

Parish Happenings

May 2017

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Why We Read the Bible at Men's Fellowship, Women's Circle, Session, Mission, Spiritual Formation and Every Other Meeting at LVPC

The recent Fuller Magazine (published by the seminary where I received my Master of Divinity degree) was themed *Reading Scripture Globally*. Along with many fascinating and challenging articles about reading scripture in cross cultural contexts there was a small article, by Joel B. Green,* in which he very succinctly challenges us with the importance of reading scripture as a "practice."



Although we don't all always hear the same thing in a given passage of scripture we can claim common ground in the belief that scripture forms and shapes us. We can and do learn from one another and we are formed by the practice of listening carefully to what others gathered around the bible are hearing. This is the very reason we began our Faith and Politics conversation by reading scripture together.



One of the lessons I've learned, from both my sabbatical silent retreat at a Jesuit retreat center and the ongoing work I'm doing with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (founder of the Jesuits), is the value of integrating the practice of prayer and reading scripture. Many of the prayer practices favored by Ignatius could be connected to Green's six suggestions. In particular his third suggestion to "read slowly." When we take the time to read scripture slowly, prayerfully, and with an openness to deep contemplation we make space for the Holy Spirit to form us – sometimes in surprising ways.

Rather than try and summarize a perfectly written article I've chosen to include it in this newsletter. At least five of his six suggestions apply directly to our formation as a congregation and community of God's people. For the past few years our session has been working on reading scripture together for just the reasons that Joel Green discusses in his article.

One of my unstated goals for our congregation is to see us more deeply immersed in reading scripture together. I hope you'll move on

from this short cover article to Green's deeper look at the role the "practice" of reading scripture has in our becoming the people of God.

* Joel B. Green is provost, dean of the School of Theology, and professor of New Testament interpretation at Fuller Seminary. He has written or edited nearly 50 books (one of which is my favorite commentary on the Gospel of Luke) and has 12 years of pastoral ministry experience.

Cultivating the Practice of Reading Scripture

Joel B. Green

Christian Formation and Discipleship

While teaching at a conference some years ago, I was startled when a participant announced that he could not imagine how any Republican could claim to take the Bible seriously. Not long afterward, I witnessed a repeat performance in another setting, except in this case we were told that Republicans alone read Scripture correctly. This reminds me of what I imagine to be a first-century “battle for the Bible”: Pharisees, Christ-followers, and Sadducees, all reading the same Scriptures but reading them quite differently, and reaching diverse conclusions about the nature of faithfulness to God. How can this be?

Clearly, a lot has to do with our formation as readers of Scripture and not only with the words written on the page. This underscores the importance of reading Scripture as a “practice,” since the idea of “practice” assumes circularity: Formed by our reading of Scripture, we become better readers of Scripture. This is not because we become better skilled at applying biblical principles. The practice of reading Scripture is not about learning how to mold the biblical message to contemporary lives and modern needs. Rather, the Scriptures yearn to reshape how we comprehend our lives and identify our greatest needs. We find in Scripture who we are and what we might become, so that we come to share its assessment of our situation, encounter its promise of restoration, and hear its challenge to serve God’s good news.

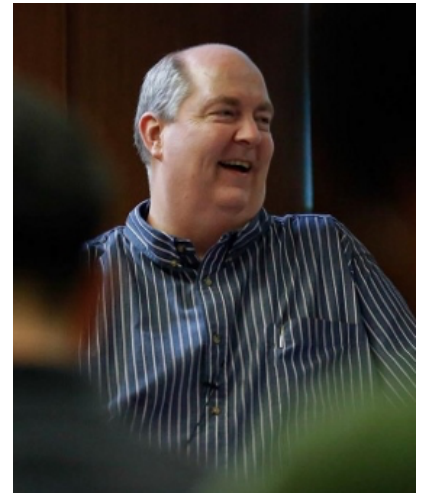
Paradoxically, perhaps, cultivating the practice of reading Scripture first prioritizes Christian formation more generally. This is because there is no necessary, straight line from reading the biblical materials to reading them Christianly; sharply put, one can be “biblical” without being “Christian.”

When Jesus criticizes two disciples on the Emmaus Road for their failure to believe what the prophets had spoken, the problem was not their inability to hear the prophets or take them seriously. Jesus asked, “Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:27, CEB). “Of course it was necessary!” we might say, but the question remains, which prophets actually document this necessity? “Isaiah 53,” we might respond, but we would then need to acknowledge that we say can say this only because we have learned to read in just this way. After all, Isaiah 53 never mentions the Messiah, and Jesus’ contemporaries were unaccustomed to thinking of Isaiah’s Servant as a suffering Messiah. The problem faced by Jesus’ disciples was their lack of the cognitive categories required for making sense of the Scriptures in this way. They needed more than a commonsense reading of a biblical text. That Isaiah spoke of Jesus was something they had to learn. Accordingly, Luke records: “Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures...” (Luke 24:27, CEB).

This example speaks to the integrated nature of Christian practices, and especially to the ways those practices shape us as readers of Scripture. Christian formation helps us to read the Scriptures Christianly. So it is worth reflecting on the difference it makes to our reading of Scripture that we regularly recite the Apostles’ Creed. What difference does it make to our reading of Scripture that we meet each other repeatedly at the Lord’s Table, that we speak often with people who do not share our faith, that we who share a common faith in Christ eat together regularly, and that we pray to Jesus as though he were God? (And what difference does it make when we do not engage in such practices as these?)

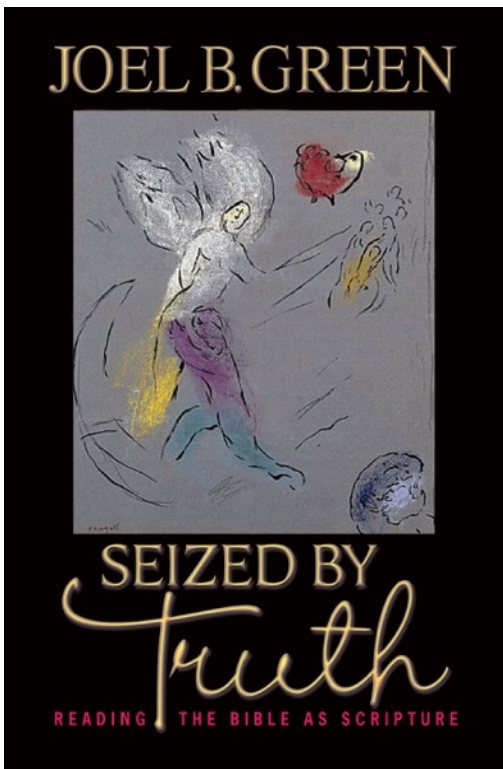
Of course, reading Scripture is itself a central Christian practice, so we may ask how we cultivate this practice among the others – a question I take up more fully in *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Abingdon, 2007). Here let me make six suggestions.

(1) Reading Scripture is not enough. Theological and ecclesial formation inform and are informed by reading Scripture. Communities that put Scripture into practice through seeking the Holy Spirit, confessing sins and forgiving each other, praying for the sick, and offering good news to others find themselves being prepared to read Scripture.



(2) *Read and read again.* It is easy to turn time with Scripture into a game of “Twenty Questions”: how to have a happy relationship, learn financial faithfulness, or whatever. A sharp line can be drawn between utilitarian approaches that treat the Bible as a how-to-manual or a database for my addressing my questions, and the formation of Scripture-shaped minds that understand God and God’s creation through Scripture-shaped lenses. The latter requires patient, deliberate reading – reading, as it were, for no good reason but for the sake of having our dispositions and reflexes shaped by Scripture.

(3) *Read slowly.* Those of us who find ourselves moving back and forth between blogs, email, texts, news outlets, and social networks on our smartphones and tablets need different rules of engagement for reading Scripture. This practice concerns not how fast I can get through today’s reading, but how slowly, combining prayer, reading, and contemplation. To crib Jesus’ words, “Let these words sink into your years” (Luke 9:44, NRSV).



(4) *Involve yourself.* If the last century or more has imagined education as the process of stepping back to observe, assess, and attain knowledge, then this practice calls for different habits. This learning is self-involving, a means by which we hear God’s address. Why do we resist this text but embrace that one? What does it mean that we are included in the community of God’s people addressed by this text?

(5) *Read together.* Inasmuch as scriptural texts have their origins and purpose deeply rooted in the community of God’s people, we ought to find ways to read in community. By this I refer to the importance of study groups where our assumptions and views are tested, but even more I mean to counter the temptation to imagine that Scripture is simply for me and about me, or that I am tasked with determining its significance apart from the larger church, historically and globally.

(6) *Refuse to distinguish between reading the Bible for a class or sermon and reading the Bible for Christian formation.* We come to Scripture for different reasons at different times, but it would be a mistake to imagine that preparing an exegesis paper or sermon required qualitatively different protocols. Should we leave our theological and ecclesial locations behind when doing exegesis? Should work with Scripture in sermon preparation bypass the reservoir of my regular reading practices? Should the crises that arise as I encounter God’s voice in Scripture not shape my reading of these texts with and for others?

As with Christian practices in general, so with developing scriptural patterns of faith and life, the destination is the journey itself. This is a journey in which we discover that the work of scriptural reading is not about transforming an ancient message into a modern application but the transformation of our lives through Scripture. The Bible does not present us with texts to be mastered, then, but with a Word intent on shaping our lives, on mastering us.

Originally Published at:

<http://www.catalystresources.org/cultivating-the-practice-of-reading-scripture/>

EVENING CIRCLE

Women's Evening Circle Bible study will be held on May 17th in the Getz library. We are studying Horizon Bible Study "Who Is Jesus, What a Difference a Lens Makes", Lesson three "According to Luke". Key Scripture: Luke 4:16-21; Acts 2:22-24. Key Idea: "Rejected by his own, Jesus, prophet of God, turns the world upside down with his teachings". Please come and join in with study and fellowship.

"FAITH AND POLITICS"

It is never too late to join us for our continuing conversations exploring the intersection between faith and politics. We began with scripture, specifically the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7, and discussed what we as Christians are called to stand for in our world. Building on that foundation we discussed how we get our news, what sources inform us, and how we approach any given political topic. We will begin moving toward specific issues that the group is passionate about in future discussions. Of highest importance will be the emphasis on respect so we can create an environment where honest questions can be asked, with the ultimate goal being to draw us as a Christian community closer to the heart of God and communicate that to our community and world. **We will continue meeting every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month from 11:45-12 and ending at 1:00.**

MISSION NEWS

Film Series Update

We are having a screening of "**Homeless In Hunterdon**" on **Friday, May 5th at 7 p.m.** A representative from Family Promise of Hunterdon County will be joining us. Please consider participating in this event as we continue our journey of spiritual discernment. The film is thirty minutes in length and chips, salsa and guacamole will be provided. In addition, our next film, "**Gender Revolution: A Journey With Katie Couric**" will be shown on **Friday, June 9th at 6:30 p.m.** Mark your calendars!

Special Offering: One Great Hour of Sharing

The Mission Team has decided to give a portion of our undesignated funds to the Special Offering to match what our congregation has already given. This year's offering, in part, helps deal with mass incarceration and racial injustice. Since we have been discussing this very same topic, we thought it was a perfect opportunity to give a little more. LVPC will be donating \$600. Thank you to all who supported this offering.

APPALACHIA SERVICE PROJECT (ASP) HAPPENINGS

ASP Work Trip

On May 7th (rain date May 21st), we will have a **CAR WASH** in our back parking lot after church! We urge all of our members to take part in

this fund raiser before you leave that day. Meet additional volunteers from Chester Community Presbyterian Church and other BYG churches, and experience first-hand the enthusiastic work done by our adults and youth.

ASP Prayer Cards

Our Appalachia Service Project trip this year is July 15-22 to Harlan, KY. We are again offering Prayer Cards featuring our volunteers. This time there is one group photo – we're being environmentally "green," saving paper/trees! We will be selling the cards for \$10 each during May and June before and after church. Our congregation has always been generous in supporting our volunteers financially, and these Prayer Cards have been a very successful fundraiser. We encourage you to think about buying "shares" in the trip, since there is not a whole collection of different cards to purchase this year. All of us cannot go on the trip, but we all can be a part of this life-changing mission opportunity. Our volunteers help make homes warmer, safer and drier for people in Appalachia. In addition, volunteers lives are changed as they see and experience life in a totally different area of our country. We have 29-30 volunteers going, which is more than we've ever had before! Each volunteer pays \$150 towards their trip and then attempts to raise \$400 more. The money goes toward travel expenses, food, and building supplies. The cards

can remind you to pray for our volunteers before the trip, while they travel to and from Appalachia, and while they work. We urge you to continue your generous support by donating as much as you can to this huge undertaking. Checks can be made out to "LVPC" with "ASP" on the memo line; your donations are tax deductible. Thank you!

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual Formation of Children

During the Lenten Season, the children talked about the Easter story in their classrooms. The 4/5 class made Resurrection gardens on Palm Sunday. The children made pinwheels and flowers



at the art table on Easter Sunday, and then used them to decorate the cross in the front of the church.

The Sunday School teacher retreat is May 20, in the Parish Hall from 9 to noon. Please mark your calendars. If you are interested in teaching SS in the future, join us for the



retreat, and find out about our SS program. Also, let Kim Rodgers or Linda Stetler know.

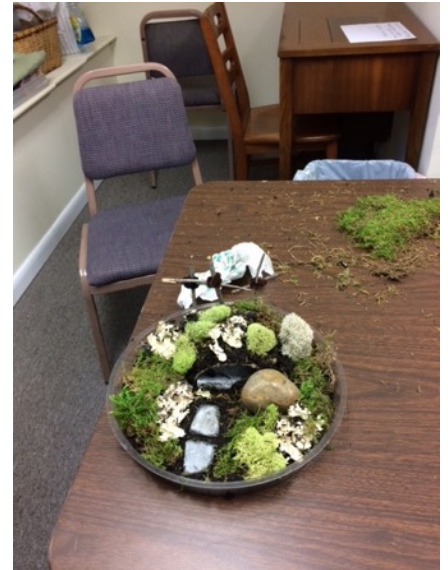
If you are interested in working on costuming for next year's Christmas play, let Linda Stetler know. This summer, we need to work on repair and laundering the existing costumes.

The Spiritual Formation Team is looking for new members. We meet once a month in the



evening and plan the programs for our SS, youth groups, and children's spiritual development. If you

are interested talk with any team member: Natalie Gast, Blake Haggerty, Kim Rodgers, Linda Stetler.



Youth Group

High school students...Join us on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month as we spend time looking at issues of faith through scripture and discussion in order to dive deeper into what it means to have a relationship with God. Yummy dessert and lots of laughs are always included. We meet at 7 p.m. at either the Rodgers or the Gasts. Feel free to invite friends. **Our May meeting dates are 5/5 and 5/19.**

Men's Bible Study

It's always a great time to join our Men's Fellowship Group! We are pausing in Chapter 15 in the Gospel of Luke and are reading *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. We meet on Saturday mornings from 8-9:30 a.m.

If you have questions, are interested, have questions or would like a study guide see Pastor Chad.

We are looking for church members (of any age) who would like to contribute something to our newsletter. Share your experiences, your memories and your hopes for LVPC. We want to hear from you.

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Claudia Gilbert: Church Administrator

Phone: 908-832-2933

E-mail: lowervalleyipc@embarqmail.com

Website: www.lowervalley.org

Office hours: W-F, 8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Session Members

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Kim Rodgers: 892-0141/chadandkimrodgers@gmail.com

Karen Newman (clerk): 638-4332/karennewman@embarqmail.com

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
May 7	Judy Eckwielen	Renee and Jeff Ollerenshaw	Wendy Garcia Warren Newman Renee Ollerenshaw Judy Eckwielen
May 14	John Leddie	The El-Zahr Family	
May 21	Nancy Knight	OPEN	
May 28 – Family Worship	Lisamarie Boehm	The Rodgers Family	
June 4 – Worship in the Park	Warren Newman	The Donlon Family	Wendy Garcia Warren Newman OPEN OPEN
June 11	OPEN	Judy Eckwielen Ed Getz	
June 18	Warren Newman	Judie and Adam Ambielli	
June 25	Lisamarie Boehm	Renee and Jeff Ollerenshaw	

**Please let the office know if you
are able to serve in one of the
OPEN spots**

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
445 County Road 513
Califon, NJ 07830
May 2017

The Vision of our Church

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church is a community of believers who worship God in word and deed, nurture each other through prayer, friendship, and education, and seek to serve others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our four areas of ministry are faith development, caring for each other, outreach ministry and supporting ministry.