

# Kindling: A Bible Study 2015

A resource for groups and individuals

Each study in this series from 2015 issues of *Canada Lutheran* offers a biblical starting place addressing an issue your family of faith may be facing, some kindling where warmth and light might be welcome. Please feel free to download this material and use it in whatever way is most appropriate to your situation.

*Canada Lutheran* introduced *Kindling: A Bible Study* in January 2013 in response to three distinct movements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

First, our readers asked for material they could use for spiritual enrichment, to inspire deeper faith.

Second, our denomination embraced National Bishop Susan Johnson's *Call to Spiritual Renewal* with excitement.

Third, many of our congregations are facing circumstances that tax their spiritual and emotional resources, and we want to build up the vitality and health of our churches.

The series was written by **Rev. Daranne Harris**, pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, Calgary.

.....  
Rev. Daranne Harris: [pastor.daranne@hopelutheran.ca](mailto:pastor.daranne@hopelutheran.ca)

*Canada Lutheran*: [editor@elcic.ca](mailto:editor@elcic.ca)

## WHAT'S INSIDE

Jan/Feb 2015 .....	Aging Well With Simeon and Anna
March 2015 .....	Turning Toward God with the Widow at Zarephath
April/May 2015 .....	Liberated Like Peter
June 2015.....	Thinking About Refugees With Priscilla and Aquila
July/Aug 2015 .....	Saying "No" with the Spies at Rahab's House
September 2015.....	Living in Community
Oct/Nov 2015.....	Taking a Stand for the Excluded
December 2015.....	Waiting With Zechariah

# Aging Well with Simeon and Anna

Our society is a mix of messages on the topic of growing older. On one hand aging affords some respect and sought after wisdom. For others senior years are lonely and one doesn't feel as purposeful as years past. Trying to halt signs of wrinkles or physical and mental decline is big business. Yet, over and over again in the stories of God's people we see God working through men and women of advancing years.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Luke 2:25–38

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

*And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was*

*being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

*There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

## Where is this coming from?

Simeon and Anna encounter the holy family during the Jewish custom of presenting the first-born son in the temple about six weeks after birth. This recalls the Passover when first-born sons were spared death. It acknowledges that the child belongs to God. Note that we hear nothing of this presentation ceremony. It is completely overshadowed by the proclamation of Simeon and Anna.

Simeon is an elderly man who was faithfully waiting. He is deeply in tune with the Holy Spirit. As righteous and devout, he seeks God and has integrity. His pursuit of the consolation of Israel refers to God's Old Testament promises about the restoration of Israel through the coming of her Messiah. By the power of the Spirit he recognizes Jesus as this Messiah.

Anna is an elderly widow. While there may have been pressure for her to remarry, she chose instead to devote her life to prayer and fasting. She, like Simeon also recognizes Christ as the Messiah and uses her capacity as prophetess to spread this news.

## What does it have to do with us?

The aged faithfulness of Simeon and Anna play key roles in the revelation of Christ as the Messiah.

Simeon's experience reminds us that God is steadfast. God does not tire of keeping God's promises. God kept God's promise to let Simeon see Jesus before he died. God follows through, even into old age.

Simeon's exchange with Mary is an act of blessing. In it we see empathy passed from the older to younger generation. Wisdom and experience acquired with age position us to reach out and share with those around us.

Anna has been served well by her lifetime of earnest worship, prayer and fasting. She remains vibrant into the eighth decade of life when the fate of widows was often unkind. We might consider how spiritual practices could enrich our own aging.

Finally, age was not a barrier for Anna to spread God's good news of the Messiah come among God's people. Age need not stand in the way of witnessing to God's light and love in our world today. 

Daranne Harris is pastor at Hope, Calgary.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

Other characters of the Bible we may look to for aging inspiration include: Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:1–18:15), Joshua (Joshua 23), Caleb (Joshua 14:6–15), Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:5–25, 57–79). Are you familiar with their stories?

# Turning Toward God with the Widow at Zarephath

Lent is a season of turning around or reorientation. Traditional spiritual practices like fasting, prayer and caring for the neighbour are ways of redirecting our focus and trust toward God. As the widow of Zarephath experienced, God's love and provision are often revealed in these times of simplicity, sacrifice and care for others.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: 1 Kings 17:10–24

*So [Elijah] set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah*

*said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah...*

## Where is this coming from?

In ancient times the death of a husband brought extreme hardship for the surviving wife and children. They were often left with little means to provide for themselves. Widows scraped by on what they could gather for themselves. And they relied on the generosity of others. The plight of the widow at Zarephath is further compounded by drought in the region where she lived. Starvation is becoming an ever-present reality for her and her son.

The interaction between Elijah and the widow at Zarephath is notable. It crossed cultural boundaries. She was Phoenecian, a Gentile. Elijah, a Jewish man, was a stranger. His God was not her god. When the story begins the widow had no idea Elijah was one who condemned abuses of power, performed miracles or healed the sick, the roles often played by prophets in ancient Israel.

## What does it have to do with us?

The widow's trust in Elijah's reassurance that God will provide can be a model for our own trust in God's provision for us. We are reminded that it is not what we do to earn our favour with God.

The Gentile widow had no claim with this God of the Israelites. She had no social status. She didn't even have her health. Yet God found her worthy. God finds us worthy of God's love and care as well, regardless of our personal circumstances.

The widow at Zarephath was open to the possibility that God would work in her life as Elijah described. This may be easier to do when you are in desperate circumstances because you have little to lose. However, we might consider how this openness can be cultivated when we aren't so despairing.

In certain ways this season of Lent helps us to do that. Paring back some of the excess creates space for God and others around us. A self-imposed simplicity or sacrifice can reorient how we are living. Likewise an experiment in generosity might challenge us out of our comfort zone and expand our outlook. Being open to God allows for us to see and receive how God is working in and through us. 

Daranne Harris is pastor at Hope, Calgary.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

- 1) The widow and her son were down to their last meal when God met them in their need. Have you ever felt like you had nothing left? What happened?
- 2) Think of a time when you put your trust in God. What was that experience like?

# Liberated Like Peter

The life of the disciple Peter reminds us that being set free by God's grace is twofold. Christ does not only liberate us from our sin and the darkness and brokenness it causes. Jesus also frees us for living in a way that reflects and inspires this God-given healing and wholeness for those around us.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Matthew 16:13–19

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

## Where is this coming from?

Peter was one of Jesus' first followers and among the inner circle of Christ's disciples. He is eager and often impulsive. He's insightful, but there are frequent examples in Scripture where he jumps in and doesn't get it quite right. (See Matthew 14:28–31—he takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink, Matthew 16:22–23—he tells Jesus he must not die and Jesus rebukes him, Matthew 17:4—he wants to build three dwellings and stay at the mountain top, Matthew 26:33–35, 69–75 and John 13:37–38, 18:17, 25–27—he says he'd never deny Jesus and then later does.)

Despite all these missteps, Jesus does not give up on Peter. He continues to guide and redirect him. In this passage from Matthew,

Jesus affirms how God is working in Peter and the important role Peter will play in the future of the church. One of Christ's final actions is absolving Peter of his denial during the events of the crucifixion and reaffirming Peter's ministry (John 21:15–19).

In the book of Acts we read how this ministry unfolds. Peter's actions bring the message of Jesus to many people. (See Acts, chapters 2–5, 8, 10, 12).

## What does it have to do with us?

Peter's life is an example of how God works to draw us into God's love and equip us to further spread it in our world. We need not be perfect, merely open to God working in and through us.

While Peter went on to be an apostle bringing numerous new converts to Christianity, this is just one of many ways God works through us to spread the message and experience of grace. In our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada's call to spiritual renewal, prayer, scripture reading, enriching faith through study, worshiping in community, serving others, and giving from what was first given to us are added to Peter's practice of sharing the good news. Each of these actions offer ways for us to live into the freedom of God's grace by deepening our relationships with God and those around us.

These deepened relationships build on the faith-filled witness of Peter and countless others who have gone before us. Liberation from what binds and oppresses the people of our modern world is still needed. Ours is the opportunity to live into the grace of God given to us so that we can be instruments of God's grace for others. 

Rev. Daranne Harris is pastor at Hope, Calgary.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

- 1) As a recipient of God's grace, what do you feel free from? What have you been freed for, or what opportunities does this freedom open up?
- 2) In addition to being the theme of the ELCIC National Convention in 2015, *Liberated by God's Grace* is the main theme for The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) activities around the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. It will also be the theme of the 2017 Assembly of the LWF in Windhoek, Namibia. Follow the conversation at [2017.lutheranworld.org](http://2017.lutheranworld.org).

# Thinking About Refugees With Priscilla and Aquila

Recent figures indicate over 51.2 million people are currently displaced because of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations. The plight of refugees is not new. People have fled persecution and been displaced throughout the ages. The story of Priscilla and Aquila, like so many stories of God's people in Scripture, tells of new beginnings for those who have been displaced.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Acts 18:1–3, 18–19a, 24–27a

*After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. ... After staying there for a considerable time, Paul said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut, for he was under a vow. When they reached Ephesus, he left them there. ... Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him.*

## Where is this coming from?

Priscilla and Aquila were among the Jews expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. The married couple took refuge in Corinth where they worked as tentmakers.

Paul came to them in Corinth, stayed with them and eventually converted them. This deepened faith prompted Priscilla and Aquila to become some of the first missionaries of the early church. They set out from Corinth with Paul and resettled in Ephesus. Here they continued to nurture others in the faith including Apollos, a dynamic

up-and-coming preacher. Paul continues to write of them in his letters. They are mentioned six times in the New Testament (Acts, Romans 16:3–4, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19).

According to the Apostolic Constitutions (eight treatises on early Christian discipline, worship and doctrine) Aquila was later ordained a bishop of Asia Minor (in modern Turkey). Tradition has it they died as martyrs. They likely were never repatriated to their home in Rome.

## What does it have to do with us?

The sheer number of refugees and ongoing conflicts in certain parts of the world make addressing the issue daunting. The story of Aquila and Priscilla reminds us that the refugee story is an individual or personal one. When we look at the lives of individuals we see opportunity for transformation and hope. A successful tentmaking business indicates that Priscilla and Aquila were able to connect with the community in some way. They were accepted and supported even though they were foreigners. We might consider how we relate to strangers in our midst.

In the story, Priscilla and Aquila exhibit confidence and desire to contribute to the wider mission of the church. They have grown in their understanding of Jesus' ministry among God's people and pass that on. Their relationship with others is not one of dependence, but that of self-giving service. I wonder how we might encourage and support such confidence and independence among those from far-off places who are making new beginnings among us. Dependence need not be the end of the story. The stories of Aquila and Priscilla and of many of our own families remind us of this. ☑

Rev. Daranne Harris is pastor at Hope, Calgary.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

One of Canadian Lutheran World Relief's primary areas of focus is work with refugees. You can read more about this work and how you might get involved at [clwr.org](http://clwr.org).

June 20 is World Refugee Day. Here are some suggestions to mark it:

- pray for the needs of refugees and displaced people;
- watch the movie *The Good Lie*, a story of Sudanese refugees who are resettled in the United States; or
- organize or participate in a Canadian Council for Refugees' Walk with Refugees in your community—visit [ccrweb.ca/en/refugee-walk](http://ccrweb.ca/en/refugee-walk) for more information.

# Saying “no” with the Spies at Rahab’s House

**M**any will readily agree that human beings are not commodities that can be bought and sold. However this remains a widespread practice in our world. Human trafficking occurs when people are recruited and deceived, disempowered and then unable to get away from exploitive situations. The story of Rahab reminds us that we have a role to play in saying “no” to humans for sale.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Joshua 2:1–21, 6: 22–25

...So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. ... Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land.” But the woman took the two men and hid them. ... Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us. ... The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. ...” The men said to her, “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land. ...”

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the prostitute’s house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.” So the young men who had been spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her. ... They burned down the city, and everything in it. ... But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. ...

## Where is this coming from?

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness the Israelites are preparing to enter the promised land. Moses has died and Joshua was leading the people. Jericho is strategically located and needs

to be conquered if the Israelite mission is to succeed.

Rahab and her family live in the city’s outer wall. It is likely they operated an inn for travellers to the bustling city. Besides her infamous profession, the flax drying on her rooftop was probably used to make linen cloth. This was another source of livelihood.

The Canaanites of Jericho had many gods. Rahab recognizes though that the God of Israel is no ordinary Canaanite deity. This motivates her interaction with the two Israelite spies.

## What does it have to do with us?

Rahab’s story is a dramatic one. It reminds us that God’s grace washes over boundaries of gender, profession and faith. No one, including each of us, is beyond the reach of God’s grace.

Some might be quick to label Rahab the prostitute as a sinner or maybe a victim. Unfortunately this continues to disempower her. What if we saw her as the protagonist and agent she is when she leverages her own power to escape the challenges of being an unmarried woman holding down multiple jobs?

Additionally we often overlook the role of the spies in this story. It is significant that they held up their end of the agreement even when they no longer required Rahab’s protection. In doing so, they say no to power imbalance and the potential for exploitation. We might consider how we too value others beyond their usefulness to us. 

Rev. Daranne Harris is pastor at Hope, Calgary.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

Exploitation and modern-day slavery affect many in our world. Often it is hidden and secretive.

Awareness prompts us to ask questions about how we contribute to this.

- 1) Did you know the garment industry is plagued by exploitation in the name of cheap fashion? Workers are taken advantage of through forced labour, long hours for little or no pay and a lack of safety measures. Do you know where and by whom your clothes are made?
- 2) Are you aware that in the last three decades there have been almost 1,200 police recorded incidents of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls across Canada? The impacts of colonization, residential schools, involvement with child welfare and intergenerational trauma are factors that put Aboriginal women and girls at risk. How do our conversations and interactions reflect values that affirm life for these often marginalized and forgotten women?

# Living in Community

**U**buntu is an African idea of interconnectedness. Some say the meaning is captured in the phrase: “I am what I am because of who we all are.” It asserts that to be fully human we cannot exist in isolation. We are shaped by our communities and we help shape them.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Luke 10:38–42

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

(See also *John 11:1–44* & *John 12:1–8*)

## Where is this coming from?

Martha, Mary and Lazarus are described in the Gospels as not only devout followers but also close friends of Jesus. There are three distinct encounters with the siblings captured in Scripture. It seems Jesus often visited their home in Bethany, which was walking distance from Jerusalem.

Martha was most likely the older sibling. She is the doer. Hospitality was an important cultural expression and she fulfills the woman's traditional role of making sure there was food and drink for guests in her home. She also speaks her mind, freely expressing lament and what she wants.

Mary might be better characterized as the thinker and connector. She steps outside cultural bounds by sitting with the men to be a part of Jesus' teaching and conversation. Actions, like that of pleading with Jesus that Lazarus would not have died if he had been there and anointing Jesus' feet, capture her heartfelt emotions.

Scripture does not tell us a lot about Lazarus. Without the mention of parents, one can imagine that he was the provider for the family. This magnifies the significance of his death.

## What does it have to do with us?

The stories of Martha, Mary and Lazarus remind us how communities rely on and are enriched by differences. While we often take Jesus' remark that Mary has chosen the better way to mean that we shouldn't be like Martha, it's important not to overlook the fact that someone still needed to prepare dinner for the guests. Jesus criticizes Martha's complaint that Mary is not helping her. He does not dismiss the work that Martha is doing.

It takes a variety of people with different skills and passions to accomplish some tasks well. Co-operation that harnesses our varied perspectives often leads to something more than any individual could do on his and her own. It also allows individuals to specialize and live into their unique gifts and passions.

One might imagine that Lazarus, as the male in the house, provided for his siblings while Martha lent her expertise in managing household affairs and Mary kept them connected to village goings on. A hundred years ago this kind of co-operation was seen in barn raisings or threshing bees when individuals in a community came together bringing their tools and resources to build or harvest.

In the information age of today, one might consider crowd-sourcing as an example. By using the Internet, groups and companies are tapping into the knowledge and experience of the public-at-large to solve complex problems or create better products.

Additionally I believe gathering together varying perspectives enriches our faith communities. Hymns from around the world add greater dimension to worship. Co-ordinating with numerous partners allows Canadian Lutheran World Relief to do more humanitarian work than they could ever do on their own. Diverse global understandings and experiences of God, given voice through activities of The Lutheran World Federation can help deepen our understanding of God and live more fully into our call to be God's people. 

**Rev. Daranne Harris is vice-president and chief mission officer for the Bethany Care Society in Calgary.**

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

- 1) How has or is your community shaping you?
- 2) What would be missing from your community if you were no longer part of it?
- 3) Who or what perspective might be brought into your community to enrich it?

# Taking a Stand for the Excluded

People are marginalized in many different ways. Sometimes it's because of widespread racism or economic disparity or geography. It can also happen simply because we like visiting with people we know instead of bringing a new person into the conversation. Noticing when people are excluded and doing something about it often takes courage. The five daughters of Zelophehad give us inspiration to take a stand when something isn't as it should be.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Numbers 27:1–11

*Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward... and they said, "Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers."*

*Moses brought their case before the LORD. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them. You shall also say to the Israelites, "If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. It shall be for the Israelites a statute and ordinance, as the LORD commanded Moses."*

For more of the story read **Numbers 36**.

## Where is this coming from?

The book of Numbers addresses a number of legal questions facing the Hebrew people in exile. The text spoke to issues of daily living and helped lay the foundation for the shape of community life together.

Inheritance and the role of women are the key issues of this passage. It is notable that the women are speaking in the assembly

and that each woman is named because this was not the norm. Their argument for women's inheritance was a plea for protection for the women of Israel.

It builds upon the belief that human beings are made in God's image. To wrong one another was to wrong God and jeopardizes the community. God's message through Moses affirms the value of women. A woman's role as daughter or wife is not a barrier to the rights and provisions of the community.

## What does it have to do with us?

There will be times in each of our lives when we are included and other times when we are excluded. Often we are more aware of the times when we are excluded because it unsettles us. We yearn to fit in or for things to be different.

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad is shaped by the community's relationship with God. It flows from the understanding that everything God creates has value. The sisters' bravery to ask for what they needed gives us courage to ask for what we need because we too are valued by God.

We might also find ourselves in a position to ask not only for personal needs, but also for the needs of others. From the security afforded by a position of belonging or being on the inside we can also be mindful of those who are marginalized or not included.

The daughters of Zelophehad had one another for support. Not everyone has this. It is in these circumstances that we can be advocates. Speaking up against injustice can be challenging. It takes nerve. Occasionally doing so risks our own exclusion. However, it also opens a path to restoring people's sense of worth and granting them the rights they deserve. 

**Rev. Daranne Harris is vice-president and chief mission officer for the Bethany Care Society in Calgary.**

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

- 1) Are you or have you been on the outside looking in? What would you want others to know about that experience?
- 2) Who is marginalized in your workplace or community? What might you do to advocate for or include them?

# Waiting With Zechariah

There is a lot of waiting going on these days. Many of us are waiting for the festivities of Christmas. Some are waiting for medical test results. Others may be waiting to head south to warmer temperatures. Or maybe you will wait even longer for winter to be over right here at home. Waiting is the time in between. It can be filled with excitement, anxiety and impatience. The story of Zechariah reminds us that God makes that journey of the in between with us.



By Rev. Daranne Harris

## THE PASSAGE: Luke 1:8–23

*Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. . . . Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. . . . He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."*

See also **Luke 1: 57–79**.

## Where is this coming from?

Zechariah was a descendent of Aaron and thus a member of the priesthood who presided over temple life. Given the arrangement of the priesthood, the task of kindling the incense in the sanctuary of the Lord, which Zechariah earned by chance, was perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Members of the priesthood were the upper class of society.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...?

- 1) Think of a time when you were waiting. Can you recall any signs that you were not alone on your journey?
- 2) What gives you strength when you are waiting?
- 3) Does the story of Zechariah encourage you to live your in-between time any differently?

While many priests were religious only in outward appearance, the phrase "righteous in the sight of God" tells us that Zechariah was different. His devotion for God was from the heart.

We do not know exactly how old Zechariah and Elizabeth were. However it is clear they were well beyond childbearing years. Barrenness was grounds for divorce. Yet Zechariah remained faithful to Elizabeth and the fate of having no heir.

## What does it have to do with us?

Zechariah's story reminds us that sometimes waiting is met with more waiting. Surely he and Elizabeth had been praying and waiting many years for a child. Then once told that they would be parents, they waited again until John was born.

The Jewish people had been waiting for a Messiah for so long. Then Jesus came. However, as we live into Christ's promise of new life, we still wait for all to be well, for the kingdom of God to fully envelop our lives and the world.

Waiting can be lonely. Zechariah was isolated when his speech was taken away. Yet God continued to provide signs that God was with Elizabeth and him during the months before John's birth. His muteness would be a daily reminder of the promise of the angel. Elizabeth's memory of John leaping in her womb at Mary's visit would make real this baby growing inside. We too often experience signs of God's presence with us.

While it would not have seemed like a gift, perhaps losing his voice proved purposeful for Zechariah. Silent space was created to prepare for the future and the new thing God was doing in his life. So often we want to escape or rush through the in-between time. Yet, maybe the in-between time has meaning, too. ☑

**Rev. Daranne Harris is vice-president and chief mission officer for the Bethany Care Society in Calgary.**