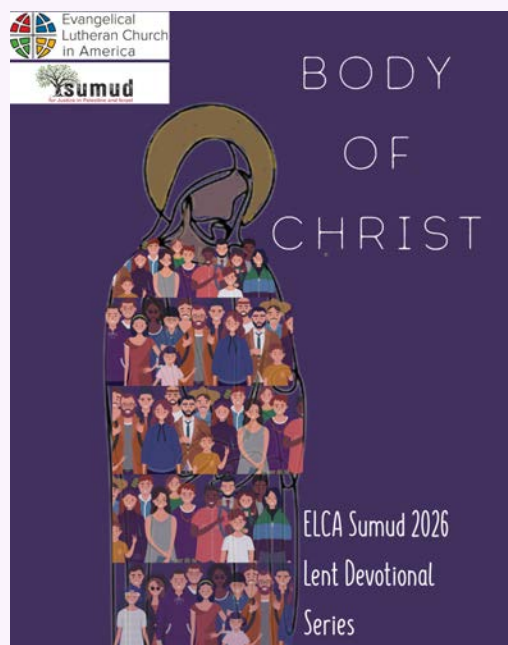


ELCA 2026 LENTEN SERIES: BODY OF CHRIST

Week 4: "Living Water"

Passage: John 4:5-42

Bishop Greg G. Busboom of the
Central/Southern Illinois Synod



We had just finished worship with the congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Beit Sahour, the village near Bethlehem that contains the Shepherd's Field. A Palestinian woman from the congregation approached me to express her deep thanks for our presence with them. "Please go back and tell our story," she pleaded. "What is the story you would like to me tell?" I asked. After a few moments of intense silence, she looked me straight in the eyes, raised her finger to my face, and, with the utmost intention, said "I will tell you a story."

She told me of her husband who had been battling cancer. The only place where her husband could receive treatment was Augusta Victoria Hospital in east Jerusalem, a hospital run by the Lutheran World Federation. Because they were Palestinian, traveling from their home in the West Bank to Augusta Victoria required a permit that they would be required to show at the heavily guarded checkpoint. On the day of her husband's appointment, with the proper permit in hand, they drove to the checkpoint. The guards at the checkpoint told her that she and the car could pass through but, if her husband wanted to pass, he would have to walk across. Her husband, weakened by his cancer, barely had the strength to stand, let alone walk. She pleaded with the guards, but they insisted. With every ounce of strength her husband could muster, he got out of the car and crawled on his hands and knees across the checkpoint. All the while, the guards laughed. To these guards, this woman and her husband were not human. They were mere objects.

When the Samaritan woman approaches Jesus in the gospel of John, Jesus sees her not as an object to be ridiculed or manipulated but rather as someone who is fully human, someone

with human agency, someone with a story to share and a gift to offer. “Give me a drink,” begins Jesus, honoring the fact that not only did Jesus have something to share with her, but she also had something to share with Jesus. Jesus, in all of his humanity, was just as dependent on her as she was on him. Jesus needed physical water. The Samaritan woman needed living water. Before serving her, Jesus recognizes that he needs to be served by her, not in a subservient kind of way, but in a way that honors what she brings to the well, even in all of her brokenness.

As members of the body of Christ, we recognize that all people, regardless of who they are, have been created in the image of God and are, therefore, not objects, but rather subjects, each with their own story, each with their own gifts, each with their own God-endowed dignity. Serving our neighbors, including our neighbors who are in need, begins with recognizing that they have gifts to share with us. Only when we recognize our dependence on others can we, with Christ-like love, share our gifts with them. Only when we are willing to receive from our neighbors, including those who are different than us, a drink of water, can we authentically share with them the living water that is Jesus.

Prayer

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, our Living Water, open our hearts to see and honor the stories of all God's children, including our Palestinian siblings, so that our thirst might be fully quenched in you. Amen.