weeks, the Lifeline team has been working on getting ready for our experiential worship service called Uncommon Ground, which kicks off this Saturday at 5:30. I have really been working hard on getting this going because on the team it is my job to put together all of our programming. And man, has First Lutheran Church put in a tall order. When we came in, they wanted us to help create three new worship services for the church, so suffice it to say that I have been a little busy along with the rest of my team. While I spent a lot of my time working on this new Saturday night service, they have each taken roles in different areas of the church. Jenn became the church's publicity monster, pumping out posters and news releases, as well as taking over the leadership of the church's youth praise team, SHINE. John has jumped into the youth program working alongside the church's youth director to plan programs and help the kids dig deeper. Caroline has engrossed herself in the coffee shop and planning a post-college/pre-family small group for the church. And finally Sara has busied herself babysitting for Bible studies, scheduling our lives, helping us to cope, and this evening she is helping out one of the pastors who is having a theme party for her daughter.

We are busy people, and it seemed like from the moment we got to First Lutheran Church in Brookings, SD, we did our best to saturate ourselves in the life of this congregation. But it is overwhelming, and there have been more than a few times since arriving that I have lost my patience with my teammates and with certain situations. But last Wednesday night, I got a chance to remember why I'm here. Last Wednesday night, I got to sit down and spend time with a group of confirmands that John and I are mentoring together. Our group is a great mix made up of the quiet, the obnoxious and loud, the athletic and not so athletic, the bored and the excited. As I sat at the table helping them walk through the Scripture for the week, they reminded me why I was at this church. Ultimately, I'm not here to put together the best worship service ever, but I am here to be with people and get down to the hard work of compassion.

And we miss it so often, this thing called compassion. I think it is because our priorities are out of wack. We think producing something is the most important thing in the whole world, so important that it is even more important than the people God has blessed us with. Because people aren't just a project you can finish, you need to keep on working, but we desperately desire a sense of accomplishment at something. So we drive ourselves batty trying to get things done, while all the time Jesus says, "You got it all wrong...only one thing is needed."

This is what Martha's problem was. She got so caught up in trying work things out that she completely messed up the relationship. She lost her compassion and treated her sister unfairly in front of a holy guest. After Jesus rebuked her, what do you think she did? I think I know. He probably left the room in a huff because Jesus didn't appreciate her work. If I were in her position, I think I would do the same thing. And as she stood outside the back door in Bethany, she probably cried her eyes out, because she knew that she was wrong, and that she had embarrassed herself. As tears streamed down her face, she probably thought of how stupid she was and how wrong it was to accuse her sister and how she had completely missed a chance to sit at the feet of Jesus.

Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we lose our compassion? Why do we so easily miss the

point? My challenge to all of you who read this is to not miss the point. Don't neglect the opportunity to show compassion...at work, at home, wherever you get a chance to sit at the feet of Jesus with your brother or sister and extend them a hand of compassion. For the love of God, do it! Don't be caught standing at a back door in Bethany, because only one thing is needed, says the Lord.

Peace,

-jon

Date: 9/23/2006

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

God has blessed us. That's a pretty general statement, but it is so true. God has indeed blessed us in more ways than we can even recognize. Over the years, I have found that one of the greatest blessings that God has given us is the gift of community. God has surrounded us with people for a variety of reasons. From the very beginning, God saw that humans need companionship, friendship and camaraderie. Another word for the need that God saw in humans is the need for fellowship. But what is fellowship? How is it a part of our daily lives?



Sara Berge

In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes that, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." God has called us to be in community, not only with others, but also with His Son. Over the past few days, I have seen how being in fellowship with others can lead us into fellowship with God. Our team has been busy working at First Lutheran in Brookings. We have had many opportunities to be in fellowship with people connected to the church: staff members, congregation members and friends from the community and SDSU campus stopping by to check out the brand new Mission Coffeehouse. These people have made our first two weeks in Brookings absolutely amazing. Many people have welcomed us, shared with us and affirmed us in the work that we're doing. I have truly enjoyed meeting and getting to know the people here. They have led me to fellowship with God by sharing His love with me.

Our team has also had the opportunity to be in fellowship with each other. Today, we had our second team outing. We met Sven, John's alter ego, who showed us some of the sites of Brookings. We had a great day laughing, talking and running through a children's maze in the rain. This is a different kind of fellowship that can also bring us into fellowship with God. By sharing joy and having fun with each other, we shared the joy of Christ.

There are so many ways that we can be in fellowship with each other and with God every day. We just need to step back and recognize the subtle, or not-so-subtle gifts of fellowship that God has blessed us with. Philippians 1:3-6 says, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." I hope and pray that you can find fellowship within the community that God has given us and that those times of fellowship can lead you into partnership with God and with the gospel. Take care and God bless!

Sara

Date: 9/26/2006

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

Welcome to Brookings, South Dakota, home of the South Dakota State

University Jacks. You might think a jackrabbit to be a rather docile creature, and not a very impressive mascot. I'm afraid you would be mistaken, and dangerously so. Jackrabbits have truly powerful hind legs, a kind of power that when paired with the sharp antlers of the jack-a-lope creates a deadly force.



But enough of my randomness for one journal entry... Here at First Lutheran Church in Brookings, South Dakota, we find ourselves in the midst of some fantastic people and some great opportunities. I must admit, I had my uncertainties coming into this year on team, but the people in this church and community have quite honestly rocked my socks off. "Opportunities?" you ask. Why, of course! There's a coffee shop where I have learned to make a latté and to always ask "Would you like whipped cream on that?" The gym presents the opportunity for me to display my massive volleyball skills (yep, I was awarded "Most Improved" at volleyball camp). There's a preschool complete with observation windows so that we can watch the little rascals pick their noses without the teacher seeing. There's the children's programming on Wednesday evening called Journey to Discipleship, and I've gotten to hang in the music room and mirror with a boy who insisted he didn't have a partner until finally I made him laugh by imitating him. Then I was the cool kid with all of the other kids. There's confirmation where, if I wasn't hanging out in the coffeehouse or in Journey, I could mentor some fantastic middle schoolers. There's a worship service after all those shenanigans (which, by the way, does have a proper spelling, so spell check tells me) where we get to do some sing-alongs and then slow it down a bit. And to round off Wednesday, there's youth group. I'm slowly learning all the high schoolers' names. Slowly. On Saturday, we get to do this awesome service with contemporary praise and experiential stuff geared towards youth/young adult. I like to call it a worship experiment. To round out the worship service stuff, on Sunday mornings we have the opportunity to go to 3 different worship services: traditional, family, and... alternative? The "alternative" (Healing Waters) uses secular music (as well as sacred) to communicate with God; it's neat. But let's focus on the family service for a bit (yep, I'm finally getting to my point).

Previously, the family service has been a part of Sunday School for kids, like a chapel to gather them, and has existed during the contemporary service. There is a kind of youth praise band that has been leading it in called Shine. They're a great group of youth with a ton of potential who we're working with to bring that out and get them really energetic. In the meantime, we have the joy of leading the family service. I mean that seriously, it's a total blast. Now, it's called a family service as it's meant for the whole family to come, not just the kids. Yes, the music is geared towards the kids with actions and movement and repetition, the words are generally shortened so they might actually understand them, and the message takes the form of a puppet show or object lesson, but the goal is for the parents and kids to both be there. Let's face it, I can come across in a way that a kid will look up to me and adore me. But I will NEVER have the impact of their mom or dad. The point of the family service is to teach kids what a worship service is about in a way that they will understand and appreciate. Who better to learn from than the people they love and know best? No one! It was great this past week to see the kids and parents breaking it down and praising God together. I'm excited for the chance to lead them in that, and even more so to see the youth of Shine take the service and make it their own. Parents, although it might seem that your kids sure get it better when that cool youth pastor says it, you have made an incredible impact on them. Keep at it! The youth of this generation have a ton of passion that just needs a

little direction. You can impact that more than you think.

-jenn.

Date: 9/28/2006

Submitted by: Caroline Moore

Journal Entry:

Last night we got to play one of my favorite games, Train Wreck, with the sr. high youth group, and that was so exciting. I really enjoy this game because you get to learn just a little about what you have in common with the kids that are playing because they say their name and then something that they have done or what they like to do. Halfway through this game, we started to say things that the kids wouldn't have done in order to exclude them from the game, and then we stopped playing the game and talked about what that feels like and ways that the world excludes them in everyday life. We talked about ways that they are looked down on because of their age and how that we would like to get them more involved in the church community. It was nice to see what they are thinking so that we may help them get more involved. I really enjoyed seeing the excitement and passion on their faces about getting involved doing all sorts of things for them so that they can have a place to serve.

I am really excited to see where God is taking this group of young adults this year. It is like opening a gift. Blessing until next time.
Hebrews 4:16



Caroline Moore

Date: 9/30/2006

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" -Isaiah 44:19a

On Saturday we kicked off what we hope will be an ever evolving movement of God that we call Uncommon Ground. Uncommon Ground is a worship service, but is a worship service unlike most people have ever seen before. It is interactive and dynamic, full of stories of faith, upbeat music and engaging activities which help those who come to worship to engage themselves in the scripture for the week and walk closer to Jesus.

And what a great kickoff this worship was. We got a guy named Brady to design a media clip which features the Uncommon Ground man which is a stick like figure with a "U" for legs and a "G" for a body and a black circle perched on top to serve as his head. The media clip shows groups of UG men walking a long a rode and gathering underneath a tree. The music also turned out really well even though most of the music was new and we had just seen it that week. I was really proud of my team especially John who just started playing bass at training when they picked up the music and just ran with it.

We also had a really good turn out for the first week. There were about 30 or 40 people who showed up to check it out and find out what it was all about. I don't know if we will see a lot of those same folks again, but I'm glad that they came and gave it a shot. This worship service is different from a lot of other worship services and it is intentional. The idea springs from something called experiential worship which a lot of church leaders are beginning to notice.

Experiential worship is just like the name sounds, experiential. The goal is to take the Scripture and try to create experiences around it in order to bring the Scripture to life. Experiences can be created in any way: changing the seating, having people come and do some kind of craft project, having people eat something, changing the layout of your projection, including objects that one doesn't



Jon Glenn

normally find in traditional worship settings, darkening the room and using candles, setting up secluded prayer areas in the back. Whatever is going to help people begin to see the Scripture more clearly.

I know that a lot of times, many people in society look at the church and complain about how it doesn't change, and I think they make a valid point--the church does not change and has a really tough time with the concept. But to cling to tradition is not what being a Christian is all about. Look at Christ--he was a world changer and was not happy with tradition and with the way things were. And we even see it in the Old Testament, as well. In the passage above, we see God telling us about the new things that he is going to do. And I can imagine some people's faces as they read this, "Our God...change...but in Hebrews it says..." Yes, in Hebrews, it does say our God is the same yesterday, today and forever, but that doesn't mean that God ties himself down to one set way of doing things.

We are very blessed here in Brookings to be living out what we feel to be the will of God every Saturday when we gather to do worship in a different way. I hope that as you read this God is speaking to you and revealing for you the new things that he wants to do in you. Not necessarily in worship, but in your life. Our God is a God who works with his people and changes them and is always interacting with them in new and different way. I hope you see the new thing that God is doing in your life today.

Peace,

-jon

Date: 10/3/2006

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

Greetings to my family in Christ!

We have been busy here in Brookings; settling into our homes, getting to know people in the congregation and helping out in many areas within the church. Time has gone by quickly, but we have been working hard and having fun all at the same time!

As we continue to settle in to life in Brookings, I've been thinking a lot about the importance of being part of a church community. Since I have been away from home for over a year now, I have found a greater love for my home church. I don't compare churches, I just find myself missing my home congregation at times--the worship style, the activities I was involved in, and the people that have become friends throughout my years there.

However, I've found that the longer I've been here at First Lutheran, the more I have felt a part of the church community. Don't get me wrong--I have felt more than welcomed since the moment we arrived. In fact, one of the things I enjoy most about this congregation is the welcoming and enthusiastic attitude we have been shown. But, the longer I'm here, the more at home I feel. I have gotten to know many wonderful people and I look forward to seeing them on a daily or weekly basis.

It is great to have a community that I feel a part of. My teams have been absolutely wonderful--great places of community, but there's just something different about a church community. I believe that God calls us to be in community with fellow believers. He has created us to need one another and to work together to do His will. In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about the community that God has created for us. He writes, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jew or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). To me, the body that Paul speaks of is a community. We are all different and have all been given unique skills and abilities, but God has done it all on purpose. He wants us to come together as a community to worship, to work for Him and to be in fellowship with



Sara Berge

one another.

I pray that you have found a community in which you feel comfortable. If not, I hope that you don't give up on the search. The church community has been a very uplifting, valuable part of my life. And finally, in more of Paul's words, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:15, 17).

Sara

Date: 10/7/2006

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

We all have our own share of struggles and vices, things about ourselves which either we don't like or the people around us have informed us that they don't like. It seems to me that everyone has at least one sin, one disgusting habit that they "work on" over and over and over again. If you haven't found anything like that in your own life, give it time, it'll pop up. I don't say that to be discouraging. I say that so those of us who have found that one thing (or... multiple, as the case may be) should know that you are not alone in your struggle.



Jenn Albert

One of my things (oh yes, I have multiple) is control. I am constantly praying that God would be in control, that He would help me to just let go and to trust Him. I want Him to be my pilot, I want Him to guide my path, I want His will to triumph. But deep down, I want what I want and I want to determine what I want and where I go. I want control. I thought this past year on team was a lesson in giving that up, with the travel and the instability and the constant reminders that I needed to be flexible. It was a total loss of control. And when I signed my letter of call for this year in Brookings, I secretly believed that maybe I would gain some control back, being in one place, being a trial group...

This next thing that I want to share, I need you to understand, is not easy for me to share, because I feel very foolish about it in general, but I know it to be true, and, for the sake of depleting some of my pride and opening myself up to others, I know I need to share... I entered training for this year as an emotional wreck. I knew going into it, that the transition would not be easy. My point of complete breakdown, though, occurred several weeks into training at job selection. On team during training, the team decides who will be in what roles for the year. The different roles, or jobs, delegate responsibilities, give order, and some become very attached to the idea of one job or another. Last year, I had been selected as the program coordinator, the person to organize our programs, put together set lists, plan worship, run rehearsals, and all that excitement. It was hard. I got frustrated with my team, with the churches, mostly with myself. But all in all, I loved it. I had control, I picked the music, and I loved to see how things all came together in the end, in ways I hadn't anticipated or even dreamed.

But I knew that I enjoyed the control, and I wanted more than anything to give that up. And so I let go of the job, I nearly flat out refused to have that responsibility again... and walking away from that meeting I felt crushed and useless. Worship is what I know. Worship is what I do, and I don't mean that just in the traditional sense of the word. I have been truly excited for the opportunity to explore worship at this church,

particularly on Saturday night, and something deep down always assumed I would be taking the lead on that. Deep down that is just a part of who I am and what I do. And somewhere along the line I realized this, and I could do nothing but mourn what I saw as the loss of my purpose, the loss of my usefulness, the loss of my self.

I **must** die to self daily. It is God's calling for our lives. I just didn't quite grasp what that might look like if it was forced on me.

Saturdays are still a struggle for me. Teaching myself to give up my control, to give up the things I think I know best and to let others take the reins sometimes leaves me drained and worn, sometimes makes me more irritable, sometimes pulls me down to self-bashing, and even sometimes leaves me freer to search out other things and other ideas. I'm not saying that I necessarily did the right thing in forcibly removing that control, but I know that God can use it. Deep down, I know that God can use it. This past Saturday has been a struggle, but the service came and went, God was praised, and those who came were pushed a little out of their comfort in worship zones.

My mantra... "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Cor. 12: 9&10
-jenn.

Date: 10/10/2006

Submitted by: Caroline Moore

Journal Entry:

Yesterday was the mediary conference at First Lutheran Church. This is a time that all the area pastors get together and have a worship service, fellowship time, and a meal together just to reconnect with a community of people. One thing that the one of the pastors at First Lutheran asked was if we would be willing to lead the pastors in a worship service. We said, yes, that would be fun. As much fun as I think that it would be, I was a little on the nervous side. I kept thinking, I am going to mess up the interactive part of the service. I was thinking that these people lead others in worship all the time and I don't.



Caroline Moore

I was so nervous going in to the service. We went through the service, and in the end it was an amazing service and God took over all the words that I was supposed to say and used them to fill the pastors up and give them a sense of peace. We then after were invited to have the meal with them, and we got to get to know the area pastors, and that was exciting. I am really excited to continue to get to know the other people in the body of Christ. It was an amazing experience, and I am glad that other people's worship fulfillment is not dependent on what I do, but what God does with it.

Date: 10/14/2006

Submitted by: John Schomberg

Journal Entry:

The time had come, the night had arrived, and last night was the event of the season. That's right people, the first ever 1st Lutheran Church Mission Coffeehouse

Middle School Dance. I know a title doesn't make an event, but if ever a large title matched a large event, this was it. But wait a minute, John, how did such a crazy, large titled event ever come about? Glad you asked because it just so happens that I am writing a journal about it.

A few weeks ago we were talking to Carol (cool lady that runs the coffee house), and she said that she wanted to do a middle school dance using the coffee house and the gym. She talked to Caroline, who thought it was a great idea, and Caroline said she would get to work. Word didn't take long to travel to my ear, and I managed to weasel my way into helping wherever I could. Caroline managed to get a plan together for all the food, music, plenty of adult help and getting the word out to the kids. Everyone on the team jumped in to help where they were asked, and before we knew it, the night of the dance had arrived. The team spent most of the day setting up, and we were hoping to get about 50 kids through the doors at 7:30 pm on a Friday night. By 7:00 pm we were already up to 50, and the dance hadn't even started yet. I spent most of the first hour herding the kids onto the dance floor as the numbers swelled to over 140. The pizza flew out of the kitchen, middle schoolers were shaking their "groove thang" on the dance floor, and many managed to hang out in the lounge area that had been set up using carpet, couches from the youth room, and a plant for ambience. The request from earlier in the night was to play more rap. In addition, many of the boys requested slow songs so they could build up the nerve to ask the girls to dance. So many rap and slow songs later, the night ended, and the middle school youth left having had a good time; the gym got a good cleaning, a few hundred dollars had been raised toward the coffee house mission, and the adults were ready for some sleep.



John Schomberg

After all that hard work there is only one question left to ask: WHEN IS THE NEXT DANCE? Not sure yet, but you can bet I will be in the middle of it.

Date: 10/17/2006

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

Sometimes life is difficult. Okay, let's be honest—life is often difficult. It is so easy to have miscommunication with others, to make mistakes, to be hurt by things that may not have been intended to hurt. For some reason, God gave us emotions and free will. I think that there are times when we use those for good and times when those things get the best of us.

Over the past few days, our team has been talking a lot. We've been sorting out miscommunications, giving grace with mistakes and trying to mend hurts caused unintentionally. I don't mean for it to sound as though our team is a complete and total mess, but realistically, we are a group of humans working closely together and we are bound to have struggles. I've found that all we can do in these times of struggle is to trust in God and to give grace and forgiveness to those around you.

Romans 5:1-5 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

While life is difficult and we face many struggles, God is there with us and will use everything that happens for good, in his own way. Suffering is tough, but Paul says that we should be happy that we suffer. What a strange concept. However, as I look at the rest of that passage, I find how true it is. Suffering develops perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope is a beautiful thing to have. Our hope in God, our faith in God leads us to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the great love of God.



Sara Berge

No matter what your struggles are today, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow; rejoice in them. Know that although they are difficult, God is there for you and through your struggles you will gain hope in God, which will never disappoint.

Take care and God bless!
Sara

Date: 10/21/2006

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

It's amazing how quickly time goes by. We've already been in Brookings for six weeks! Before we know it, Christmas will be here. Easter will soon follow and then we'll be leaving the church for VBS! I'm already sad at the thought of leaving this congregation. We've had great experiences and seen God working in so many ways in these few weeks.



Sara Berge

This weekend, my family, as well as Jon's family, came to visit us. We had a wonderful time visiting with them and sharing the ministry here with them. It was also great for me to have the support of our families. Everything we are doing here is amazing, but it's even better when we get to share what we are doing with loved ones as well as knowing that we have the support of people close to us.

I am so thankful that God gave us other people for love and support. Yet, what we get here on earth can't even compare to the love and support that God gives us. Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands." God always has been, and always will be there to give us love and support. All we need to do is accept his gift. He then asks to respond to that gift by loving him and following his ways.

I think it can be similar with families. My family has been there to give me their love and support. All I needed to do was accept the gift. Amazing. It seems so simple, yet for so many people, it is a difficult concept to grasp. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) God has given us his great gifts of unconditional love, grace and forgiveness through our faith. Accept his gifts and live in the joy of his love and support.

Take care and God bless!
Sara

Date: 10/24/2006

Submitted by: Caroline Moore

Journal Entry:

So today was the day that I started my young adult devotion class at the church. I was nervous most of the day because I didn't know what I was going to be talking on that night, and so I spent hours reading books and praying for guidance and hoping that something would come to me. As it grew closer and closer to the actual time that the class would start and I still didn't have a topic to go on or anything to read, nothing was coming to me. I was really starting to freak out.



Caroline Moore

About an hour before the class was supposed to start, Jenn my teammate had gotten the mail and was giving that to everyone, and in my mail this week I got a lovely 3x5 index card with a verse written on it, and that was it. As I looked at this card, I was thinking, "Who is this from, and why did they send it to me?" I then remember that while I was at training earlier this year one of the other sound techs decided that they were going to send out verses every week to people that wanted to receive them. I remember that I said that I wanted to get one from them,

and it just so happened that this week was my turn to receive on from them. As I read the passage from Romans 12:9-13, it is titled "Love" and talks about how love must be sincere, we should honor one another before ourselves, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. It ends the verse with the statement that we should share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. That is all that I needed to remember that when I am entering in to a devotion with others is that I should share my life and my time with those of God's people that are in need. So, I decided that to use this passage for the class that night and learned more about the other people that came than if I have everything planned out in detail because we were able to discuss the text and just simply talk about it without any underlying reason other than to meditate on the Word. I am really excited to meet with this group of people again next week and learn more about them and about God. Blessings.

Date: 10/26/2006

Submitted by: John Schomberg

Journal Entry:

I would rather have been playing volleyball with the middle school youth, or hanging out with a friend, or at a high school sporting event, or pretty much anywhere else than where I was headed. That was my attitude on the way to St. Dysmas in Sioux Falls, SD. St. Dysmas is the name for a mission congregation and a ministry located in the South Dakota State Penitentiary. It seemed like a good idea when I signed up a few weeks ago, but as the moment arrived when we pulled out of the parking lot, my heart was not in it . . . and I knew it. I put on my fake smile, got all the folks in the van, and we were on our way to St. Dysmas. On the drive down, I was able to talk to the people I was traveling with and find out more about the men we were visiting and what an amazing community they had formed. By the time I had arrived, I can honestly say that my attitude had improved, and I was glad that I could take some time out of my day to give back to a group of guys who had led some difficult lives and made some bad decisions. We met up with another group of people, and all together about 20 of us were able to enter the prison, find our way upstairs and into the sanctuary. I should probably point out at this time that I had never been in a prison and didn't know what to expect. I was immediately struck by a sense of community, and the hospitality was amazing. I was seated, and as we began, I noted that there were over 100 men, 20 from our group and no guards in sight, yet I can honestly say that I have never felt so comfortable in my life. The service continued as many of the men played parts, from playing in the band to handing out communion and singing in the choir. As Pastor Bill began his message, with a few bad jokes, he began talking about how there is a group of sinners in this room that are not ready to be honest with God. In John 8:31-36 Jesus talks about how everyone that commits a sin is a slave to sin and that only through Jesus we will ever be free. He continued to say that the group of sinners is still pretending that they have it all together and that they are in control of their lives. According to Pastor Bill, the ones still pretending and who have been broken and have nowhere else to turn but to God were the visitors. The inmates, unlike the visitors, don't have to pretend that everything is OK and that they have everything under control. This hit me very close to home as I find that I only depend on God when things are going badly and that when things are good, I think I can do it on my own. What freedom there must be in being totally dependent on God! By the time the service was over, I realized that I was not here for these men but instead, I realized that they were here for me. This community of believers had shown me a better way to live and modeled it in their Christian walks. There wasn't another place on this earth I would have rather been, and I can't wait to go back. And when I do, I will be bringing my bass. That's right! I talked to the bass player for a while after the service, and he hasn't had a service off in almost five years. I told him that next time I made it down, I would give him a night off to relax. God has done a great deal of humbling me this year, but never has the lesson been as powerful as last night at St. Dysmas. Please take a moment to go visit their website at www.stdysmas.org and discover one of the most amazing Christian communities I have ever had the honor of being a part of.



John Schomberg

Date: 11/14/2006

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

"Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

- Romans 5:3-5

Forgive me if I've mentioned these verses in a past journal or two, but in my time on team, I've found them to be the most true and uplifting. Life on team can be difficult. Let's face it—life can be difficult. We are forced to deal with things each day that are unpleasant and challenging. While we are in the midst of such difficulties, it's hard to see how God fits in. We challenge God, asking Him to reveal himself, to change things, or to help us understand why.

In my experience, I've found that God is right beside us in those times. He makes himself known, but, because we are so caught up in the difficulty of the situation, or because we are trying so hard to control things ourselves, we rarely find Him. There have been many times where I have looked back on the past and seen how God was working in challenges that I have faced, knowing that in those moments I felt abandoned by God.

Why do I bring this up? Well, lately our team has been asking a lot of questions. We've found that it's difficult to build intentional relationships when we have places to escape to, cars to drive, and work to busy ourselves with. We have been working on building our communication skills, finding ways to show appreciation for one another and working on forming solid relationships. Unfortunately, these wonderful things don't happen overnight, so we will have to be patient with one another and trust God to lead us in these things and more.

So, as we work through difficult situations, I am searching for God in the midst. I will also rejoice in our sufferings knowing that eventually, the difficult times will give us the great hope of God. May you find the same joy in life's challenges.



Sara Berge

Date: 11/15/2006

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: "I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom. But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.'" -Job 32:6-8

Wednesday is a big day for First Lutheran Church. There is a music and drama program in the afternoons, Bible school for adults and kids, confirmation, youth group, a community dinner and worship to close out the day. And so there I was in worship, at the end of a whirlwind day, standing in front of a group of all ages, sharing a story about my childhood filled with hurt and redemption. I felt really good as I stood up front and confessed to everyone there how I tortured one of my classmates in elementary school.

But in the middle of this confession, I heard very loud little voice on my left shout out, "That's naughty!" I turned to look and saw a little girl who was about five years old with a hand wrapped around her mouth sitting on her mother's lap. I looked at the little girl and said, "Yes, that was naughty!" And with that I turned away and continued telling the story. But this little girl, persistent as she was, decided that she was going to continue to put in her two cents and so for the rest of the story she was always there to comment on how mean and naughty I had been.

It was just like I had planted her in the audience. Any time I made a transition to a different part of the story, there she was right there with me with some kind of comment. Even after I read from Romans 5, and I moved into the spiritual application part of the sharing she moved right with me and made comments on how naughty we all were. But when I got to the bottom of how bad we were, she did the unthinkable; she shouted out, "But Jesus forgives us."



Jon Glenn

It is always amazing to me how perceptive children can be. Even when we think they don't get it, generally they are the first ones to really understand the heart of the message that we are trying to share. They are able to cut through all of the facades and the false starts and get to the reality of things. That I think is one of the joys of being young. I think the older we get, the more we tend to spiritualize simple concepts out of reality. We find ways to theologize love and grace and forgiveness so much to the point that they just don't make sense anymore.

The above quote from Job comes toward the end of the book after Job's friends have told him that the reason he is going through so much suffering because of something bad that he must have done. But then Elihu, the youngest of the group comes out, and questions Job's humility and wisdom telling him that he has no right to stand before God and declare himself blameless, because only God is blameless. His words echo the words that God will speak to Job in the last part of the book. Here we see the youngest person getting straight to the heart of God.

Find some way to be young today. Talk about love, community, peace, joy, laughter, and God. And when you do, be like the little girl who so clearly pointed back to Jesus. Today, will you be the loud, persistent, little voice in the corner?

Peace

-jon

Date: 11/18/2006

Submitted by: John Schomberg

Journal Entry:

A 1st Lutheran Church Mission Coffeehouse Production—that's right, people—it's time for Middle School Youth Dance Part *Deux*, and somehow in all the excitement of the first dance, I opened my big mouth and found myself in charge of putting together the second dance. Lucky for me, Caroline had done most of the hard work setting up the first dance, and all I had to do was not screw stuff up. My major project for this dance was making the music fresher, louder and even more fun than the first. Goal #1 was to set up a task force of middle school youth to fill in the gaps of my coolness (I know, it is hard to imagine that someone could be more cool than I am, but even I have to admit I am not perfect . . . not quite, anyway). We found all the latest dance music as well as great classics such as the "Hustle," "Y.M.C.A.," "Ice, Ice Baby," and the crowd favorite from the first dance, the "Cha Cha Slide." With all the music necessary, I was able to get with Brady, one of the few guys in this town who rivals my own coolness, and work on our DJ booth. Caroline set everything up as we ended up with dueling computers, each with a list of the best dance hits on the planet—or at least in Brookings. Just like the last dance, the youth showed up early and in force, as we again had around 140 kids in the building. We had no problems, and once again we were successful in providing a fun, safe place to hang out and dance. The highlights included Cassie's enforcement of the 6-inch rule, about 20 boys protesting the "Cha Cha Slide" by sitting on the dance floor, watching everyone huddle around while a few kids showed off the latest moves, and seeing everyone go home happy, tired, and wondering when the next dance will be happening. I don't know the answer but you can be assured that you will all be in the loop. Peace, I'm out!



John Schomberg

Date: 11/21/2006

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

Tonight, we are having dinner with our host family for the first time. Now, I know what you're thinking-- you've been in Brookings for two months now, and this is the first time you've ever had dinner with your host family?! Maybe "host family" is not quite the right term, more like "the family who owns the home we girls stay in," the Ropps. Mike Ropp works here at SDSU, the university in town, and it just so happens that this year he's on sabbatical down in New Mexico, which is why we inhabit the Ropp family home. For the most part, they stay down in New Mexico, Mike popping in from time to time when he's in town for random things. So, before this, the girls had met Susan and the kids (twins, Kate and Tom), and seen Mike on those random in town visits, but...we've had very limited contact with the family whose home we occupy.



Jenn Albert

Good news! They're home for Thanksgiving. That means we get to sit down and have a meal with this family; in fact, we get to eat with them tonight! While they're home, the girls get to stay with another phenomenal family from the church, the Rounds, who have been an amazing support for us here in Brookings.

I've been asked before what my favorite part of being on team last year was. I loved the music and visiting different places all the time. Events were crazy with so much energy and amazing kids, speakers, and musicians. The food at potlucks rocked. But the best part was definitely the host families. It's fantastic to be able to stay in people's homes, seeing them interact with each other in a more intimate setting, and, although I know that people act differently simply because we are there, that is the closest I'll get to seeing people with their guards down in their natural settings. Although I do appreciate having my own space in a house, I do miss the intimacy of visiting people where they are most comfortable. That's one reason I'm excited to eat with the Ropps. It's only a couple hours, but, having lived in their space for several months, I feel like I already know them...I'm just looking forward to getting the chance for some time with them. Thank you to all the host families out there who open up your homes and lives to us.

-jenn.

Date: 11/23/2006
Submitted by: Sara Berge
Journal Entry:

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

This holiday has been spent very differently from any other Youth Encounter team. The church did not have plans for us and thus gave us both today and tomorrow off. Yippee!!!! Since we are in one location and many of us have vehicles, rather than spending Thanksgiving together, we split up. John and Caroline drove to Nebraska to visit family and friends. Jon spent the day with the pastors, their families and other families from the congregation. Jenn celebrated with her host family from the church. I went to my grandma's house, where I spent time with many family members.



Sara Berge

It was wonderful to see my family and to realize how wonderful they are. My heart melted when my goddaughter, who I have not been able to see much recently because of my travels, walked into the house and ran over to give me a hug. My grandparents welcomed me a night early and we relaxed while watching a movie; we even ate pumpkin pie--for breakfast! I helped my cousin, Ashlie, learn how to make lefse. My mom, dad, and brother came, followed by more cousins, my aunt and uncle and more! We had a full house with lots of food, noise and sleepiness. While I was surrounded by chaos, I was entirely relaxed. I think this is the joy of family. Even though things can be absolutely crazy, there is comfort. For this, I am truly grateful.

What are you thankful for today? God has blessed us in so many ways. I am sure that I don't even know half of the ways that God has shown his love for me. To name a few, I have a loving family, great teammates, and a supportive pastoral staff at the church we are working at. Not only that, but we have amazing friends in the congregation, in Brookings, and around the world. Not only did God call us to this ministry, God surrounded us with people to support us while we are doing his work.

I guess that I am trying to say (in far more words than necessary) is that I am thankful for

all of you--our friends and family who have been supporting us through the good and the bad, emotional, physical, financial and spiritual. You have all been blessings to us. May you know how appreciated and loved you are. Take care, God bless, and thank God for all of your blessings--the ones you see and the ones you don't.

Date: 11/28/2006

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. --Psalm 27:19



Jon Glenn

I turned my head and looked out at the parking lot. Dark and grey. The overcast skies hiding the sun so effectively that it would make one think that the sun would never shine in that place again. I blinked and turned my attention back to the person who was sitting in the chair across from me. Her name is Annie. She told me how she doesn't know what she should do. Should she stay here and continue to study at South Dakota State University and get an apartment with a friend of hers, or should she go to Honduras for a year?

I love Annie. By far, she is one of the most encouraging people that I have been able to meet in Brookings. Annie is a searcher. She searches for truth, she searches for the best in others, and she searches for the heart of God like very few people I have seen before. And so as she sat there recounting the many things, both great and small, that were on her mind, I wasn't surprised when she began mentioning how she had been talking to God about all of it for a long time, but had gotten no response. She was frustrated, and all she wanted was for God to say something.

I turned and looked at the parking lot again, but it was just as dark and cold as when I had looked on it a few moments before and I realized that I was just like Annie. I was asking God when the sun would come and shine again, but I was getting no response. I began to think of all of those things that are weighing on me and my teammates. I thought of all the cries that have risen up to God in the last few weeks about the church and the worship services and our relationships to each other and to those around us. And as I looked out at the dreary sky, I began to feel the dark grey damp creep across my heart.

Why is it that in those moments where we seem like we need an answer from God the most, God appears to be silent? I used to struggle with that silence a lot. Within the past few years it has gotten a lot better, but this year it has just come back with a vengeance. I ask God whether I should stay here or go home because it seems like I'm just not needed; I don't really get a response, but I do get a lot of very supportive people. Not a lot of folks show up for our Saturday night worship, and I wonder if God has come at all, but then I see a woman named Kathy in the back raising her hands and rejoicing with a smile. I ask God why our team hasn't gelled together, and still the problems persist, but then all of us get together and have dinner and we laugh about things that are going on.

Truth be told, I don't know why God doesn't answer, but part of me wonders if it is because he is wondering what our response will be to the problem. Part of me wonders if the old tools that he has given us (his promises in Scripture, his everyday blessings, his faithfulness to us at other times) might still work today. And part of me wonders if God just wants to mourn with us, and be angry with us, and eventually find the light with us.

It is so very difficult to wait for the Lord, because we don't know why he wants us to wait, and we don't really know what we are waiting for. All we know is that we are supposed to wait. What are you waiting for today? What are those decisions or situations that you are lost in. How long will you wait for the light that will shine?

As I write this, I look out on the same parking lot that I had looked out onto a few days before, but this time as I look up into the sky I see the glowing orb that I had been searching for, and I feel my heart filling with its light dispelling the gloom. It may not be an answer to all of my searching, but it is a start.

Peace,

-jon

Date: 1/4/2007

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

Happy New Year! I pray that your holiday season was wonderful and filled with the love and joy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our team was blessed over Christmas to spend time with family and friends, rejoicing in the birth of Jesus. As we have returned to Brookings, our team has been faced with a few challenges among many blessings. The familiar words of Jeremiah 29:11 come to mind. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." These are words that we need to cling to now, remembering that God is with us and guiding us. Our teammate, Caroline, has decided not to return to our team for personal reasons. We are keeping her in our thoughts and prayers and I hope that you will do the same for her and for our team.



Sara Berge

Thus, returning to Brookings has caused us to work through many different thoughts and feelings. We have been adjusting to life without a teammate and working through the feelings that surround that. At the same time, we have been welcomed back with great joy. Everyone here has been so excited to have us back, to talk with us about break and to share their experiences with us. The people here at First Lutheran are truly blessings to us on Lifeline.

As we work to figure out how our team functions now, we are leaning on God and his promises to us. This is why the verse from Jeremiah is so important. God has great plans for all of us, no matter where we are. He will give us hope and so much more. When I was preparing to write this message and studying this verse, I found that the verses that follow, that are not nearly as familiar, are equally, if not more, important...

"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord.—Jeremiah 29: 12-14

I think that the well-known verse means even more with the three verses that follow it. God does have great plans for us, but we need to trust in Him. We need to seek the Lord and his promises. We will discover the plans that God has for us as we seek him with our whole hearts. Not only that, but we will find something much greater—God.

I pray that you will seek God with your whole heart and that you will be able to trust the promise of great plans that he has for you. I know that he has great plans for our team, as well as the other Youth Encounter teams. Thank you for your continued support and prayers. Take care and God bless!
Sara

Date: 1/16/2007

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

They will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done.—Psalm 64:9

I knew that if I told them how bad it actually was, they wouldn't want to go. Especially Jenn, who is a little afraid of my driving as it is. And to be completely honest, I'm not sure I even really knew how bad it was. Sure, it is winter in South Dakota, and I have never really experienced what driving in the snow can be like in this neck of the woods,



but I figured I had driven in snow storms plenty of times and this time was not going to be any different. **Jon Glenn**

And it really wasn't that bad driving down. The loose granules of snow swirled across the road, forming alluring patterns for the eyes to feast on. And despite the fact that the radar had shown a huge blob of precipitation sitting right over the city of Sioux Falls, we made it to the church for worship right on time even with an unexpected side trip. After worship, we had driven around the city, and while we might have slid around a little bit, we got to where we were going. So after our evening of fun and excitement, we found ourselves heading north on I-29. But the trip back was a little different than the trip there. You see, during our time in Sioux Falls, the snow had continued to fall, and so now the snow which had been so fascinating when we first saw it swirling on top of the road began to swirl all around us. Every time a car passed, a cloud of snow was kicked up in its wake, forming a billowing cloud which blocked my vision on all sides. I was able to fight through most of it, but the semis were the worst.

It seems that it is a natural law of the universe that just at the right moment, when you think you have everything together, something happens which causes you to realize that you have absolutely no control over anything. One of these moments came as I was sitting in the van surrounded by the swirling snow. I began to feel confident that I would be able to get us back to Brookings without any trouble at all when a huge semi with trailer passed us on the left side, kicking up a cloud of snow on one side of us. And then if that wasn't bad enough, the minute it passed us, it moved back over into the right lane, blowing billows of snow at our windshield. For a moment, everything went white. While I was able to see a little bit before, now there was no chance at all. My instincts clicked in and I began to listen to the zip strips on either side to make sure I didn't put the van in a ditch. My muscles tensed up and Jenn let out a yelp. As the semi began to pull ahead of us, the snow began to clear and we were able to see again, although we were still a little shocked. The lights of Brookings never looked so good as we crossed the county line that night. We had made it and we were safe.

It is generally during my journal entries that I try and lend some kind of spiritual backdrop to the stories I tell and the adventures I have. But today just doesn't feel like that kind of day. Because while I would like to tell you how I think God applies in this situation, maybe the thing that is needed most of all is for you to figure out how it applies to you, and where exactly you see God in this story.

My hope is that you can read this and see God and also that you can begin to see God more in your daily life. He is there, and he is screaming at you in order to let him be a part of it. So where do you see God?

Date: 1/23/2007

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

In college I took a social dance class in order to fulfill one of my gym requirements, so when it was announced in staff meeting that one of the students from SDSU would be teaching a salsa dance class in the activity center, I was mildly interested. By a twist of fate, I agreed to go with Jon, and we would learn to salsa together.

You know, dancing is a funny thing. In couples dancing, the whole dance is not coordinated, but rather, on the fly, however the music moves, the boy directs by guiding the girl's hands in certain directions to indicate what next move they will make together. It's an interesting interplay, and funny in juxtaposition with conversations I've had recently about what the Bible says about women and what to make of the word "submission."

With my social dance class in college, my partner, bless his heart, just wasn't sure of what he was doing half the time, and so, I found myself leading more often than not. It's an interesting transition for me to have a partner who goes to class as often as I do and



Jenn Albert

actually accepts control. It's hard for me to just let go of that and let Jon show me where to go. He has never danced salsa before, and his motions sometimes confuse me. This kind of trust is not based on lack of history between us, as I trust Jon as a friend and teammate, but rather based on his previous experience. On the other hand, I find myself falling more easily into the correct steps with Curtis, our dance instructor. His motions give me a good indication of where he is going next, where he wants to take me, and I am less prone to fight because I know and can see that he knows what he is doing and has a ton of experience.

And I can't help but make a connection to the way God leads and we respond. Now, I know that the ways God guides us are generally not as noticeable as a physical pull one direction or the other; bear with me. I like to think of my relationship to God as a kind of dance, where He leads me and I follow His lead to create this beautiful play of motion and energy, of love and passion. Unfortunately, there are a lot of times where I try to reverse the roles, make myself the leader instead of the follower, telling God that I really don't care where He wants to take me, my way is better and will create better results (which, of course, actually results in disaster, more often than not). I have a hard time letting go and taking God's subtle hints, especially when it's in an unfamiliar area. Like with Jon, in the back of my mind, I think, "But God, we've never done this before, I have experience in THIS area with you. How do I know that You know what You're doing?" It sounds preposterous, God not knowing more than I do about what's going on, but it's so much easier for me to trust God in areas that we've been before, things that I know He does well.

What might God be gently tugging you towards that might take you in uncharted territory? Are you ready to create this beautiful dance that He's calling us to?

-jenn.

Psalm 31:3 "Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me."

Date: 1/30/2007

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

Last night I went to take the trash out to the curb (happens every Monday) after a long day of working on stuff at the church as well as working on an application for next year. I was beat and was not excited to be dragging the trashcan down to the end of the driveway, but as I opened the door to the house we live in, I found myself in the midst of flakey powder. Now, being from Southern Illinois, I have experienced a fair amount of snow throughout my life, but that snow is not quite the same. My first thought was of that glittery fake snow--you know, the stuff made out of Styrofoam? It had that same kind of look and glittered in the porch light, making the night look somehow...magical. Stepping out into that in my boots and winter coat with Elwood (the dog) prancing about my feet lightened my heart. I had entered a different world filled with fluffy goodness, sparkles, and a kind of purity that comes with new fallen snow, leaving all of the junk that had been, all of the stress and disjointed thoughts to the complex simplicity of this beauty.

God never ceases to surprise me. He shows up in the little things and in the big things. He shows up in the midst of our self-doubt and in the middle of our most confident moments. Today's encouragement/challenge: look back over your day for the little moments that God has blessed you with--He shows up when we take the time to look for Him.

-jenn.



Jenn Albert

Date: 2/1/2007

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession." -Titus 2:13,14



Jon Glenn

Jim's Tap is an eclectic mix of medieval ambience, hard rock, gaming tables and college debauchery. The cultural anomaly stands at the south end of Main St. and is the purveyor of many fine traditions including the "Around the World Club," where you can drink a variety of imported malt beverages which might earn you a t-shirt to commemorate your historic feat. As well as "The Biker Drive-By," which takes place every summer. It is a sight to see, I hear, but if you are getting a drink at the bar, you just have to be careful to not get hit by the motorcyclists buzzing through the center of the saloon. And it is here, huddled at two round tables under the haze of the cigarette smoke that hovers just above their heads, that a group of folks meets for the first Theology on Tap session that Brookings has seen.

One of the things that I was really excited to do when I got to Brookings was be a part of meeting such as this one. Gatherings like these were the highlight of my college experience. After church every Wednesday, the pastor would take off his collar and join a group of about 15 of us at a local pub and discuss the deep things of faith and doctrine. It was a time that shaped my beliefs, and I found in that place one of the greatest communities that I ever experienced in my years of higher education. And so, knowing that I was going to be coming to a college town, I hoped that I could transplant that same tradition.

Actually, to be honest, I had been dragging my heels with it for quite a few months; the timing just never seemed to be right, and I wasn't ever sure how I was going to get the conversation off the ground. But then two weeks ago, Brady, a friend of mine at church, asked me when we were going to start, and so we set a time for Thursday at 9:00 p.m. The topic for the first evening was a statement that Brady had heard from a speaker at a Christian gathering who said, "The genius of Christianity is that not a lot matters." He wanted to know what I thought, and I really couldn't answer the question completely, so we took it to Jim's and placed it before a group of about eight individuals, some from church and some from the Lutheran Student Center in town. Two hours and a Black and Tan later, we had more questions than when we had begun. Our topic rolled over into subjects about cause and effect, what our role as Christians should be, where exactly the line is between faith and works, and how exactly this whole thing fits together.

When we all said goodbye, I walked out of the bar and heaved a sigh. It seemed that it was a mighty successful first attempt. Brady had gotten his question answered. Pr. Dave got to teach a little bit. My friend Ray from Lutheran Student Center got to talk theology with someone. My friend and salsa teacher, Curtis, got to experience a larger Christian community. And Cassie got to continue to explore the great leadership gifts God has given her. And me...well, it took me back to my days in college.

The thing that I love most about Theology on Tap is that you don't expect it to be happening in the place where it is happening. There are many Christians who would probably be shocked at the thought of bringing God into a bar. But I think the bar is the perfect place to take a conversation like this one, because I think that is what Jesus would do. Jesus would often go into the places where a rabbi was never expected to go, and every time he left, something always seemed to be different. He took what was old and what was imperfect and he made it new.

Our God has a way of taking things, sanctifying them and making them his once again. He takes bread and wine and makes it into his body and blood. He takes water and infuses it with his Spirit. He takes ancient texts and makes them have meaning. He takes us and purifies us in order that he can make us holy. And if God can do that for us, as messed up as we are, who is to say he can't do it for a place like Jim's Tap?

Peace,

-jon

Date: 2/5/2007

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

What an exciting weekend! We have just finished our first Quake, a Youth Encounter Event for middle school students. As a community based team, it was an adventure for us just to have a booking outside of Brookings. But, it was even more exciting that this particular booking happened to be an event with 100 people at a hotel in Sioux Falls. We had a great time meeting new people, running around for almost three days straight, and, most importantly, praising our great God. I was reminded of how much I enjoy the community of God, especially one that is so excited about God and his love for us.



Sara Berge

The theme for this weekend was the same as Youth Encounter's team theme for the year, "Rescue." Our theme verse comes from Galatians 1:3-5 and says, "Grace and peace to you from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." God really spoke to me through this theme and these verses this weekend, which was somewhat surprising considering the amount of studying that we do of the theme and theme verse during our training.

A great deal of what I learned and discovered this past weekend was due to a man named Wes Halula, who was our speaker for the Event. Wes helped me to think of the theme in some different ways. Many of the things he shared were familiar to me: the idea that Jesus died to rescue us from our sins, that this sacrifice is for me personally, and that forgiveness is a main theme within the idea of rescue. However, I also discovered some new ideas from his messages. Because God has rescued us, we should share that rescue with others. It is important for us to forgive others as God has forgiven us, even though the people we are forgiving may not understand that forgiveness or accept it. For me, the most important part of the weekend was during a celebration in which Wes spoke about fruits. He shared that a lot of times, we get caught up in what we are accomplishing, seeking tangible results. However, it may take weeks, months or even years for what we are doing to take effect.

It is important to realize that we are called by God to do good, to do what he wants us to do. What we also need to realize is that people may not willingly accept this right away. We need to be prepared to not have tangible results, but to know that we are doing our best to serve the Lord. Because God has rescued us, we should share that with others, no matter how difficult and thankless it can be at times. Later on in Galatians, Paul talks about this. He says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:9-10).

God has rescued us from our sins. God has called us to share that message and that love with the people around us. It won't be easy, and it won't always show tangible results, but God is there to support us and will be pleased with our efforts. So, I encourage you to keep on doing good to those around you and trust that God is there to guide you. Take care and God bless!

Date: 2/9/2007

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little loves little."--Luke 7:47

During my life as a young adult, I have only celebrated Valentine's Day with a significant other once. So February 14 for me is often not greeted with a great deal of joy, flowers, or candy. Instead, February 14 marks "Singles Awareness Day," that one very specific



Jon Glenn

day during the year when it becomes obvious to everyone that you are in fact too big of a loser to actually have anyone to spend the day with. You will have to pardon my sarcasm. It isn't that I'm opposed to romance or opposed to love in any way, shape, or form. I believe love is the very thing that we are supposed to be about as a people of God, but I guess the love that I'm looking at is a little bit different than the kind you find in Hallmark cards and 1-800-FLOWERS arrangements.

Like last night at the Coffeehouse. We had an open mic night where a lot of the adults in the congregation were able to showcase their talent. One of my favorite acts was performed by Ross Abraham, a math professor at SDSU, who composed a song for his wife and sang it to her over speaker phone because she was not able to come to the coffeehouse because of sickness. He said he had composed it for her as a Valentine's Day present, but my guess is that it was for more than Valentine's Day. To do something like that requires forethought, which means that it couldn't have been just an outpouring of emotion from a one day event, but something that comes from a deep feeling of connection and a desire to express something not for yourself, but something that will only make the other person happy.

And I guess the sad thing is that not everyone gets to experience that kind of love. That is the really depressing part about Singles Awareness Day; it specifically points out the fact that you feel as though you have no one who loves you. I heard one of the saddest things I have ever heard in my life this week. I had a meeting with a student to talk about something that she was going to be doing for worship. But as we sat down, I noticed there was something that was really bothering her and so I asked her about it. Now the fantastic thing about this woman is that she is willing to just pour out her emotions. So she began telling me about an ex-boyfriend that she had run into before meeting me, which flowed into a story about how the guy that she was really interested in shut her down because "she wasn't good for him." This in turn all led back to God and how God just doesn't make sense. And it was in the midst of this conversation that I asked her when the last time was that she really felt loved. She slumped back into her chair and thought for a moment before looking back up at me and saying that the last time she had really felt loved was about 11 years ago when she was 9 years old and her father told her that he would always love her.

There are people like this girl who are wandering all over the earth. People who, just for a moment, want to know that they are the most important thing in the world to another person. And I could tell you that what they really need most is God because it is true...they do. But, think of those times when you haven't felt loved. During those moments, what did you need most of all, some quiet time to pray, or a friend to give you a hug and say, "I love you!"?

There is a reason why Jesus connects forgiveness and love in the passage above, and the reason is very simply that we cannot understand the love a person has for us unless we understand that the other person has forgiven us. Forgiveness lets us know that everything between us is okay, and it frees us up to accept the love that the other person has for us. That is why someone giving you a hug and saying "I love you" feels so good because it lets you know that everything is okay with this other person. When someone does something for you to let you know that your relationship is solid, when they, for instance, sing you a song they wrote for you, it lets you know that the relationship is okay and it frees you to love them. So, this Singles Awareness Day, let people know that you have forgiven them. Let them know that you are okay with them. Allow them to experience the love you have for them and through you, the love God has for them. In order that no one feels unloved.

Happy Valentine's Day,
-jon

Date: 2/27/2007

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

Ministry is exhausting. I don't say that to glorify what we do or to gain sympathy, it's just the way it is and something that I think anyone should know before rushing headlong into it. There are so many times along the way that I have personally questioned the things that I do and the reasons that I do them. When I entered

college, I was set on youth ministry, but going to a small liberal arts college offered only one major that was *vaguely* ministry related: religion. Around about my junior year, having barely any classes left for my major, I began to *seriously* question this whole youth ministry thing. What was I thinking? I didn't know how to talk to youth about God--I was lucky if I could carry a conversation with one of them for longer than 15 minutes, for goodness sake! But there I was, not having the money for more school in a different major, not having the time for serious discernment, seeing myself bent on this path. I figured, I had better just suck it up and get better at it. What else was I going to do?



Jenn Albert

It's a scary thought when you get yourself worked into a place where you feel as though you can do nothing else, and you begin to question your abilities, your motivation, your experiences. There are still points at which I find myself in that place of pure self-doubt. Last year there was one night about the time that I was leaving team for a day for an interview at a church, when I had a complete breakdown, bawling to my teammates that I was horrible with teenagers and wasn't fit to work in ministry any where. Why was I going to this church? I would just be a hindrance to their ministry. Admittedly, I'm not sure about my ultimate purpose. I'm content for now to leave that in God's hands.

I once heard a pastor say that if, when you think about your life you can picture yourself being content and fulfilled in anything other than being a pastor, you shouldn't be a pastor. Now, I'm not defending him, but I guess I know what he means. I had a phone conversation with an out-of-state friend the other night, and we were talking about the pains and stresses of ministry, and how easy it is to get fed up, to question ourselves, to fall into the same old same old and become obsolete. I talk about how I have to fight doubt a lot, about how often times I don't think I do this for the right reasons, wondering if I'm just too scared to do anything else. He asks me why I feel ministry is the right place. I pause, trying to find the words to encompass what it is that I know deep down. You see, the thing is, I cannot see myself doing anything else. That's just it. Not in a sense that I don't think I'm capable of doing anything else; I'm even hesitant to say that I mean that I couldn't find contentment doing anything else. I just literally cannot imagine anything else. It is my purpose, it is what I was designed for. Now, what that looks like, where that is, why that is, those are questions of a different caliber which I am currently not equipped to answer. And that's okay. I find myself in a place now where I can rest in the assurance that even if I don't know the ultimate placement of... well...me, my general direction could not be more beautiful. I am so excited to continue this adventure.

I pray that God may give you confidence in your moment and a peace with the unknown of the future.

We're on our way to Denver in a whirlwind trip for some Quake fun with other opportunities along the way. Sara, Jon and I are back on the road. How surreal is that!

-jenn.

Date: 3/15/2007
Submitted by: Sara Berge
Journal Entry:

Another day has passed by in Brookings, SD. It's hard to believe that it has already been almost two weeks since we returned from our great traveling adventures. We have been so busy catching up on things here and beginning a rush to get things done before we leave at the end of May. As we have been busy, I have not been very good about writing my journals. I do apologize for causing all of our faithful readers to wait to hear about our grand traveling adventures.

On Tuesday, February 27, Jon, Jenn and I loaded up the van, hooked up the trailer and set off on what is a big adventure for us. We were leaving for almost two weeks! It was stressful to get things ready here at the church, but once we were in the van, it was smooth sailing. Thankfully, we were ahead of a giant storm that raged in the Brookings area, and we had great driving weather. That night, we stopped in Rapid City, SD to stay with my aunt, uncle and two cousins. It was great to see them and to introduce them to my teammates of over a year. Jon and I even went to see my cousin, Tate, play basketball. What fun!



Sara Berge

Wednesday was a long day for driving for us. We made our way through Wyoming, which was not very exciting, to tell you the truth, and eventually made it to Denver! I really enjoyed spending time with my fabulous teammates in our pretty green van. We have officially begun searching for names for our van and trailer, so if you have any suggestions, feel free to let us know! Once we reached the city of Denver, however, our beautiful driving weather came to an end. We had a difficult time crossing severely icy, traffic-jammed roads. But, after an hour and 45 minutes, we made it to the south side of Denver and met our hostess, Denise. It was great to stay with her for a few nights and to have her with us for the entire weekend.

Our adventure continued on Thursday with an icy, mountainous drive to the Denver Lutheran High School, where we played for a chapel service. It was so much fun to worship with the youth there and to get to know some of the students and teachers. In the afternoon, we were blessed with a devotion from one of the staff members. We were reminded that in our weaknesses, God is strong, which proved to be a great theme for the weekend.

It's time for a confession--I have a strange goal. One day I would like to say that I have visited all 50 state capitol buildings. So, since we were in Denver, how could we pass up the opportunity to visit the state capitol building? We drove around downtown Denver Thursday night, and officially visited the building Friday morning. Yay! From there, we drove to the Doubletree Hotel, where the greatest adventure of all was waiting to begin...

We arrived at the hotel and met up with our Event Director for the weekend, Jeromy. It was great to see him after a month. But, he did not have great news for us. Tangled Blue, our main band for the weekend, was stuck in Minnesota in the giant storm I talked about earlier. In the end, they were not able to get to the hotel until late Saturday morning! Because of this, we had the opportunity to play more music for the first and second celebrations and to lead campfire on Friday night. It was a lot of fun, but added stress at the same time.

At this point, our Thursday devotion came to mind. Our last verses in our study came from 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest in me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

How important it was for us to remember that even though things were not perfect in our eyes and we did not always feel capable to handle things, God was truly in control. He was able to work through us, to be strong within our weaknesses. Not only was that a great message for us that weekend at the Quake, but it is very important for us to remember every day. We are not created perfect. We make mistakes every day. But, God will use us, weaknesses and all. We just need to let him.

All in all, the Quake went very well. God did amazing things, and I especially enjoyed my time with the Junior Guides. The weekend flew by, as did our trip back to Brookings. By the way, we stayed in Lincoln, NE for a couple nights with our friend Marta's family. Since we were there, we got to visit another state capitol building! Woo hoo!

I hope that this message finds you all well and that you will remember that God will be using you, regardless of how weak you may feel. When we are weak, we are strong! Take care and God bless!

Sara

Date: 3/20/2007

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!" - Psalm 95:6

This Saturday we had the first of two worship conferences that we will be leading in Brookings. While the conference was specifically set up to help us teach the folks at First Lutheran how to lead worship, we also opened it up to other ministries throughout the Brookings area. I wasn't expecting a large crowd, and so when we got a group of ten, I didn't really



Jon Glenn

feel too bad. And it was a really good group of ten. We had a speaker named Jo Woodard from the Baptist Church in town give the opening devotion as well as lead some of our large group sessions. We had a workshop leader named Aimee Spar from Intervarsity who led a fantastic session on manuscript style Bible study. And the other folks who gathered for the conference asked a lot of questions and had some wonderful thoughts to share. All in all, the first week of the conference went really well, and it seemed like people were able to connect in some great ways not just to the material, but to God as well.

Things like this conference are really important I think, both for those who might be learning this stuff for the first time and for those who are seasoned veterans because it reminds us of the basics. And worship at its heart is a really basic thing; it is communing with God. And not to downplay this amazing experience, but that is really all that it is. The problem for me this weekend, and I think the problem with a lot of church attendees and even pastors, is that we forsake the communion with God for something else. We walk into church and instead of worshipping the one who truly gives life, we worship those idols that we bring in with us...let me explain.

Sunday morning was terrible for me. We led two worship services back to back that were completely different. I was in a skit during the second service and my family had to leave during the second service, so I had to say goodbye to them during the sermon, and every song that I sang that day lacked any type of spirit or worship. I felt terrible when I left church, so I resolved to do something about. I decided that I needed to go to a place where I wouldn't have to lead anything. I decided to go to an emergent service in Sioux Falls called The Crossing. The service was great until the end when the pastor mentioned that there would be people off to the side who would be willing to pray for anyone who would come forward. That's when I heard God in my head tell me to go and get prayed for. But I was scared and a little ashamed, so I fought him on it. For twenty minutes God and I went back forth arguing with one another about whether I should get prayed for. Then it came to the climax of the argument. I asked God to help me, and the response that I got to the statement was chilling, "I'm trying. You just won't let me." You see, my thing is this. I don't like being weak in front of people. I don't like to submit myself to others, particularly people I don't know and don't really respect as authorities. So to go up and asked to be prayed for was an attack to my pride. God knew it and called me out on it. He had the gall to ask me in worship to actually worship him instead of myself.

The text above speaks of what it is to worship. It talks about communion with God and living in a right relationship with him. It speaks of acknowledging God as Creator and because of that acknowledgement to give him the praise that is due his name when we enter into worship. It asks us to focus our self enough to kneel before the one who has made us in his image; who has made us into outpourers of love and adoration in the same way he is (Zep 3:17). I'm struggling to sort this whole thing out right now because I desperately desire to hold onto my dignity and my self-respect and my pride in the face of a God who has given up all these things for me (Phil 2:6-10). And it is in these moments that God seems to say the same thing to me that he said to the Israelites in the desert and for that matter to all his people throughout time, "Do we have to do this all over again?" And it feels like I'm being hit over the head with a tire iron which knocks me out cold. But it is in this state of desperation as my legs buckle and my knees drop to floor that I find myself before the one who knows me best. The one who lifts up my head and says, "I tried. I'm trying. I will keep on trying. And I will always find a way to work around you."

Peace,

-jon

Date: 3/28/2007

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

"Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."--John 12: 3

Wednesday nights are somewhat crazy for us, with dinner, kids' education and confirmation, youth group, and then heading over to the college to spend time in worship and hanging out with some amazing students there. The children's education, Journey to Discipleship, is really a fantastic experience for them, I think, as they get to visit differently themed rooms each week, with one Bible story for five weeks. This way, they get to know the story, so that by the end of a five-week period, many can give you an accurate summary. This is our last five weeks of Journey, and I get to hang out in the art room. We're talking about the story of Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Jesus, the general idea of service, what do we do to beautify the feet of Christ? In my room the kids hear the story and then paint their feet with India ink as a reminder that we want our feet to reflect Christ's. There are moments of uncontrolled confusion as with any kids' programming, but I thoroughly enjoy watching them create their own masterpieces, each unique, although occasional themes run through some feet of sports team logos or phrases.



Jenn Albert

A few weeks ago, Jon mentioned the worship workshops, and at the first one, our speaker, Jo Woodard, looked at the other story of the anointing of Christ's feet, and then a week after, the Mary of Bethany version was the Gospel text for Sunday. Do you ever feel like you've had a story just drilled into you? Have you ever heard the same message time and again from different sources and still can't seem to quite get the point? I wonder if I'm missing the message God seeks for me.

This past Wednesday, as I was going through the story of Mary of Bethany, I began by asking if the kids could remember two people from last week's story. Then, if anyone could remember who Mary's brother and sister were. I didn't think much of it, simply remembering that my guide papers had mentioned something about the kids leaving this station knowing Martha and Lazarus were Mary's siblings. In the Bible, the last story of these siblings is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. I can say that I know this story well as it was last year's Lenten text for our YE worship service. Okay, let me help you to connect my train of thought, here, and to the eventual point that God has led me to. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He came to Mary and Martha in their time of deepest need and sorrow and brought joy and hope. Mary chooses to spill her jar of perfume, a prized possession of her family, on this occasion in response to the great gift that Jesus has given their family. Mary knows that her gift pales in comparison to Jesus', but she gives the complete best that she has without shame and without looking back. She does so not out of obligation, not to gain recognition as the men looked at her with disdain. She pours out her greatest gift because it is the only thing she can do, the only appropriate response that she has for the love that this man has shown to her.

It begs the question in me: how does God find us as we offer ourselves to him? I want desperately for the things that I have offered to Him to be sincerely from the depths of the joy that He has created in me because of the great love that He has shown me. Today, my greatest hope and prayer for you is that you can find yourself in such a place that your pouring out, your sacrifice, your offering is but the only thing that you can do.

God, how You love me! I will never understand.

-jenn.

Date: 3/31/2007
Submitted by: Sara Berge
Journal Entry:

Did you know that there are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament? Do you know where the exact middle of the Bible is? How about that the first five books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch? Can you name these five books? Well, there are now five third graders at First Lutheran in Brookings who can answer all of these questions and more! I am so proud of them!



Sara Berge

Friday was our first of four lock-ins to take place before we leave Brookings in May. Three of these lock-ins are part of the church's stepping stones program. In this program, children learn about a different aspect of faith each year until confirmation starts and are recognized by the congregation on these important events. This weekend, the third graders were learning about the Bible. We had five students come with parents and it was a great time of fun, learning and,

thankfully, sleep!

One of the greatest parts of this experience was watching the parents with their children. The kids got to hear stories of faith from their parents and the parents were awed by the knowledge and learning of their children. It was great to see kids and parents studying the Bible together—just as God calls us to do. “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 11:18-21a)

At the beginning of the lock-in, I was wondering how things would go with such a small group. But, these kids proved to me that numbers don't matter! They were full of energy and excited to play games and praise God! I do believe that they are one of the few groups that has truly grasped the concept of “breaking it down,” as we do in many of our songs—they danced like crazy! God was truly a part of this lock-in.

Another part of this lock-in that I appreciated was our guest speaker, Marion. She is a member of the congregation who frequently volunteers at the Coffeehouse, so we see her often. But, I had not heard many of the stories that she shared with us. The kids and adults alike were drawn to her stories about her grandfather and the meaning that the Bible has for her. She handed out copies of her favorite Bible verse and, immediately, one of the kids asked if they could look it up in their Bibles! Marion was a great blessing to all of us at the lock-in.

In Marion's talk, she shared the verse Psalm 118: 24 which says, “This is the day the Lord has made; rejoice and be glad in it!” This verse is important to Marion because it shows that even though your day may not be going so well, we can find joy in it because God made it, and God doesn't make bad things! She encouraged us to always look for the good—look for what God is doing in our lives and to write some of those things down. Highlight and write in Bibles so that the things that are important to you can be easily found to help you, and can also be passed on to others.

I think that Marion's words are important for all of us to hear. God is in every day and in everything—we just need to look for him. Whenever you are struggling, turn to God and His word for us. And rejoice no matter what—for this is the day that the Lord has made.

- Sara

Date: 4/5/2007

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

“This is just like making Indian Tacos!” said my new friend, Brett. This ended up being a great conversation starter, as I had no idea what Indian Tacos were. It gave Brett a chance to explain the food and how his mom makes them from scratch on a regular basis. Where did this conversation come from, you may ask? Well, from making Communion bread, of course!

Wait... maybe I should back up a little bit. Last night we had a lock-in with a great group of fifth graders. They were working on their Faith Stepping Stone for the sacrament of Holy Communion. We started out with nine kids. Since seven of them were boys however, the two girls decided it would be best to go home for the night. I don't think they realized that Jenn and I would be there. So, after the two girls and one of the boys left, we had six guys spending the night at the church with the Lifeline crew. We had a great time learning about Communion, praising God, playing basketball, and taking part in a rousing game of Sardines. I have to say that one of the boys had the best hiding spot of all—a garbage can! I'm not sure how other people were supposed to hide with him, but he didn't have to worry about that, since not a single person thought to look there.

Overall, the lock-in was a great experience and I really enjoyed my time with the fifth graders. Although, I must say that we are rather tired today; particularly Jon, who stayed up most of the night trying to get the boys to sleep and make sure that they stayed out of trouble. But, after naps and time to relax, we were back at the church for the Maundy Thursday service to help out and to watch the blessing of our fifth graders after their night of study.



Sara Berge

We also had a specific role in the worship service tonight. As Pastor Nyla was preparing for her message, she asked us about foot washing. We talked about how, in Jesus' time, foot washing was a common courtesy, a sign of hospitality. However, there's not as much of a need nor is it what we would think of as common anymore. So, we considered some different kinds of hospitality that we see today. As I thought back to our time on the road last year, I realized something. In virtually every home that I walked in to, the first thing I was asked was, "Can I get you something to drink?" or "You must be hungry—let me get you something to eat." Because of this experience, we concluded that today's common courtesy is offering food and/or drink to our guests. Thus, our role was to welcome people by offering them either coffee or water to drink as they entered worship, as a modern-day substitute for foot washing.

It was interesting to see the variety of responses from people as they came to the service. Some were grateful and graciously accepted the offer. Some were reluctant and seemed to accept because they thought they should. Some were reluctant and chose to politely decline. A few just flat-out refused, talking about how it's not appropriate to have food and drink inside the sanctuary. These different responses reminded me of how diverse the church is. Within one congregation, people have different traditions, views and visions. It's difficult to meet the many differing needs of the congregants all at once. This is just one of the many things that I have learned about church ministry while being here in Brookings.

God has shown us many things here. We've learned about the various dynamics to church ministry, we've learned about growing in community both within our team and outside of it, and, thanks to the fifth grade lock-in, we had an opportunity to learn more about Holy Communion. All of these things and so much more we thank God for, and we look forward to learning even more as time goes on. Take care and God bless!

Date: 4/8/2007

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit with you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD." –Ezekiel 37:13,14



Jon Glenn

They were playing Guitar Hero as I parked my car underneath the awning just outside of the youth room door, and while the music was discernable outside, it was overpowering as I stepped through the doorway. It was 2 a.m. on Easter morning, and Carol, John, and I were keeping watch for the Savior in our own special way by making quiche, coffee, and sticky buns to feed the masses that would be crowding in through the church doors later on that morning. It was a strange watch to be keeping, less about the one who came to save than about those who had been saved.

The focus made sense, though. As people began to filter in through the rear door of the church for one of the three services that morning, one could see that they had dressed their finest for this once a year event. The music for the day had been especially chosen to be powerful and full of life, and also familiar, because one wants to offer a little bit of familiarity for those who aren't often seen on Sunday. And when it came time for the sermon, Scott stood up in front of everyone and made sure to point out that there was in fact worship happening next week, too, for those who were interested. It was a great day full of celebration as we ended the long days of waiting that came with Lent.

But I have to wonder if the waiting is really over, and whether God has responded to us just yet. Is it a little early for celebration or does the word, "when" still hang in the air lying dormant until its final metamorphoses into "now"? We sit in the pews on Sunday morning and proclaim the great mystery of faith, "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." But we do not see him anywhere, and the question in all of our minds, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, is "when?" When will we see this Savior again? When will he open up our graves and raise us out of them? When will we feel sadness no more and experience what it actually means to live?

The night before the celebration, a small group of thirty sat in the sanctuary keeping watch. One among them stood up with her three ring binder in hand that had all of the texts for the Easter Vigil

service typed out in dialogue form. Carla was playing God, an odd part for someone who feels herself to be so far from the person she was portraying. She began to read the passage from Ezekiel, and as the words "I will raise you from your graves," fell from her lips, tears began to fall from her eyes, and she began to heave and sob shattering the peace of that vigil we were keeping. And in that moment we all felt the loss and we all experienced the tension that existed in our life, because we all knew that while we professed alleluia, there were others who were gasping for their last breath. It was strange because no one rushed to her side. No one went to her for a loving embrace—we all just sat in stunned silence as we were confronted with the absurdity of our practice.

We were waiting for the wrong thing. We tried to make ourselves believe that we were really waiting for the celebration of Easter, but what we were waiting for that night; what Carol, John, I were waiting for; what the people on Sunday morning were waiting for; what we all are waiting for is "now." We all know that we were born to die, so the resurrection miracle means so much. It is the thing that makes it so miraculous. And so we sit and wait together knowing that there is something to come, because we have seen it happen in someone else. And since we have seen it happen in someone else, we hope that it will happen in us, too. Keep watch until the vigil ends, until this Lenten life turns into resurrection joy, until "when" becomes "now."

Peace,

-jon

Date: 4/15/2007

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

Break. Now, on a traveling Youth Encounter team, a person always gets all kinds of interesting questions, from "Who drives the van?" to "Do you have a chaperone?" Although the questions change when the team is stationary, there are still interesting ones. My least favorite, though, spans across all teams, even beyond team. It is a question often dreaded by high school and college seniors, by those who have big dreams but no idea how to get to them, by those who have no dreams and no direction...by now, I'm sure you're already formulating the question in your mind: "So, what will you be doing next year?" Now, don't get me wrong, I am completely aware that the people who ask are merely wanting to know about my future; they care about me and want to know about my life. Unfortunately, this knowledge does not really help to find the adequate answer to such questions.



Jenn Albert

I find myself hemming and hawing about, "Well, I think I'll spend some time earning money to pay back some loans, you know, maybe get a job at a coffee shop or a bookstore...I like Chicago, or maybe Portland... But if something falls in my lap, I might just take that as a sign from God..." My latest attempt at a joke was one recommended to me by Jon, "I'm going to work on a cruise ship as late night entertainment." Even through the joking, though, I can feel inside me the panic slowly growing, gaining momentum, and I'm partially waiting for the day when someone will ask me and I simply proceed to throw myself upon the floor and demonstrate the most impressive display of 20-something temper tantrum known to humankind.

Ok, so it might be a slight exaggeration.

It's funny, though, how we get ourselves worked into such places where, finding ourselves inadequate to fully care for our own wellbeing, we question our own ability to be a productive member of society, desperately try to come up with answers to questions we could never predict the answers to, and generally throw tantrums of epic proportions, if not outwardly in some form, at least inwardly. I mean, as a community of believers, one of the first things that we know about ourselves is that we are incapable of determining these things on our own. We cannot control the future (nor should we seek that kind of control, as God's ways are always better), and we cannot find joy and meaning in life without God. But yet, time and again, we feel the need to fit in with society's norms; we must have direction and purpose; we must be assertive and go for our own goals; we must gain the kind of success that demonstrates our worth in monetary stability numbers. I don't know if you're familiar with this new fangled Facebook thing--it's a means of staying in contact with friends at other schools, at your own school, whatever, and each person fills out a profile for themselves. Well, a while back, I noticed that a couple of my friends had "I

make a sad attempt to follow Jesus” under “Religious Views.” At first I found this rather depressing, and kind of self-degrading, but the more I think about it, the more it seems the only thing we can do, as we regularly fail miserably in this attempt to make good on following Christ.

So, as we return from break and, in this last month at Brookings, I prepare myself to answer the dreaded question, maybe I can find the peace in Christ to turn to those who care enough to want to know where I’m headed next and say, “You know, I’m not sure, but I think I’m okay with letting God have that for now.”

-jenn.

Date: 4/18/2007

Submitted by: Jon Glenn

Journal Entry:

“For I desire steadfast love, and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”—Hosea 6:6

Not many people had responded to the large white eyesore sitting behind me. Most were still in some type of sleep deprived morning haze due to late nights of video games, conversation, and homework. The only thought on their mind was the caffeine rush from that first sip of a tall vanilla latte at Java City. So when Amy, one of the staff workers for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, walked in, she was a welcomed sight; you could actually carry on a conversation. She had come to meet with a student who walked right past us as we started to talk. Amy called out to him and he came and joined the two of us standing in the warm glow the sun sent cascading through the windows of the Union Breezeway.



Jon Glenn

After Amy had introduced the both of us, I asked him what he thought of the words plastered on the white 4' x 8' piece of plastic behind us. And as he read the words "Religion sucks," he asked what I thought was the most profound question of the day, "What is religion?"

In January, Melissa and I began talking about other things she could do as the Peer Minister of Outreach for the University Lutheran Center. I suggested a few outreach events that I had seen done in the past, but the one that really caught their attention was an event called “Why I Hate Religion” that my friend William led with his InterVarsity chapter. As I outlined what the event might look like, Melissa and Ray began to get really excited and started fleshing out the skeleton that I had given them. "What if we put the words on a banner? I know a guy who could get us a good deal." "We could ask Pastor Jason if he would come and talk; he is all about this kind of stuff!" "Could we get the other campus organizations involved?" "Religion stinks...doesn't really seem to grab the attention...What about 'Religion sucks'?"

Their excitement did not wane. They saw this as a chance to really do something that would affect their campus. They did all the work. They got speakers, planned the worship, ordered the banner, got people to sit at the table and talk with other students, e-mailed other campus organization, shot and edited video, and were used by God in mighty ways.

After the event was over, I drove the large eyesore back over to the University Lutheran Center to drop it off, but it is not one of those things that you can just drop off. Throughout the day, students wrote all over the 4' x 8' surface until there was no room left. We got all kinds of comments from all different people, from those who didn’t understand what we were doing, to those who did and really appreciated the thought, to those who were just confused as to why the University Lutheran Center would say such a thing, but all the comments were full of honesty and heart. The students of SDSU were shaken out of their apathy today and were asked to join a conversation that will hopefully not stop now that the poster is down. The hope is that today people were given a framework to talk and share with each other about their beliefs and about their faith and about what they think religion is and what it should be.

Today when I go to bed, I go to bed feeling fulfilled; because today I helped put people in a place where they could talk about Jesus or talk about themselves with complete strangers and not

be afraid to do it. Today I got to be Jesus for lots of college students who have a lot of great thoughts but are just looking for the best way to express them. So I invite you to join the conversation.

What do you think about the statement "Religion sucks"?
Write it down.
Speak your mind.
Join the conversation.

Peace,

-jon

Date: 4/24/2007

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' the King will reply, '**I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.**'" -Matthew 25:37-40



Sara Berge

These verses are our theme verses for the last month of our Journey to Discipleship program. This is the education program for the preschool through fifth graders at our church. We are learning about Mary of Bethany and her great offering of love as she anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. In the passage, Mary breaks an alabaster jar of nard, which was valuable for multiple reasons. Nard was very hard to come by—it was only found in the Himalayan Mountains and needed to be transported quite a distance. Also, alabaster was not cheap by any means. This jar of perfume was a very expensive, very valuable possession—possibly equivalent to a year's salary. But Mary gave it all. She broke the alabaster jar, which means that she wasn't planning on saving any of the nard, or the jar for that matter. Mary was so overwhelmed with love for Jesus that she gave all she had.

As we've been studying this passage, I've been working at a station called the Oasis. Here we learn through science or some kind of hands-on activity. We started out the hour by talking about different expensive things that many families in the U.S. today own. We talked about how long it would take for us to save the money to purchase items ranging from electronics to houses to swimming pools. Then I asked the kids if they would be willing to simply give away the expensive item they had just spent a year saving for. More times than not, the kids responded with a "No way!" or "At least sell it so you get some money back!" The idea behind this question was to get the kids thinking about how amazing it was for Mary to give away what was possibly her most prized possession. It makes me wonder what I would be willing to give up for Jesus.

Mary gave something that was both tangible and intangible. God calls us to give tangibly through our offerings of time, talents and possessions. God also calls us to give intangibly through our relationships. I think that the theme verses for this month encompass all of these ways. Whenever we give, both tangibly and intangibly, to those in need, we are showing our love for God.

Sometimes I get caught up with giving one way or another. I focus on giving tangibly and forget about giving intangibly. Or sometimes the opposite. There are even times when I wonder if I'm giving anything at all. These are times when I need to sit back and evaluate what I have been doing with my time and my resources. At times, I realize that I haven't been doing a very good job. Then, there are times that I realize that while I'm definitely not perfect, I have given a lot of myself. Lately, I've found that with our team. We've been tired lately and, as we wrap up our time at First Lutheran, we seem to find ourselves wondering what we can possibly still be giving to this church while we're only here for three more weeks. But, as I've looked back at the past week, we've given so much and have even more in store for the weeks ahead.

Today, we spent some time at Greenleaf Assisted Living Center in Brookings. We shared some music and a puppet show with the residents and had some time of fellowship with them afterwards. As I think about that time, I realize that by simply taking the time to ask people about themselves, to listen and to share with them, we were giving to God. I wonder if we don't make giving more complicated than it actually is. In order to give to God, to show the love that we have for him, all we have to do is care about his people. That's something we can do every day of our lives. It doesn't have to be something huge or expensive, like Mary's alabaster jar of perfume. All it takes is a few minutes to ask, listen and share with the people around you.

I pray that as you read my rambling thoughts you are inspired to find ways to give and show love to God in your daily lives. May God continue to bless and watch over you all.

Date: 5/10/2007

Submitted by: Sara Berge

Journal Entry:

There's something about kids singing that just makes my heart smile. My heart sure was happy yesterday! In the afternoon we visited Stonybrook, a retirement community in Brookings with the Children's Choir and Drama groups from First Lutheran. Not only was this a great opportunity to serve this community, but it was also a chance for the kids to share God's love and to show their love to God through their praises.



Sara Berge

One moment from this program in particular stands out to me. The kids were singing a song called, "I Believe," which is from the musical that they are preparing to present in June. This song was filled with great words and fun choreography. As the kids were singing, dancing and moving; I noticed that one voice was significantly louder than the others. A little girl named Ellie was singing her heart out to the words, "I believe, oh yes, I believe. I believe in Jesus!" She was so sincere and so focused that my heart simply melted. It brought new meaning to the words, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" (Psalm 98:4) Ellie was not worried about what the other kids were doing, or what other people thought of her. She just let loose and sang praises to our great God.

Last night we also had the opportunity to be a part of the closing program for Journey to Discipleship. The Wednesday night education program focused on many stories including Ruth and Naomi, Samuel, the birth of Jesus, Jonah, Jesus at the Temple and Mary of Bethany. Throughout the program, the kids were able to share these stories, memory verses and songs from the year. It was great to see the kids up front praising God through song, wiggles, drama and more. If only all people praised God so freely and with so much joy.

Our time here in Brookings has been a great journey and I have been truly touched by the children at this church. They have shared their faith and helped me to experience my faith in different ways. After all, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Luke 18:17) I pray that you are able to experience this childlike faith and that your hearts are happy. Take care and God bless.

Date: 6/23/2007

Submitted by: Jenn Albert

Journal Entry:

When I found out that we were visiting the area of my alma mater, I was uber excited. You have to understand that my college experience was filled with joy and frustration and growing and so many different things, and I often find myself pining for the "good ol' days." Yep, only two years out, and I've already begun referring to college as if it were in the far distant past. It was a blessing to see some friends in the area, to share some of my experiences with them, and, in the process, to realize, myself, the way God has been working around me and through me.



Jenn Albert

I wonder sometimes, looking back on life, if I was properly motivated in some areas. This question in particular comes from

spending time in Moline at First Congregational Church. During college, I was so totally enthralled with contemporary praise music, that I wouldn't really even consider a church which didn't have some kind of praise band up front for a service. Looking back, I think I missed out on some really great congregations because of my newfound zest for, as I call it, "rocking out for God." First Congregational is one of those places. I have been so absolutely blessed by the people we have come into contact with this week, and have learned so much about what it means to love like Christ.

This week has indeed been an adventure, from a Renaissance fair to the wild ride of Avalanche Ranch, dressing up as pirates for Pirates of the Caribbean 3 to chasing preschoolers around a playground as the horrible, feared tickle monster. I'm glad to have some more reasons to visit the Quad Cities in the future.

-jenn.
