



God's Gift of the Stranger Amongst Us – Study Leader's Copy

Prepared by Richard Collyer for the LCA Vic/Tas District African Ministry and Mission Reference Group 2014.

Introduction:

The intention of this study on understanding, celebrating and caring for God's Gift of The Stranger Amongst Us is to encourage investigation, reflection, conversation, prayer and action.

This study arose out of the work of Pastor Allan Heppner who, whilst the Pastor for Congregational Support in Victoria, took a very keen interest in working with African refugees and migrants in Victoria. After his death a Memorial Fund was established to honour his work and to provide funding so that it can continue. This Bible Study is one of those projects.

Understanding the ways and will of God and walking in faith are never solitary activities. As the body of Christ we support, challenge and encourage one another as we share our individual experiences and understanding of God's Word.

The Holy Spirit always does good guiding when Christians talk and listen to one another over God's Word. Hopefully the discussion will continue with families and friends after each study session.

Sometimes statements, questions and activities may seem a bit challenging or a struggle. The master teacher Jesus was often provocative, pushing his hearers to take a fresh look at traditional and unquestioned truths – this is often when new insights come and spiritual growth happens.

It is perhaps like the struggle Jacob had with the stranger. As Christians we have a unity in Christ. What we are often involved with is to struggle together to become a church with one will to serve Christ together.

We can struggle with fear until sunrise and in the morning limp away like Jacob, with fewer illusions and courage and hope in God, understanding the importance of struggle in the life of faith. Whenever we wrestle with God, we are in God's arms and already home.

The study is shaped around some key questions.

Key Questions:

1. What are some references to the word stranger in the Bible?
2. How are we like Jonah?
3. A stranger? Who? Me? Us?
4. How are aliens discussed in the Bible?
5. Now where to and who with?



1. What are some references to the word stranger in the Bible?

Participant notes:

In this opening session we will be broadly exploring some of the Biblical texts associated with the topic of God's Gift of the Stranger Amongst Us. We will be returning to some of these texts, sometimes in more detail, later in the study.

There are at least 40 references in the Bible to the word stranger. In the New Testament the Greek word "hospitality" translated means "love of strangers." Some of them are:

Genesis 23:4; Exodus 22:2; Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 33:34; Deuteronomy 10:18,19; Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; Deuteronomy 26:12; Deuteronomy 16:11; Jonah 2:4; Matthew 15:34; Matthew 25:35; Mark 15:34; Luke 10:29; Luke 24:13-16; Acts 10:34-35; Acts 16:15; Acts 17:7; Acts 18:1-3; Acts 28:7; Romans 12:4-5; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 2:11.

What do you think some texts might refer to?

How would you categorise them? (Your study leader will give you instructions on how to proceed.)

Which text that you have most clearly provides both a law and gospel message regarding strangers?

Leader Notes:

Resources: Bibles, cards printed with Bible texts as indicated below and printed over page.

How would you categorise them?

Divide into smaller groups (3/4) if necessary. Provide each small group with a selection (e.g. 10) of the texts, with each text printed on a separate card (see over page). Ask the group to categorise them into at least 3 groups of the study group's choosing. Make sure that each group has Mark 15:34 and an example from Jesus or the apostles relying in the help of strangers.

In small groups: Which text most clearly provides both a law and gospel message regarding strangers?

Mark 15:34 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

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Exodus 22:21 Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt

Exodus 23:9 Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

Leviticus 33:34 If a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God..

Deuteronomy 10:18,19 God loves the foreigners residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 14:28, 29 At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Matthew 25:35 I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Romans 12:4-5 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Mark 15:34 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Luke 24:13-16 and 30-32: Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about eleven kilometers from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him...³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Acts 10: 27-29 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

Jonah 1: 7b-10 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

Jonah 2:4 I (Jonah) said, 'I have been banished from your (the LORD'S) sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

Luke 10:27-29: He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

Deuteronomy 16:11 Rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name – you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows living among you.

Deuteronomy 26:10-12 ... and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. ¹¹ Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household.

¹² When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

Matthew 15:34 How many loaves do you have?

Acts 16:15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

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Acts 17: 6-7 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,"⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

Acts 18:1-3 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.² There he met 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,³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Acts 28:7 There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island (Malta). He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days.

2. How are we like Jonah?

Participant Notes:

Jonah worked for a God — a “transnational/global” God — whose reach well surpassed Jonah’s imagination. In this session, we will explore together the boundaries — both internal and external — that shape the way we seek to accompany others in mission. Together with Jonah, we discover what is necessary for this journey.

Which way to go?

Imagine that you work for a transnational/global company. Your company is transferring you to a new location, which is indicated on the piece of paper you will receive. On the back of the paper, write down the following:

A one-word reaction

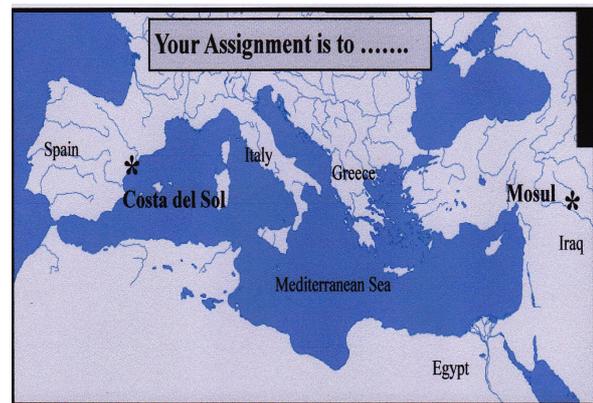
A one-sentence prayer

A question you would want to ask your employer

Leader Notes:

Resources: Bibles, job assignment cards.

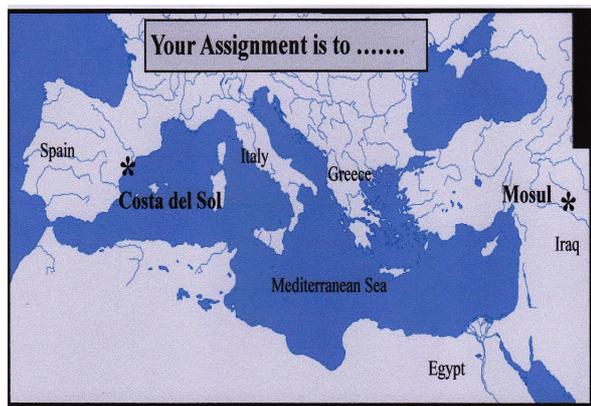
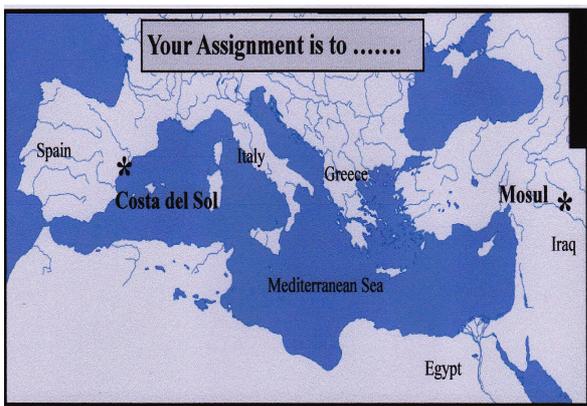
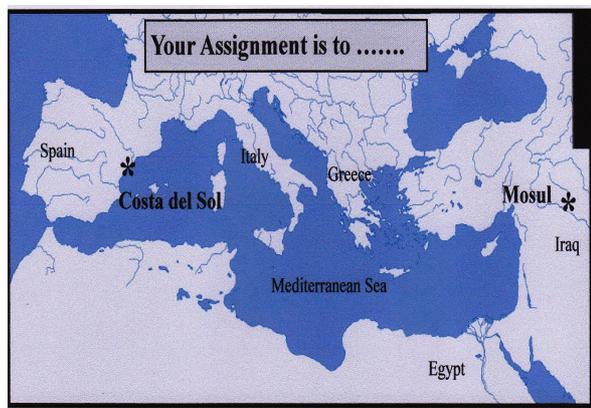
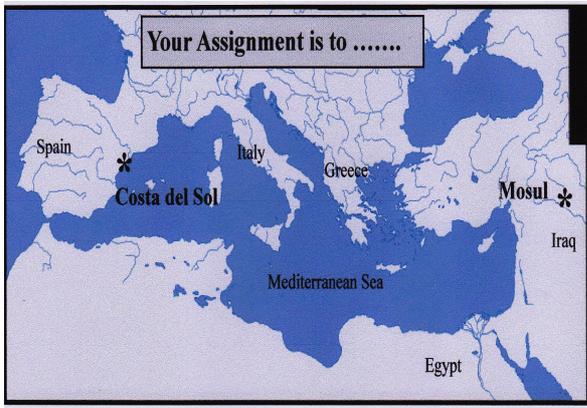
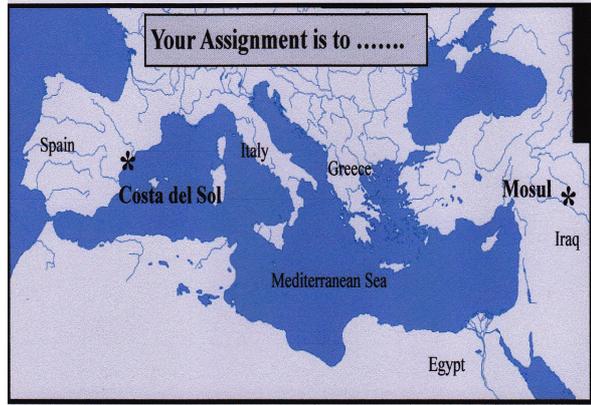
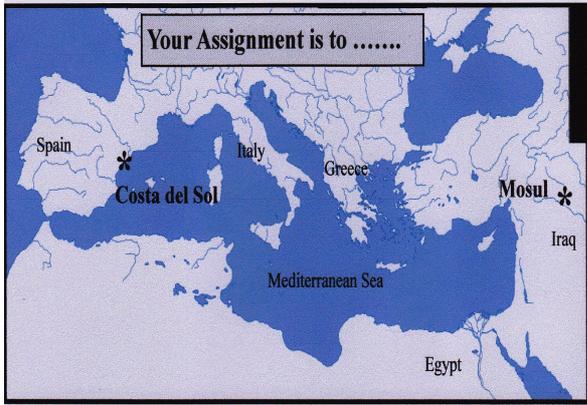
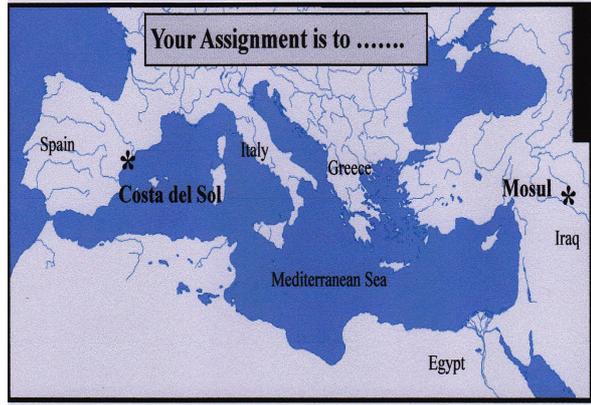
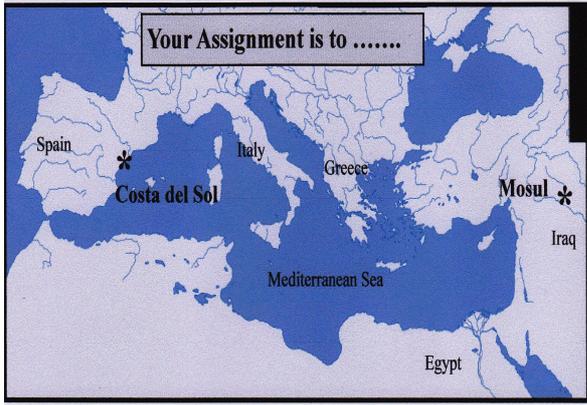
Using the image of a job assignment at a “transnational/global company,” this opening activity will help introduce Jonah’s “work assignment” and explore his reaction to it. Prepare a piece of paper — about a quarter-sheet size — for each participant. On half of the sheets write the words, “Mosul, Northern Iraq,” and on the other half, “Costa del Sol, Southern Spain”. It may have a map (see below) showing the location of the two places. These are the contemporary names of the two contrasting cities in Jonah’s story: Nineveh was near today’s Mosul in northern Iraq and Tarshish was long thought to be Tartessus, a coastal town near today’s vacation destination of Costa del Sol in southern Spain although some scholars now believe is to be Tarsus, St Paul’s home town in Cilicia (Acts 22.3). Either way Jonah took a sea journey as he thought ‘away from the presence of the Lord’, instead of making the land journey to Nineveh.



The book of Jonah seeks to challenge the prophet’s narrow vision and stereotypes of others. The likely contrasting reactions to the two “assignments” are intended to explore how our own perceptions and stereotypes about people and places can shape our understanding and approach to others.

Discussion:

- How does the location determine your reaction?
- What would you need to consider as you prepare for the move?
- How would you pack differently?
- How do you feel about the prospective success/outcomes of this imaginary transfer?



Pushing the boundaries

Participant Notes:

Read Jonah 1:1-3

- What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out for you?

There were plenty of “good reasons” for Jonah to refuse to go to Nineveh. The city was the capital of the Assyrian empire, and in Israel’s prophetic imagination, it often represented all that was counter to God and God’s people. The prophet Nahum describes it as a “city of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty” (Nahum 3:1).

- Who are the people or places that seem totally other, distant, to us?
- Who are the groups, nations or people who represent that “other” in our personal, communal or national imagination?

In Jonah’s imagination, it seems that both Nineveh and Tarshish are beyond the reach of God — one because of its evil ways, the other simply by its distant location.

- What parts of our lives, work or calling can feel beyond the reach of God?

Nineveh became the capital of Assyria toward the end of its mighty military empire. Throughout the biblical text, Nineveh’s fall to the Babylonian Empire (and later the Medes and Persians) became a symbol of God’s punishment of unjust oppressors (this was the focus of the entire book of Nahum). Jonah is being sent to it because of its “wickedness.” Tarshish, a city known for its ships and commerce (2 Chronicles 9:21) was a contrast to Nineveh both by the role it played in Israel’s imagination and by its physical location — completely in the opposite direction from where God was sending Jonah. In a way, Tarshish represented the farthest point Jonah would likely have been able to think of — a place far away from all of his troubles.

- In what ways do fear and stereotypes continue to divide the world between “us” and “them”?
- Where in the Lutheran order of service do we confess that we have turned away from God and his presence? In what ways, by our thoughts and actions, do we contradict our own sense of God’s presence?

Leader Notes:

God cared even for the Assyrian people in Nineveh. He cares for everybody. Jonah expected God to punish the people of Nineveh; not to show his mercy. God shows Jonah that his thoughts are wrong. The people of Israel should care for everyone and everything that God has made.

The book of Jonah is more a story than a regular prophetic book. It makes its point through extensive use of imagery (a shipwreck, a whale, a worm, a vine that grows overnight, etc.), humour (Jonah’s attempt to escape God, cattle wearing sackcloth and ashes, etc.), colourful language (God “hurling” a wind at the boat Jonah is on and Jonah suggesting that he be thrown overboard, a city that is three days walk across, etc.) and irony (it is the non-Hebrew sailors and people of Nineveh who listen to God rather than the prophet himself!). Participants may want to focus on the larger themes of the book and on questions about the historicity of the events it portrays. Jesus accepted it as a true story (Matthew 12:39-41). Dr Renner has stressed that it was a ‘prepared’ fish designed for the purpose by God.

Verse 8 - They wanted to know which god he served. (People believed that every god belonged to a particular place or people - see Genesis 28:16, where Jacob, at that time weak in faith, thought the Lord was restricted to his home area. Jonah’s God must be punishing him by sending the storm. See Psalm 107:23-30 for a wonderful description of a storm at sea.)

3.3 - The city itself was only 8 miles across. But the officials of Nineveh also governed the large district around the city. This was about 50 miles across. That would certainly take Jonah three days to walk across. (The people of Assyria had two words for ‘city’. One word meant the city itself. The other word included the much larger area around the city that the city officials governed.)

4. 9-11 God cares for everything that he has made. He cares for every person and he cares for every animal (Psalm 145:9). He is very patient. He will go to great trouble to try to persuade every person in every nation to trust in him and to follow him.

The word came a second time

Participant Notes:

Part 1: Read Jonah 3:1-3a

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out to you?

In chapter 1, Jonah refused to go to Nineveh. What has changed by chapter 3?

Jonah's "conversion" (change of direction) comes about through his time-out in "the belly of the fish," where he has a chance to do some thinking.

- Have you ever spent some time "in the belly of the whale"?
- Where are your "belly of the whale" places, the places where you get to think, pray and reflect?
- What are ways in which worship, devotional time or prayer help you to set time aside to think?

Part of the story in the book of Jonah is about the conversion of Nineveh — the invitation to heed God's call and change their ways. For that to happen, however, Jonah must first be converted himself.

- Are there ways in which we — the church — need to be "changed" before we can effectively invite others into a living relationship with God?

Part 2: Read Jonah chapter 2.

- What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out to you?
- What do these stirring words express about Jonah's experience?
- What transforming experiences, particularly those that occurred in the context of worship or prayer, have you experienced?
- What is the role of thanksgiving in his transformation?

Leader Notes:

You could have one person read Jonah chapter 2 out loud, or split the group in two and read it back and forth by verse, or invite people to read it in silence.

The language of the text portrays God actively supervising nature to bring Jonah to his senses. It is clear that Jonah completely miscalculated God's reach in God's world. Being forced into a "time out" in the belly of a fish, Jonah comes out a changed man. He expresses that transformation in the form of prayer and worship, partially captured in the prayer in chapter 2.

Many scholars have pointed out that the book of Jonah is as much about the conversion of Nineveh as it is about the conversion of Jonah. Pointing to the story of another unwilling prophet who, like Jonah, began his journey from the port city of Joppa, author Justo Gonzalez argues in his book "*Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes*" that the encounter between Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 — and the whole book of Acts — is as much a story about the conversion of new people to Christianity as it is about the blossoming of Christianity itself into a much broader movement. From the start, the Jesus we come to know in the Gospels saw his mission to the Jews primarily (though he did teach and help a good number of Gentiles as well) as just the first step towards world-wide outreach to the Gentiles. Compare, e.g. Matt 10:1-5 with Matt 28:16-20. Gonzalez writes: "Peter, Son of Jonah, receives a call in Joppa — where Jonah himself boarded a ship. Contrast between the clarity of the vision for Cornelius (10:3) to Peter's puzzlement (10:17) ... Have we stopped to reflect on how much the church learned through that mission?"

Like the story in Jonah, the story in Acts reminds us that the mission is at its best a mutual endeavour, where both the one bringing the message and the one receiving it experience a transformation.

Forty days more

Participant Notes:

Read Jonah 3:3b-5 and 4:1-11

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out for you?

“Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Eight words... that’s it. What do you think about Jonah’s sermon? What about Nineveh’s reaction?

In verse 4:2 Jonah quotes a very familiar Jewish belief about God: “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.” How do you think he sounded when he recited this central belief?

Read verse 4:2 out loud once more and try to infuse it with the tone and expression Jonah likely used when saying it. Can you hear Jonah’s ambivalence about God’s grace? Has there ever been a time when you have felt ambivalent about God’s grace?

Just like Jonah, people of faith have often been ambivalent about God’s grace. Discuss together the following verse from the hymn “There is a Wideness in God’s Mercy”(TIS 136):

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of our mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
But we make this love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
And we magnify its strictness
with a zeal God will not own.

Continuing with writer’s approach, God first “appoints” a bush to grow overnight and provide shade for Jonah and then, when Jonah most needs the bush, “appoints” a worm to attack the bush and kill it. What do you think of this portrayal of God?

Jonah is one of only two books in the Bible that ends with a question — the other is the book of Nahum. Re-read verses 4:10-11. What do they reveal about God? What do they challenge Jonah to consider?

Leader Notes:

Without an internal transformation, mission to those who are “other” is not sustainable. Our journey of accompanying a stranger must begin with a willingness to cross our own internal boundaries. Our own ability, as individuals or communities, to effectively engage others, requires that we attend to our own insecurities, that we explore our own faith and convictions. It does not mean that we need to have it all together before we begin, but simply that we recognize that we do not have it all together. It requires that we approach the other with the same level of grace that we are called to approach ourselves — and others — the way God sees us.

Jonah (8th century BC) is called a prophet in 2 Kings 14:25, which records his prophecy that God would restore Israel’s boundaries after the Syrian incursions under Hazael. Jonah’s book opens with the prophetic formula, ‘The word of the Lord came to Jonah’ (1:1; see also 3:1).

Jonah’s minimalist eight word sermon in Jonah 3:4 reflects his lack of trust and his contempt for those he has been sent to preach to. Nineveh’s response is completely surprising. Like the non-Hebrew sailors earlier in the book who are the ones who encourage Jonah to pray, the people of Nineveh are the ones portrayed in the book as actually acting as God would have them act. This story is an invitation to openness to the possibility that those we are sent to minister to often turn out to be our partners and our teachers! The story is also a reminder that in journeying with others it is important to take our faith and ourselves seriously, but not too seriously. The book of Jonah is read in its entirety, repenting cattle and all, as part of one of the services during the Jewish tradition of Yom Kippur — the Day of Atonement. In the midst of this very solemn commemoration, the book of Jonah provides some comedy relief lest we take ourselves too seriously.

Optional activities:

1. Even before the age of texts and tweets, Jonah generated a powerful 48-character message. In pairs, identify a ministry of your congregation you feel strongly about (worship, youth, social ministry, etc.). Write a text (160 characters) or a tweet (140 characters) that you feel effectively communicates your passion for that ministry to others.

2. Read the ending of the Books of Jonah and of Nahum.
What do you notice? What stands out?

In the discomfort that followed the loss of shade Jonah experiences a personal loss. God’s pleading question to Jonah asks if he can imagine the value of humans and creation. Jonah has reduced the value of others to the use he may have for them. Again, there is a challenge — and an invitation — to a more

sustainable way. Can we see those we approach as fully human? The book of Nahum is an “oracle” (prophetic speeches) against the city of Nineveh, and it provides a contrast to Jonah’s message about the city. These two are the only books in the Bible to end with a question, points out the Lutheran Study Bible: “While Nahum’s final question emphasizes Nineveh’s never ending cruelty (3:10), God’s final question to Jonah emphasizes God’s concern even for the people of the wicked city (4:11). Reading these two books together helps us to see more clearly that God is both just (Nahum) and merciful (Jonah) toward oppressors and oppressed alike.

The Good Samaritan

Participant Notes:

Read Luke 10:25-37

Examine this drawing illustrating part of the story.



What would you put in the drawing which comes **after** this one to clearly show that a stranger/foreigner helped the stricken man?

In what ways is the story of the Good Samaritan connected with the experience of Jonah?

How and where does the Lutheran order of divine service resonate with the understanding that Jesus initially comes to us as a stranger (Ephesians 2:19) and that we are strangers on this earth (Hebrews 11:13)?

3. A stranger? Who? Me? Us?

Participant Notes:

Each of us has in our minds a picture of our world as we see it. This applies to communities as well. We operate with hidden rules which guide our behaviour and outlook. Often we do not see it differently unless we come into contact with others of a different culture. Let's explore this together by investigating

- Cross cultural awareness
- Ethnic differences in a worldview
- Class differences in a worldview

3.1 Cross Cultural awareness

Note: Hofstede's material helps as a guideline for a better understanding of cultures. They describe national averages which apply to the population in its entirety. Hofstede's cultural dimensions enable users to distinguish cultural perceptions. They do not define individual personalities or determine behaviour.

What Do You See?

Picture 1.



Possible interpretations:

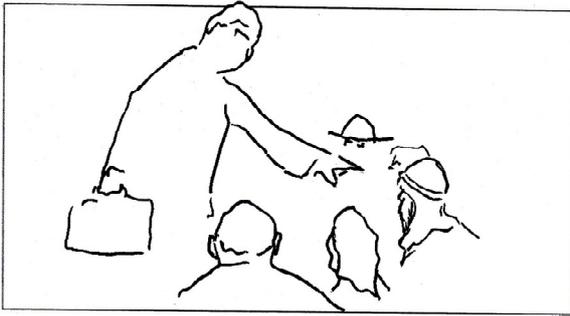
- Two women walking and a man threatens one of the women with a piece of wood.
- Two men are attacking a woman.
- A woman steps aside to let a blind man pass.
- A beggar and a woman.
- Gardening.
- A family working on their land.
- Two people helping each other to do something.
- Poor people with the man digging for food and the woman collecting it.
- A man cleaning the floor.
- A man digging a hole and the woman dropping seeds into it.

Leader Notes:

Resources: Copies of the cross cultural awareness pictures, Cultural Differences in a Worldview, Class Differences in a Worldview, Order of Divine Service,

Work through the following surveys and suggested activities with the group.

Picture 2.



Possible interpretations:

- A teacher reprimanding a student.
- A man teaching other men.
- A boss giving instructions to employees.
- A government official warning a gathering of people with different religions.
- Blessing.
- A preacher in church.
- A film director instructing actors where to stand to the scene.
- A salesman trying to sell his wares.

You bring your own cultural interpretation to any situation. The above interpretations came from people ranging in age from 14 to 50 in Bolivia, The Netherlands, China, Ethiopia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Peru, Tunisia and Uganda.

What Would You Feel?

A Meeting in the Street

You are walking along the street in a town that is unfamiliar to you. The street is quiet. Somebody crosses the street and walks towards you. What do you think? (Choose one of the following.)

1. This person means to rob you. Comment: People from a masculine culture might feel this way.
2. This person means to ask for directions. Comment: people from a feminine culture might feel this way.
3. This person means to have a chat with you. Comment: This is a tolerant view.
4. This person might ask you to dinner. Comment: A person from a culture which thinks of the group first may have this view.
5. This person I going to sell you that you are not allowed here. Comment: This might be the view of a person from an uncertain culture.
6. This person means to sell you something. Comment: From any culture.

A Welcome at the Airport

You are headed to a formal business meeting with somebody you have never met before. When you get off the plane, a warmly smiling woman wearing jeans and sandals is holding up a sign with your name on it. What do you think? (Choose one of the following.)

1. She must be a secretary.
2. She is probably the person with whom you will have the meeting.
3. It is wonderful to be welcomed so warmly.
4. How dare she meet you in such an informal outfit?
5. There must be an error, because you were expecting a formal looking gentleman.

- What do the reactions suggest about possible cultural backgrounds and expectations?

Barriers

Hofstede comments that there are several cross-cultural barriers to communication.

1. Language differences includes knowing what to say, how to say it, when, where and why. Knowing a little can be unhelpful. Words can have more than one meaning. Can you think of some in English? What about the use of metaphors in English? The solution is to LEARN the language, find an interpreter and ask for clarification.

2. Non verbal communication includes gesture, posture, personal space, clothing, eye contact. DO NOT assume that you can read the non verbal, don't take

nonverbal behaviours personally, and develop awareness of non-verbal communication in different cultures.

3. Stereotypes occur when we tend to fit people into patterns based on our previous experience. If we expect X then we will probably see X. The solution is to INCREASE your awareness of preconceptions, learn about other cultures and see things from their situation.

4. We can easily make judgements about another culture e.g. food, drink, clothing, good/ bad based on your own cultural bias. The solution is to MAINTAIN an appropriate distance and do not judge matters from your own cultural perspective.

5. High level of stress often accompanies cross cultural interactions. Unfamiliar experiences often do this and intercultural experiences are no different. Be ACCEPTING, be forgiving, give the benefit of the doubt.

From Exploring Culture by Gert Hofstede, Paul Pedersen, Geert Hofstede (Intercultural Press 2002)

- Any thoughts or comments?

3.2 Cultural Differences in a Worldview

WHAT DOES YOUR CULTURE LOOK LIKE?

Each of us has in our minds a picture of our world as we see it. This applies to communities as well. We do not see it differently unless we come into contact with others of a different culture. The following chart explores these possibilities. Please note that these are broad categories and are designed to open up discussion.

Leader Notes:

See Chart following page.

Activity

The left hand column has been identified as applying to European Australians (or Cold-Climate Cultures) and the right hand column to Communities of Colour (or Hot-Climate Cultures). These are very broad generalisations. They do not determine behaviour but aim to describe differences in cultural outlook and illustrate that these outlooks exist and have significance in how we relate to each other and even how we do church.

The leader needs to choose between the following two alternative activities.

Alternative 1: Hand out *What Does Your Culture Look Like?* with the heading and category headings folded back so that they are out of sight (or remove the category headings altogether before photocopying).

Ask participants to tick those items which they think apply to their cultural group. Compare with the alternatives in the other column.

- How and where do you see these differences reflected in yourself and others?
- How do any of these features show up in your congregation? Could they be a barrier to welcoming the stranger?

Alternative 2: Hand out *What Does Your Culture Look Like?* folded back along line dividing European Australians and Communities of Colour.

- Ask participants to examine the European Australians column.
- Is this a reasonable summary?
- What do you predict might be a very different cultural view for some of the categories?

Open page and compare results.

- How and where do you see these differences reflected in yourself and others?
- How do any of these features show up in your congregation? Could they be a barrier to welcoming the stranger?

WHAT DOES YOUR CULTURE LOOK LIKE?

	<u>European Australians/Cold Climate</u>	<u>Communities of Colour/Hot Climate</u>
Guiding Beliefs	Independence Individual rights Egalitarianism Control and dominance	Interdependence Honour and family protection Authoritarianism Harmony and deference
Nature and Environment	Mastery over nature and the environment Humans are superior to the physical world and are entitled to use the world's resources for their own benefit.	Living in harmony with nature and the environment Humans are a part of the natural order and need to live respectfully in it.
Time Orientation	Time is divided into compartments and seen as incremental. Being on time is important and even seen as a mark of respect. Efficient use of time is emphasised. The past is behind, the future in front.	Time is an infinite continuum. Time is closely connected with relationships. Efficiency and time do not take priority over the person. The past is in front. The future is behind.
People Relations	Individual social focus. I ask 'Do things contribute to the survival and betterment of me?' Individuals can speak for themselves. Taking initiative in a group is good. I mainly have to look after myself. Address people by their given names unless others use titles.	Collective social focus. I ask 'Do things to contribute to survival and betterment of family and community?' Taking initiative in the group depends on my role in the group. The group protects and provides for me. Give attention to appropriate greetings.
Inclusion and Privacy	People enjoy having time and space to themselves. Each person is a steward of their possessions and responsible for them People are expected to ask permission to borrow. It's OK to hold private conversations with a few people and not everyone.	It is not desirable to be left to oneself. I know I am automatically included in activities (e.g. meals, conversation, celebrations) of the group. Possessions can be freely used by all. It is rude to hold a private conversation or make plans that exclude others present.
Communication	Short, direct questions show respect for the person's time and professionalism. A 'yes' is a 'yes' and 'no' is 'no'. An honest direct answer is information only and does not reflect how a person feels about you	Direct questions may offend. A 'yes' may not be an answer to a question but polite, cultural compliance. My behaviour reflects on the whole group.
Hospitality	Hospitality is planned for and advance notice usually required. The guest may pay for eg own meal at a restaurant. Travellers are expected to make their own arrangements. Hospitality is a special occasion and receives the full attention of the host.	Hospitality is spontaneous. The guest pays for nothing. Travellers may be paid for. A gift is usually expected. Food and drink are involved. Hospitality usually takes place in the home.

Acknowledgement to *Foreign to Familiar* by S. Lanier for some of the cultural characteristics.

3.3 Class Differences in a Worldview

HIDDEN RULES AMONG CLASSES

Hidden rules are the unspoken cues and habits of a group. All groups have hidden rules. A person brings the hidden rules with them which they were raised. Hidden rules help us survive and negotiate. Hidden rules can be important in understanding the stranger amongst us.

See chart following.

Activity:

Remove the social class headings and ask each participant.

Circle those items which you learnt from your parents.

What do you practice now?

Discuss any observations including limitations/strengths of the survey.

How do any of these features show up in your congregation?

Could they be a barrier to welcoming the stranger?

What do you think a recent refugee from Sri Lanka or Sudan might circle?

HIDDEN RULES AMONG CLASSES

Hidden rules are the unspoken cues and habits of a group. All groups have hidden rules. A person brings the hidden rules with them which they were raised. Hidden rules help us survive and negotiate. Hidden rules can be important in understanding the stranger amongst us.

	Poverty	Middle class	Wealthy
Possessions	People	Things	One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees.
Money	To be used, spent.	To be managed.	To be conserved, invested
Social emphasis	Social inclusion of people he/she likes	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency	Emphasis is on social exclusion
Food	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.	Key question: Did you like it? Quality important.	Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.
Time	Present most important; decision made for the moment and based on feelings or survival.	Future most important; decisions made against future consequences.	Traditions and history most important; decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum.
Education	Valued and revered as abstract but not a reality	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections
Family structure	Tends to be matriarchal	Tends to be patriarchal	Depends on who has the money
Worldview	Sees the world in terms of the local setting	Sees the world in terms of the national setting	Sees the world in terms of the international setting
Driving Forces	Survival, relationships, entertainment	Work, achievement	Financial, political and social connections

Participant Notes:

Out of Africa

Out of Africa: Lessons learned from 5 years of ministry to South Sudanese people by Pastor Stephen van der Hoek
2014

My friendship with African people began in Adelaide, during my time at seminary, when I made friends with some new arrivals from Congo-Kinshasa, Liberia and South Sudan. Also during this time, the St Paul's Lutheran Church at Ferryden Park were in need of Sunday School teachers, a task for which I volunteered. Classes had around 30 children, including Dinka and Nuer children from Sudan, and also Pitjantjatjara and Arranta speaking Aboriginal children. Later, when I was ordained in 2008, I was sent to the Gippsland parish in Victoria, which has a sizeable South Sudanese group, mostly of Nuer people, but also with some Dinka and Nuba people. The contents of my presentation today come mostly from my experience with Sudanese people, and is by no means intended to be reflective of the whole of Africa!

During my time in Gippsland, I have often been mindful of Romans 1:11-12: "For I long to see you, that I may impart some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine". In some sense, all the time that a pastor shares with people in his parish is time where he can learn just as much from his parishioners as the parishioners learn from him. For me, this has been doubly so with the Sudanese: there has been so much to learn from *them*. We have been *mutually encouraged by each other's faith*.

And so, with St Paul, I say: "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you" (cf. 1 Cor 11:23). Any insight, then, that may help Australians understand South Sudanese people, and vice-versa, doesn't come from me, but from the Lord. What I have received from the Lord in my privileged position as being the pastor of the Gippsland parish with its Sudanese members, I now deliver to you. I pray that it may be useful to you and beneficial, and that the Holy Spirit may continue to build and strengthen our church, as it seeks to bring the gospel to all nations.

1 Sometimes I use the term "Africa" or "Africans" in a more general sense. Here I mean "the Africans I have met", not "all Africans".

Existence of the devil

Once a fellow pastor approached me at a pastors' conference, and said, "Aren't the Sudanese wonderful? They have such a natural love of the Gospel."

In some sense, I knew what he meant, but I was uneasy about what he said. Yes, "the Sudanese are wonderful"—that's true! They bring a kind of excitement and vibrancy to our church community, and there is a joy in African people that is quite infectious. But I also knew many Sudanese who had *no love* of the Gospel. I knew many who came to church regularly and were happy to be there, but didn't really know what the Gospel was.

So I replied to this pastor, “No—the Sudanese don’t have a natural love of the Gospel. They have a real belief in the *existence of the devil*, and they’ll do anything to get him off their back.”

Now this pastor was quite taken aback by my response at the time, but the more I have thought about it, the more I would stand my ground on this. The truth is, that *nobody* has a “natural love for the Gospel”. Everybody—whether you’re from Australia, Africa, Europe, America or Asia—needs to hear the Gospel preached to them. And every Sunday when we go to church, the Gospel is always something *new*. There is always some new aspect of the Gospel which hasn’t affected our lives yet, and some hidden sin that is yet to be uncovered and healed. And yet, there is a difference between the way Australians and Sudanese talk about the faith. They are more uninhibited, outwardly joyous and happy about their faith. But if I would attempt to explain this “joy”, it’s that they believe that they have a real enemy—Satan himself—who has been conquered and defeated by Jesus.

It is rare to meet a Sudanese person who doesn’t believe in God, even if they don’t go to church. It seems to me that there’s almost no such thing as a Sudanese atheist. No-one would dare deny the existence of God, because they know full well that the devil is real, and if there’s anyone who is going to defeat Satan, it’s going to be God.

This brings me to two small stories from Martin Luther’s Table-Talk.

The first story goes like this: The devil knocks on Martin Luther’s door and says, “Does Martin Luther live here?” He replies, “No. Martin Luther died years ago: only Christ lives here.”

The second story goes like this: Martin Luther wakes up in the middle of the night and sees the devil on the end of his bed, and says: “Oh, it’s just you”. And he goes back to sleep.

Now, these stories are classics in Lutheran folklore. But I have found, that if I tell these stories to a room full of westerners, they have a good laugh and a chuckle about them. But, sometimes, I have told the same stories to Sudanese people, and they have nodded their heads in great profound seriousness, and said, “That’s a very good story, pastor. That’s very true.” These stories about fighting the devil are no laughing matter.

So when it comes to matters to do with salvation, there is much more of a heightened sense of not only being *purchased and won from all sins and from death*, but also from *the power of the devil*.

What is Pastor Stephen saying, meaning and suggesting?

What is the significance of the specific mentions of the devil in our service order?

Note: For further discussion of the Devil see Ch 4 Spiritual Warfare in J Kleinig [Grace Upon Grace](#)

God's giving and withholding

A few more things about the apparent lack of outright Sudanese atheism: on one hand, there is a much more heightened sense of God's existence, but also, there seems to be a much more heightened sense of God's hand at work in *giving or withholding punishment*. In western culture, we often (rightly) paint God in the most loving terms, but sometimes to the extent of trying to excuse him for anything which we don't like.

Once I visited an old German lady, whom I had never met before. She didn't let me in her house, we exchanged a few "pleasantries" through the fly-wire, but she wasn't interested in talking to me very much. The next Sunday at church, there was a Sudanese man there, who lived near this lady. I said to him, "I was in your town this week, visiting a lady who lives near you." He said, "Who is this lady? Is she here at church?" I said (rightly or wrongly), "No—I'm not really sure if she even believes in God." At this, the Sudanese man said, "What? How can she not believe in God? Hasn't she watched the news? Hasn't she seen what has happened in New Zealand? Hasn't she seen what has happened in Japan?" – For this man, the earthquake in Christchurch and the tsunami in Japan were *proof* of the existence of God, whereas most westerners would be shaking their heads and saying, "How can God let these sorts of things happen?"

At the end of 2009, a six-year-old Sudanese boy in my parish was killed in his front yard by a drunk driver. Over the next week, I spent a lot of time at the family's house, and there were a large number of Sudanese people who came to visit the family. During this time, I heard one person after another come and say to the parents: "Our children are on loan to us from God, and if he wants to take them back to himself at any time, that's his right." – I could imagine if people went and said the same thing to a couple from *my own* culture in the same situation, they would most likely throw them out of the house!

But in this there is something very profound: we "westerners" often want to excuse God from any involvement in these kind of tragedies. But at the same time, isn't it in some way comforting to know that God allowed it, and that it wasn't simply the devil or some other non-descript evil force that was completely in control? If God allowed suffering, can't he also help people in their suffering? If he wounds, can't he also heal?

This also seemed to impact the way the Sudanese understood God's holiness. Once at a youth camp, I was trying to explain the word "holy" to the group. Somewhere in the discussion, I asked, "What do you think would happen if you *touched* something that was holy?" One Sudanese boy immediately said, "You would die!" One of the ladies (not Sudanese) from my parish scoffed, and thought the boy was being silly. But the boy was *deadly serious*, and the lady was quite surprised that I took him seriously. We know from the Old Testament that people died from simply looking at the Ark of the Covenant (cf 1 Sam 6:19). It is probably fair to say that there are many westerners who simply don't believe that these things in the bible really happened, but the *reality* of these events seem to make "much more sense" to the Africans.

What is Pastor Stephen saying, meaning and suggesting?

How does this aspect of God's grace appear in our service order?

The angels

Recently, I heard that a certain theologian had said that most Christians believe in a transcendent God (up there) and a personal Jesus (down here), but that many Africans believe in a whole spiritual world that is in the middle. However, this description is not quite adequate or accurate.

For us as Lutherans, we believe in Jesus Christ, who is the incarnate Son of God. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and also, the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily. Jesus is the one who is both seated on the throne in heaven, and also truly present in his church, ruling and guiding it through his word and sacraments. So in the Divine Service, Jesus is actually here among us, speaking his word to us, forgiving us our sins, pouring out his own Holy Spirit, praying to his Father with us, and consecrating and distributing his body and blood for us to eat and drink. And we do this together with "the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven".

So angels and demons – the "middle spiritual world"— are not in the middle. They are creations of God, just like us. And Jesus says: *Truly, truly, you will see heaven opened, and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man* (John 1:51). The angels of God are together with Jesus and commanded by him. Any angel that is not on the side of Jesus is a demon. As St Paul says in Gal 1:10: *Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*

A person who describes these other spiritual realities as "in the middle" doesn't really understand what these things are. In some sense, the belief of many Sudanese in the existence of these spiritual realities is because (1) they have practised animism in their recent past, and (2) they never had a "scientific enlightenment" as in the west. Therefore, many westerners either see all these things as superstitious or mediaeval, or they consider them an interesting novelty. They consider them a novelty because our culture has forgotten that without proper discernment, these things can be dangerous.

One of the areas where this seemed to come up was in discussions about dreams. Right from early on in my time in Gippsland, I was often asked by Sudanese people to come and talk to them about a dream that they had had. Often these dreams would be about a relative, and something that happened to them. I never sought to "interpret" their dreams, but to lead them in prayer for the person in the dream whom they were worried about. Sometime later in my time in the parish, an elderly German lady also told me about a dream of hers, and I found myself having similar conversations with her as with the Sudanese people. It struck me from this that it wasn't just the Sudanese who needed to be ministered in this way, but also many of the westerners. The difference was that the Sudanese were less shy about talking about it. So on a number of occasions,

where the lectionary allowed it, I preached in quite some detail about angels (eg, at Christmas and St Michaels' Day) and also dreams (at Christmas or Epiphany, talking about Joseph and the wise men). Once in the same year, I preached about the Cherubim in Ezekiel 1 at Ascension, and the Seraphim in Isaiah 6 on Holy Trinity, a couple of weeks later. It was the Sudanese who gave me the confidence to talk freely about these kinds of things, and whenever I did mention them, the non-Africans then started to tell me about all the supernatural phenomena they had experienced in their life: strange coincidences, dreams, angelic apparitions, etc. And each story came with words like: "I always wanted to tell someone about this, but I always thought that my pastor would think I was a lunatic!"

It seems to me, then, that the difference between my culture and the Sudanese is not that *they* believed in the existence of supernatural realities, but that *we* don't. The difference is that western culture is *repressed* in its belief of these things, whereas the Sudanese are culturally "free" to talk about it. And in *this* sense, the Sudanese are somewhat culturally closer to the worldview of the people in biblical times. They see the world in technicolour, whereas many western people live as in a black-and-white movie.

The Slovenian (atheist) philosopher Slavoj Žižek wrote: "If, once upon a time, we publicly pretended to believe while privately we were sceptics or even engaged in obscene mocking of our public beliefs, today we publicly tend to profess our sceptical, hedonistic, relaxed attitude while privately we remain haunted by belief and severe prohibitions."² It is quite true to say that today where Christianity and religion are publicly suppressed, many people in Australia almost secretly believe in God, and need encouragement (and almost "permission") to enter into God's presence with all its hidden realities, while the whole culture around them decays spiritually and denies the existence of these things.

Sure—"charismatic Christians" believe in these things with a much more heightened awareness. However, this is also often accompanied by a naïveté as to the spiritual dangerousness of these things. Often some find angels and demons a novelty for their spirituality, and almost revel in talking about them, like a new car. I also met plenty of Africans who were completely "overdosed" with charismata and "underdosed" with the Word of God, and were easily misled into following any travelling "preacher-of-the-month" into the sunset! However, the Sudanese in Gippsland are not neo-Pentecostals, but still believe in the reality of supernatural things, while also keeping a certain wariness and reserve in over-talking about these things. For them, the recognition of the supernatural does not involve recovery of a culture once lost, but connects with their immediate past.

² Slavoj Žižek & Boris Gunjević, 2012, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*, Seven Stories Press, New York, pp7 & 27.

What is Pastor Stephen saying, meaning and suggesting?

What is the significance of the specific mentions of the angels in our service order?

What do you understand by the reference to angels in the following prayers?

Luther's Morning Prayer

My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, that You kept me safe from all evil and danger last night. Save me, I pray, today as well, from every evil and sin, so that all I do and the way that I live will please you. I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have. Let Your holy Angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, that You have protected me, by Your grace. Forgive, I pray, all my sins and the evil I have done. Protect me, by Your grace, tonight. I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have. Let Your holy angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me. Amen.

How are angels often portrayed in paintings?

Which of the following pictures best shows what most people think angels are called by God to do?

What are some Biblical examples where angels were seen by people?

Leader Notes:

You may wish to show visual examples of angels using PowerPoint.

Angels are very active in the Bible and are used by God as messengers, warriors, and servants. The word "angel" comes from the Greek word *angelos* which means messenger. Angels are spiritual beings without bodies of flesh and bones though they apparently have the ability to appear in human form (Genesis 19:1-22). Angels have many functions. You may get the group to look up the following texts. They praise God (Isaiah 6:3), serve as messengers to the world (Luke 1:11-20,26-28; Luke 21-9), watch over God's people (Psalm 91:11-12), and are sometimes used as instruments of God's judgment (Matthew 13:49-50).

Leader Notes:

After the group has recalled examples then ask them to look up the following texts. Genesis 22:11, Genesis 31:11, Matthew 4:11, Luke 22:43, Matthew 1:20, Matthew 13:41, Matthew 28:5, Luke 1:28, Luke 2:15.

Participant notes:

Are angels always to be seen?

Proverbs 25:2

Hebrews 13:2

Who might these unknown angels be?

Luke 14:12-14

Could they be people in your congregation who you know but are somewhat stranger to you? People you have drifted away from?

Marriage and Children

The attitudes towards marriage and family life deserve a mention here. It has often seemed to me that among the Sudanese “love” was not the overriding motive for marriage—eg some marriages were arranged. (This is not to say that Sudanese marriages are generally “loveless”—in fact, far from it.) However, polygamy also is still common for those who were married in Africa. It’s hard to know just how much the marriage values amongst Sudanese are formed from their traditional tribal culture over centuries, or by the fact that they were under the influence of an Islamic state for so long. When talking to South Sudanese people, the reason for the allowance of polygamy in their country is normally “blamed” on the Qur’an. Also, every now and then, domestic violence was a problem, and this doesn’t quite have the same taboo as amongst western people.

When looking at biblical passages about husbands and wives, eg in 1 Pet 3:7, which speaks of “showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel”, westerners often have in their ears the ring of modern feminism. But when compared with a domestic violence dynamic, it takes on a new angle of promoting the dignity of women. In the Qur’an, the “chastisement” of women is encouraged in certain circumstances, but is not at all in the New Testament³. It is a very different thing if women are called to submit to physical force, rather than Christ-like love and self-sacrifice.

Compare the following texts—Qur’an 4:34: “Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear obedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them.” (*The Koran*, 2006, tr N J Dawood, Penguin, London.) Ephesians 5:28-30: “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” Colossians 3:19: “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.” 1 Peter 3:7: “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to them as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Children are valued very highly, by both men and women. Unfortunately, barrenness seems to be commonly seen as a legitimate excuse for divorce. Abortion is a complete taboo, but this comes not so much from a guilt-driven avoidance of breaking the fifth or sixth commandment, but rather from a much deeper instinct and conviction that children really are gifts and blessings from God. I have found that Sudanese people generally believe that God really does make babies, just as westerners generally don't. But there is also a valuing of each child, not simply the children in general.

To illustrate this, I go back to West Africa, to a Liberian lady I knew once in Adelaide, who declared to me once with eyes of fire, "A lady should never have an abortion, because you don't know who this baby is going to be! It might be the next president of Liberia who will lead the nation into a great era of civilization and prosperity, making Liberia the jewel in West Africa's crown! You wouldn't want to kill the president!"

This kind of logic is quite foreign to westerners, but perhaps is the same logic which says that Levi might have even paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, *for*, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews argues (7:10), *he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.*

I have heard many stories during my ministry of doctors encouraging Sudanese women to have an abortion because they already have too many children. One woman, expecting her sixth child, replied to such a doctor, "I will not have an abortion. I am a Christian. God will help me." I had related this story to another minister from the ecumenical fraternal in Traralgon, who scoffed at this, saying, "by 'God', she means, 'Centrelink will help her,'" and then proceeded to attack Sudanese people with large families for taking advantage of the Australian welfare system. He said that the Sudanese shouldn't have any children unless they could provide for them themselves.

What this minister completely failed to recognise is that when this woman said, "God will help me", she wasn't simply talking about finances. She was a woman who had never had a lot of money and wasn't using childbirth as a means for attaining more government cash. But also, whether or not the Sudanese had any money at all from Centrelink would make no difference to whether they had children. If they had money, they would have it together; if they starve, they would starve together. In fact, this same woman said that she didn't like Australia for its abortion-promoting doctors, and would rather be in a country where her children would starve, than in one where the people didn't pray. What this Traralgon minister also failed to recognise was that by saying that this woman shouldn't have any more children because of her lack of personal finances, he was also tacitly saying that *most people* in the whole of Africa should not be having any children at all, thereby taking away from a whole continent, ravaged with war and famine, one of the only joys in life that they have left. And so, it is not uncommon to meet a pregnant Sudanese woman, who says, "This will be my seventh child. I'm very blessed."

What is Pastor Stephen saying, meaning and suggesting?

What is the significance of the reference to marriage and children in the Lutheran order of service?

Time and Money

One of the great clashes of western and Sudanese culture is their understanding of time. When I lived in Adelaide, the Sudanese called it BMT: Black Man's Time. By the time I got to Gippsland, the politically-correct police had already altered this to: Sudanese Local Time.

I once had an experience with some West Africans in Adelaide for whom this was also true. Once at St Paul's Lutheran Church, Blair Athol, the local Liberian community had hired the church hall for a Liberian festival. Many of the members of the church thought they might come, and turned up at the advertised starting time at 6pm. There was no-one there. At about 6.30pm someone rang one of the Liberian ladies to find out that she had started cooking her food at home at 6pm. When she finished cooking it, she would then go to the church. It so turned out that the first Liberian turned up well after 7.30 and by that time, all the "white people" went home, completely grumpy about their wasted night out.

Many an unsuspecting westerner has been caught out by this flexible attitude to schedules!

But also, once at Traralgon, there was a funeral to be held at 2pm. But because the Sudanese wanted to start the funeral on time, they told people from Melbourne to come at 1pm. Unfortunately, the Sudanese from Melbourne really made an effort, and turned up on time, although there was no intention whatsoever to start at 1pm! So the Sudanese became grumpy because they were made to turn up an hour early for no reason!

But I think, there is a certain regard for time, in that, it is precious, and it is time that is spent with *people*. It seems like there is never too much time that you can spend with people. A 10 minute visit to a person is almost unheard of! It also struck me when there was a death that people would drop everything and go to visit the family and to be with them. It was always so important that they were not alone in their time of grief, whereas westerners often leave each other alone. However, this time is often not *time spent together* when people need it the most.

Also, we have to remember that in Sudan—as in other parts of Africa—it is the family and community who help in a time of need, physically and financially, rather than an impersonal insurance agency. So cutting off one's family and community means cutting off help in a time of need.

Time, like money, is here now, and gone tomorrow. So time needs to be taken now to do what we can't do tomorrow. Money needs to be spent now, since we might not have it tomorrow. A friend of mine, a missionary in Africa, told a story about a congregation in Europe who gave some money to some Africans for building a church. But, when the money was in hand, someone had to go to hospital, and the money was spent on the health care. This exasperated the Europeans, but what else were the Africans to do?

Anyway, there are whole books written about the topic of how Africans manage money!
eg David E Maranz, 2001, *African Friends and Money Matters*, Publications in Ethnography No 37, SIL International.

What is Pastor Stephen saying, meaning and suggesting?

What is the significance of the references to time and money in the Lutheran order of service?

Exploring Differences in Ways with Money

Participant Notes:

What shapes your ways with money?

This study invites us to consider the things that influence our ways with money so that we can better understand how they have shaped our thinking and practices and better understand the sometimes mysterious ways of others who manage their finances in ways that we don't at first understand. By reaching a better understanding of each others' ways we might better be able to tolerate difference, critically examine our own values and ways with money, and be able to more effectively help each other when help is sought.

Which of the following most affected the way you used your money this week?

- o your past experiences,
- o your cultural and Christian beliefs/ values,
- o the kind of training or example our parents gave you,
- o your access to financial services e.g. banks
- o your positive or negative experiences of financial institutions
- o your understanding of how you can best use the myriad of products offered by financial institutions.

Leader Notes:

Resources: Money Matters chart, Case Study stories

Money Matter Chart

Participants complete the chart and questions.

Money Matter Stories

Divide the participants into groups and discuss some of the following finance stories. You may want to have a story that all groups discuss so that the responses can be compared. For this common story you may also like to choose the option of using the story which has different names such as Mary/Fazila or Simon/Hassan.

For each of the following statements and questions about Australian money issues explore how it is possibly the same or different in Africa and refugee camps.

Money Matters

Australia	Africa (X = different; √= same)	Refugee Camps (X = different; √= same)
There is no war happening in Australia. Australia is a pretty safe place to live.		
In Australia we have a welfare system.*		
In Australia when you have an income you have tax deducted from your income and pay taxes in other ways too. The government tries to make the taxation system fair The taxation system enables everyone to be safe and to have access to education, healthcare, and welfare should they need it		
In Australia there are banks Australian banks are easy to access and safe places to put your money.		
In Australia there are a lot of bills to pay and if you fall behind paying your bills you can arrange a payment plan.		
In Australia money is not openly talked about and people keep secrets about money		
In Australia financial independence is valued.		
In Australia a lot of people use which is easy to get but if you end up paying interest it is expensive.		
Businesses try to encourage you to buy more things by offering you credit and banks try to get you to use credit so they can make money out of the interest you pay them.		
In Australia money is seen as an individual's possession or as a means to more goods or services		
Some Australians save money An ability to save money is seen to be a good thing		
Australians do not share money very readily.		
Many Australians feel good about giving money for aid relief		
In Australia, money maintains its value and Australians do not suffer from high inflation.		

* Consider these questions about the welfare system

- What rights does the Australian welfare system protect?
- Does everyone have access to the same system if they are in need?
- How does having a welfare system shape our ways of managing money?

John gets paid each fortnight and transfers \$100 using internet banking to a separate bank account where he leaves the money and pretends that it doesn't exist. He is saving this money for when he needs a new car or has to go overseas to visit his mother. He also transfers \$300 from his pay to another bank account – he uses the money in this account to pay his bills including rent and because he has saved all his bills for a year and added up his expenses he has worked out how much he needs to put away each fortnight to cover his bills. John likes his system because he never has to worry about having money to pay his bills. There is almost always enough money in the account to cover all the bills. The rest of the money John uses for everything else he needs like: food, petrol, and other weekly expenses.

How is this story like or unlike your own financial story?

What sort of a wage do you think John gets?

Do you think he probably has permanent employment?

Would his money management system work if he had irregular casual employment?

How do you think John feels about banks? Is John a confident bank customer?

Do you detect any cultural values in this story? If so what are they?

Mary, a mother of 3 little children, gets \$600 a fortnight from Centerlink. She uses Centapay to deduct \$150 for water, electricity and gas so she doesn't have to worry about those bills. She pays half the rent on the house (\$250 a fortnight) on payday and she sends \$100 overseas to her relatives. This leaves her with \$150 for food and transport. Her husband's income which is not regular pays the loan on their car and the other half of the rent. Sometimes they can only afford bread to eat for two days before the next payday.

How far is this story like or unlike your own financial story?

What values do you detect Mary has regarding money?

How might Mary feel when they can only have bread for some meals?

Fazila a mother of 3 little children gets \$600 a fortnight from Centerlink. She uses Centapay to deduct \$150 for water, electricity and gas so she doesn't have to worry about those bills. She pays half the rent on the house (\$250 a fortnight) on payday and she sends \$100 overseas to her relatives. This leaves her with \$150 for food and transport. Her husband's income which is not regular pays the loan on their car and the other half of the rent. Sometimes they can only afford bread to eat for two days before the next payday.

How far is this story like or unlike your own financial story?

What values do you detect Fazila has regarding money?

How might Fazila feel when they can only have bread for some meals?

Simon's family only just have enough money to pay all their expenses. However when asked for money by extended family they will always try to give what is asked for. Several times a year this means that Simon also has to go to extended family to ask for money. Simon is careful to only ask for what he feels the donor can afford to give because he knows that like him they will always try to give what is asked for. Simon once managed to save \$600 for a TV that his wife and kids wanted and then gave the money to a cousin who needed the money for rent instead. It took Simon 12 months to save \$600 again and then as soon as he had it he rushed out to the store and bought the TV straight away. He was worried that another cousin who had got a speeding fine would come to him asking for some money. He can't help feeling a little guilty whenever he looks at the TV in the lounge.

How far is this story like or unlike your own financial story?

What values do you detect Simon has regarding money?

Why might Simon feel guilty when he watches TV?

Hassan's family only just have enough money to pay all their expenses. However when asked for money by extended family they will always try to give what is asked for. Several times a year this means that Hassan also has to go to extended family to ask for money. Hassan is careful to only ask for what he feels the donor can afford to give because he knows that like him they will always try to give what is asked for. Hassan once managed to save \$600 for a TV that his wife and kids wanted and then gave the money to a cousin who needed the money for rent instead. It took Hassan 12 months to save \$600 again and then as soon as he had it he rushed out to the store and bought the TV straight away. He was worried that another cousin who had got a speeding fine would come to him asking for some money. He can't help feeling a little guilty whenever he looks at the TV in the lounge.

How far is this story like or unlike your own financial story?

What values do you detect Hassan has regarding money?

Why might Hassan feel guilty when he watches TV?

Bible Study – Money Matters

Participant Notes:

This study examines a Christian view of money and asks questions such as how much is enough and the connection between contentment and material prosperity.

Luke 16:13

“Mammon” is the Aramaic word for “riches”.
What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out to you?

1 Timothy 6:6-8

- What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out to you?

What do you understand by “godliness” and “contentment”? See also 2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:11,19; Job 1:21, Ecclesiastes 5:15

How much is enough for the Christian? Refer to Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:16-21

What does Paul say about the connection between contentment and material prosperity?

How can the Christian learn to be content with simple living? See also Romans 12:1-2, Psalm 62:10

Pastor Luther said we should be the master of our money, not its servant. “When (one) sees a man who has no coat, he says to his money: ‘Come out, young Mr. Gulden (a high-value coin)! There is a poor naked man who has no coat; you must serve him. Over there lies a sick man who has no refreshment. Come forth, Sir Dollar! You must be on your way; go and help him.’ People who handle their possessions in this way are masters of their possessions. And, surely, all honest Christians will do this. But the folk who are saving much money and are forever scheming how to make the pile larger are servants (to their money).”

Abraham, known in the Old Testament for his hospitality, was certainly rich. “But...,” Luther says, “He keeps on managing and using his possessions, and his special effort is to keep his heart pure. He does not become proud because of his wealth and does not gain and preserve it in a greedy manner; but he is generous and hospitable.... If God has given you wealth, give thanks to God, and see that you make the right use of it.”

Leader Notes:

It is clear from the transition at verse 6 that Paul has intended all along to teach a Christian view of money. The false teachers have provided a vivid contrast for instruction. If Paul felt his first readers needed to be taught concerning their outlook on material possessions and contentment, how much more do we modern servants of God need to gain his insight!

Paul tells us that the Christian's goal with respect to material things is *godliness with contentment*. *Godliness* in Paul's vocabulary means the genuine Christian life, a faith-relationship with God and a new way of life. *Contentment* is a Pauline word in the New Testament (2 Cor 9:8; compare Phil 4:11). It had a prominent place in Stoic philosophy, where it defined an attitude of "self-sufficiency," meaning detachment or independence from things or possessions. Contentment came from within. Paul approved of this idea but naturally supplied a Christian basis for it: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. . . . I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:11, 13). Thus for Paul the Christian goal is a genuine relationship with God, our source of contentment, and a healthy detachment from material things. This combination is *great gain*. In contrast to 6:5, *gain* here is measured according to spiritual rather than material value. Eternal benefits are surely promised, but the focus is on how the believer with this healthy perspective can avoid the many pitfalls of greed in the present life.

To ground his view of contentment, Paul draws on Old Testament wisdom. Both Job 1:21 and Ecclesiastes 5:15 expound the principle that material things belong only to this world. Things have no lasting value and provide no eternal advantage. Therefore one's contentment cannot stem from things. Human contact with the material world begins at birth and terminates at death. But Christian hope takes the believer beyond the material limit to a boundless eternity, and logically, then, eternal values must shape our view of temporal things. To put it simply, Job and Paul mean that "things," their value and usefulness, pertain to this world, which is but a temporary home (compare Heb 11:10).

This leads to a question: For the Christian how much is enough? Paul's principle implies a standard of material sufficiency that is minimal indeed. *Food and clothing* ought to be enough. While Paul may be quoting popular philosophy, it is far more likely that he is drawing from the model of Christ (Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:16-21). He does not say anything negative about living above this minimum standard, though he will teach that life at a higher material level carries with it heavy obligations. But he does say that real *contentment* and material prosperity have nothing to do with one another. And acquisitiveness has nothing to do with godliness.

How can the Christian learn to be content with simple living? Certainly not by accepting the standards set by this world. Paul suggests that an eternal perspective and an attitude of detachment toward things are prerequisites. As an eternal perspective develops, dependence on things material will decline.

Participant Notes:

Deuteronomy 14:28.

What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out to you? What is being encouraged?

In the Lutheran Church in Tanzania there are three forms of offering. One is the Sunday collection plate which is for the poor. The second is a tithe in which the Treasurer negotiates with each earner on how much and when the tithe will be offered. The third form is when people give a thank offering to God for something good that has happened.

- How far could this approach be of benefit in your congregation?

Closing remarks

It has often struck me that in our church body, we have set up various committees and even hold conferences (!) for the purpose of supporting African ministry. Perhaps there is also a silent implication sometimes that the African migrants are the ones who are being helped and who need to be taught, and the westerners are the ones who give the help and the teaching. And it's true—there are many things that Africans need help with in coming to a new country and coming into contact with a completely foreign culture. There is also a great hunger amongst them for being taught the bible and theology. However, we also need to value these people as *God's gift to us*, not simply as those who can be integrated to our standards and way of life, but as those who can enrich our understanding in a fresh new way. Westerners also need to learn from the Africans.

Leader Notes:

Jubilee giving: There is encouragement in Deuteronomy 14:28 to invest our funds set aside for special purposes in support for migrants and refugees, along with others who benefit from these gifts.

It has been my intention here not to show what I have learnt about how to minister to Sudanese, but how the Sudanese have helped me understand things in a different light. Not everything about the South Sudanese is right, though. But at the same time, neither is everything about Australia. Members of both cultures are all sinners, and are in need of the same gospel.

One man in my parish often said that when he was a boy, he often thought about what it would be like to go as a missionary to “deepest, darkest Africa”. Never did he imagine that one day “deepest, darkest Africa” would come to him!

I conclude with the words of Psalm 67: *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.*

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Pastor Stephen van der Hoek
Gippsland Lutheran Parish
12 February 2014

Worship

Leader notes:

Resources: Youtube videos: First Lutheran African Ministry and /or Lutheran African Choir – Shepparton to Jeparit; For pictures displaying an African view of the Gospel stories which could be used with the final question in this part of the study see <http://www.jesusmafa.com> e.g.



Pastor Matt Anker makes the following comment on African worship:

“The often expressed western assumption that all African worship is lively, loud and unstructured is just not true and does a disservice to a people who are profoundly faithful and who find themselves confronted by the full spectrum of human experience that cannot be addressed in this stereotyped setting. The liturgy, which is enjoyed in Africa in everything from the most simple of forms to the most elaborate, provides the reliable and safe space where the risen Lord Jesus can minister to them in just this mix of diverse circumstances. Guilt, shame, joy, isolation, thanksgiving, reflection, grief, and praise are placed in the proper pastoral context in the liturgy.”

Participant Notes:

Although Lutheran congregations may use slightly different service orders, the essential elements are the same as is the way in which most worship is conducted.

How might this be seen and felt by a stranger who joins us from a different cultural and Christian background or none at all?

How might divine service be enriched by learning from others?

View the Youtube videos: First Lutheran African Ministry and /or Lutheran African Choir – Shepparton to Jeparit.

What do you see and hear?

How welcoming is your church?

Can persons of a language other than English or persons who cannot read find the entrance?

Once inside, do you feel welcome?

How are you welcomed?

How well does your congregation speak a language of welcome?

How well does your congregation show that it is knowledgeable and caring so that diverse people will find it relevant and helpful?

How well is your congregation one of compassion and justice so that people of various backgrounds can find friends and advocates?

What group does your congregation have opportunity to speak across race, culture or class?

How easy is it to follow your worship order?

How is your music made to be easily followed?

Does someone help a newcomer to follow the service order if needed?

How are you made to feel welcome after the service?

How well are newcomers instructed in the richness of the divine service?

How does our culture affect our worship?

e.g. language, symbols, artefacts, interaction of people, banners.

e.g. What if your church/Sunday school displayed some African pictures of Bible stories?

Pastor Matt Anker writes:

“Many people have experienced a sense of embarrassment upon entering an unfamiliar congregation. The combination of unexpected local practices during the service and having attention drawn to you in an attempt to make you feel welcome, often leaves you exposed. From a western perspective this may be uncomfortable, but rarely leads to long term harm. In cross cultural ministry, however, this is no small matter. Something as simple as not knowing what will happen next in the divine service can bring a deep sense of shame to many traditional people. In addition, being ‘forced’ to endure informal interactions with well meaning people can be most offensive and confronting due to the fact that in most non-western cultures, access to an individual is traditionally limited to a select few family members. It is precisely at this point that the liturgy provides protection from inappropriate intimacy and safeguard from shame. The liturgical rite structures our interactions and provides a consistent pattern that people are free to engage in to a greater or lesser extent, thereby providing security and sanctuary to those who are already feeling conspicuous. Kleinig makes precisely this point when he states that “even though ritual communicates a way of life, it does so discreetly, without imposing itself upon a person, by invading his privacy. It creates the time and space for voluntary involvement. Its demands are minimal. It merely requires the presence of a person (1988: 17).”

What do you hear or notice?

4. How are aliens discussed in the Bible?

Participant Notes:

As Christians we acknowledge the difficulties any government faces in setting policy when there are competing concerns of security, compassion, justice and protection let alone our duty to honour and pray for our leaders. Nevertheless we want to take seriously our responsibility to those in real need as God says ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’ Zechariah 7:9-10

Leader notes:

Resources: Bibles, copies of *If the world were a village of 100 people...*, *Act Now*, *All the Lonely Children*, *Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Scriptural, Theological and Ethical Approaches*,

1. How did God instruct ancient Israel to treat the "strangers" (non-Israelites, Gentiles) who were living with them?

Exodus 22:21, Exodus 23:9, Exodus 12:49, Leviticus 19:33 – 34 .

Note: Israel was not a closed society composed only of the descendents of Jacob. Not only does God allow aliens (also known as sojourners) to live among his chosen people, he specifically commanded how they were to be treated and their status in society. Those born in Israel were forbidden by God to oppress strangers - especially since at one time they, too, were strangers in a strange land.

Those foreign born who lived in Israel could worship the true God as fully as any native-born citizen. The Bible says, however, that they were expected to obey God's Law and were subject to the same penalties for disobedience as those born in the land. If they did obey, they could experience all the blessings that came with obedience to God's way just like any Israelite citizen.

2. And what are the instructions in the New Testament?

Ephesians 2:11-22, Hebrews 13:2, Acts 15

Note: The treatment of strangers found in the Old Testament was carried over into New Testament times when God's blessings would be available to people of all nations. The apostles and elders who gathered for what is known as the "Jerusalem conference" (Acts 15) recognized this truth. They placed no greater responsibility upon Gentile believers than that expressed in the Law of Moses. For whatever reason, they found it necessary to name four specific obligations (Acts 15:20), but beyond that, they knew that any other instructions were unnecessary.

3. And asylum seekers today...?

Leaders Notes:

The following two activities could be very useful in helping the group to gain an understanding of the background of being a refugee and even of those who come to Australia.

The first, *If the world were a village of 100 people...* requires participants to predict and then discover how world resources and opportunities are distributed.

If the world was a village of 100 people then ...

<i>Our Estimate</i>	<i>Actual Number</i>	<i>Item</i>
		would be unable to read or write
		would be malnourished
		would be dying of starvation
		would be without access to a safe water supply
		would lack access to improved sanitation
		would not have any electricity
		would own an automobile
		would speak English
		would control 32% of the entire village's wealth
		would be receiving --and attempting to live on-- only 3% of the income of "the village"

STATE OF THE VILLAGE REPORT by D. H. Meadows, 2005.

If the world was a village of 100 people then ...

<i>Our Estimate</i>	<i>Actual Number</i>	<i>Item</i>
		would be unable to read or write
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STATE OF THE VILLAGE REPORT by D. H. Meadows, 2005.

Leader Notes:

Answer table for If the world was a village of 100 people then

Our Estimate	Actual Number	Item
	35	would be unable to read or write
	50	would be malnourished
	1	would be dying of starvation
	33	would be without access to a safe water supply
	39	would lack access to improved sanitation
	24	would not have any electricity
	7	would own an automobile
	8	would speak English
	5	would control 32% of the entire village's wealth
	33	would be receiving --and attempting to live on-- only 3% of the income of "the village"

STATE OF THE VILLAGE REPORT by D. H. Meadows, 2005.

The following is also something to ponder....

If you woke up this morning healthythen you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep... then you are more comfortable than 75% of the people of this world.

If you have money in the bank and spare change in your pocket or purse ...then you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you can read this ...then you are more blessed than over 2 billion who cannot read at all.

Which group are we in?

The second, *Act Now*, is a simulation activity in which participants are placed in the position of living in a country undergoing turmoil and they are seeking to hold onto their beliefs and yet survive.

Act Now – A Rights Human Simulation activity
(Written by R. Collyer and based on *Repression* by C. Broadbent for Amnesty International 1982)

Resources:

2 to 4 Life Cards per person. The Life Cards cover areas such as anxiety, imprisonment, hunger, health and income. An Act Now - Decision Choices sheet for each person on which participants indicate their responses to each situation.

Aim:

The aim of the game is to remain faithful to your beliefs and to survive if you can.

Instructions:

Each person is handed 2 to 4 cards. You may wish to make the distribution of Life Cards more closely resemble the distribution of wealth in your community by randomly distributing different number of Life Cards to different people or by placing a pile of cards in front of the group and asking them to distribute them according to how they see wealth is distributed in their community.

The Leader reads out Situation 1. On the command ACT NOW, participants read and make a choice from those available for Situation 1. They are to pick an option which best approximates what they think they might do in the circumstances.

The Leader then reads the results from the Results for each choice.

Participants keep or forfeit the Life Cards as directed by the Leader.

If a participant cannot find sufficient cards to pay the forfeit, their personal resources are obviously exhausted and she dies. (*This wording is quite important because it gives participants the opportunity to share cards between each other.*)

A Hope situation gives certain participants extra Life Cards.

This game simulates real life; consequently, those who survive may not be those with the most integrity, courage or idealism.

ACT NOW—A Human Rights Simulation Activity

Situation 1

Your country is experiencing a time of difficulty. There is a high level of unemployment, increasing inflation, an ever-widening gap between rich and poor and general unease.

ACT NOW

- A – You are too busy with your own life to think or be worried about it.
- B – You complain to your friends about what is happening.
- C- You write letters to the paper and post a blog.

Results:

A, B, C. You are all right for the present.

Situation 2

There is growing dissatisfaction. Food shortages are now common, unemployment is increasing rapidly and the cost of living continues to rise steeply. Rallies and protests, which sometimes turn violent, are now frequent. Crimes against people and property increase enormously. Everyone knows of someone who has been affected. The government declares that maintaining law and order is the most important priority and bans all public demonstrations, bans any references to protests against the government in all media including the internet, and the police and military are expanded. All welfare and education programs are cut back to make this possible. Concerns about climate change and the shortage of water are ignored.

ACT NOW

- A – You take part in a non-violent protest.
- B – You distribute information that criticises the government.
- C – You remain hopeful that once law and order is restored that the country will return to normal.

Results:

- A – You are arrested at the rally. Lose one Life Card
- B – Your employer becomes aware of your activities and you lose your job. Lose one Life Card.
- C – You are all right for the present.

Situation 3

The government is running out of money. In order to save on costs the government has decided to change the health scheme in favour of one that only the rich can afford. The cost of drinking water is rising rapidly.

ACT NOW

- A – You decide to join a rally to protest.
- B – You do nothing.
- C – You decide to install more water tanks.

Results

- A – You are arrested. Lose one Life Card.
- B - You are all right for the present EXCEPT if a poor person (i.e. sitting on the floor). Hand one Life card to a rich person to pay for the new health system.
- C – If rich you are rewarded by the government. Collect one Life Card. If poor you find that you cannot afford the cost of a tank. Hand one Life Card to a rich person to pay for the new health system.

Situation 4

The church you belong to has started working with the families of political prisoners and produces an underground newspaper which highlights the suffering of these people. A friend is imprisoned because she is suspected of associating with the writer of an article critical of the government. You are asked to store the photocopier in your garage.

ACT NOW

- A – You refuse the request because you think the church should stay out of politics.
- B – You agree to the request but take no further part in the project.
- C – You become very keen about the newspaper as a way of helping your friend.

Results:

- A - The minister of your church is arrested. At the security headquarters, he is tortured to give information about suspected people. His screams are relayed down the phone to his wife who is forced to listen from her own home. She suffers greatly and you are shocked and feel that your own decisions were quite wrong in the light of this event. Lose two Life cards.
- B and C. - Your venture remains undetected but you are very worried. Lose one Life Card.

HOPE

The government has decided to allow world health organisations into the country to provide aid. It is distributed by the army. You may collect one Life Card. You may collect two Life Cards ONLY if another participant has already given you a card during the previous situations.

Situation 5

Food is becoming harder to buy. The government introduces severe rationing. Supermarket shelves are nearly empty especially of bread and milk. People queue for hours for one piece of fruit. Meat is only affordable for the rich. You are sure that worse is to follow.

ACT NOW

- A - You decide to help a local church charity for the poor.
- B - You decide to stock your freezer.
- C - You join a small group which steals food from the army.

Results

- A – You see scenes of starvation that will haunt you forever. Lose one Life Card
- B – The electricity fails constantly. You lose the food in your freezer. Lose one Life Card.
- C- You are successful a few times but then it all comes unstuck. You are arrested. Lose one Life Card.

Situation 6

You have reached a foreign country and seek refuge. It is a rather hot day. You have been standing outside in a line for several hours. A few people are selling bottles of water at very inflated prices. You finally reach the desk and an official expects you to answer the following questions. **(NOTE the English is NOT read out aloud)**

- Baye Uvelaphi? (Where have you come from? *Zulu*)
- Ungubani igama lakho? (What is your name? *Zulu*)
- Do ikollok tfal? (Do you have children? *Maltese*)
- Is jy Australiese? (Are you Australian? *Africaans*)
- Manpalænk ni di tē winimi tō? (How many chickens does he have there? *Nuer*)

ACT NOW

A – You decide to answer in English according to what you think is being asked.

B – You stand dumbfounded and decide to offer a bribe to the official.

C – You try to explain that you only speak English.

Results

A – You are asked to go to another line with an English translator.

B – Your offer of a bribe is rejected and you are asked to go to another line with an English translator.

C – You are asked to go to another line with an English translator.

Debrief

What did you notice/feel/experience?

ACT NOW - Decision Choices

After each situation is read out, tick one of the following responses that best approximates what you would do.

Situation 1

- A – You are too busy with your own life to think or be worried about it.
- B – You complain to your friends about what is happening.
- C - You write letters to the paper and post a blog.

Situation 2

- A – You take part in a non-violent protest.
- B – You distribute information that criticises the government.
- C – You remain hopeful that once law and order is restored that the country will return to normal.

Situation 3

- A – You decide to join a rally to protest.
- B – You do nothing.
- C – You decide to install more water tanks.

Situation 4

- A – You refuse the request because you think the church should stay out of politics.
- B – You agree to the request but take no further part in the project.
- C – You become very keen about the newspaper as a way of helping your friend.

Situation 5

- A - You decide to help a local church charity for the poor.
- B - You decide to stock your freezer.
- C - You join a small group which steals food from the army.

Situation 6

- A – You decide to answer in English according to what you think is being asked.
- B – You stand dumbfounded and decide to offer a bribe to the official.
- C – You try to explain that you only speak English

Participant Notes:

Understanding the language of refugees

Asylum seekers: Those who would like to settle in Australia because of extreme difficulties in their home country. They arrive via various means.

Refugees: Those who are accepted into Australia after processing as 'genuine' asylum seekers and are normally allowed to stay.

Illegal arrivals: This is a misleading term for it is not illegal to seek refuge on our country.

Illegal aliens: Aliens are people who live in a country, other than the one of their birth, without having obtained citizenship status.

Jumping the queue: The majority (but not all) of asylum seekers are from countries where there is no queue to join, and there is no Refugee Convention country en-route to Australia that can provide long term protection. For example, Indonesia is not a signatory to the Convention, so to send asylum seeker there means that they have no hope of ever getting citizenship and a secure future.

Facts and Figures

The United Nations estimates that there are about 16 million refugees worldwide. Many are in camps and no-man's lands. One million asylum seekers are waiting for visas.

Australia's refugee intake is currently (2014) 13,750 per year.

Australia accepts about 200,000 permanent skilled migrants per year and more than 200,000 on temporary or working holiday visas.

Australia currently ranks 49th in the world for refugee intake per capita, or 91st when national wealth is taken into account.

More than 8,000 asylum seekers are currently being held in detention centres in Australia, Manus Island, Christmas Island and Nauru including more than 1,000 children.

For 2014 the cost of running detention centres is almost \$3 billion.

About 30,000 asylum seekers are currently living in the community on Bridging Visas. They receive 89% or less of the lowest Centrelink payment, and are not allowed to work for pay.

Recent policy changes remove the possibility of family reunions for anyone who has come by boat since 2001, including those recognized as refugees, as no permanent visas are being issued at present.

Recent boats contain many women and children who are attempting to join their husbands and fathers here in Australia since that last ruling.

Nearly all those who arrive by boat and who are processed are found to be refugees.

Case Study: ‘Love coming to life’ by Pastor Tom Pietsch from *Inside Story - St Paul’s Lutheran Church Quarterly Magazine* March 2014

On a Sunday morning in May 2013, the ushers at St Paul’s Grovedale found themselves welcoming six young men with dark skin and limited English. After worship, they joined us for a cup of tea and we found out they were Tamil asylum seekers, released from detention only a couple of days prior and placed into a house next door to the church. Some of us then spent the afternoon hearing the stories of Leo, Robert Mohammed, Samuel Mardi and Sutha. We showed them around Geelong and helped organise their living arrangements. Some of us returned the next day, and the day after, and the week after, and so our journey went.

Within six months we had got to know around 20 Tamils and 20 Iranians, all released from detention into our community. While government services are designed to provide the asylum seekers with financial assistance, we have become their friends and the people they turn to for love and for support. The Tamils tell stories of persecution and suffering, and the Iranian stories reflect confusion and uncertainty – including a strong desire to return home.

Our members have provided clothes, prams and food. We have pleaded with real estate agents and property owners to let asylum seekers rent local housing. We have recruited Tamils on to our cricket teams. We have given them driving lessons and even received a donated car. We have helped the move house, or move interstate. We have given English classes. We have prayed with them and blessed them. We have shared countless meals with them. We have helped them in worship and have told them of the atoning death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Our journey with asylum seekers began in worship. Along with the entire cosmos, we know that it will end there too.

- For further exploration of this topic see *Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Scriptural, Theological and Ethical Approaches* by the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane (2013) and *All the Lonely Children* by the Australian Churches Refugee Task Force (2013 NCCA).

Questions for Discussion

What does all this mean for us today?

How can the LCA with its unique experience and special relationship with African refugees, best influence politicians and government agencies, media and confront simplistic notions such as stop the boats, queue jumping etc.?

Could an acceptable quota of refugees to Australia be higher?

Would community detention rather than restrictive detention be a better alternative?

Can it ever be fair to keep children in detention?

How do we best provide safety for those who are so desperate that they take to sea in risky conditions?

Should the people smugglers and their passengers be equally punished?

Is it ethically unjustifiable for the Australian Government to imprison in dangerous and uncontrolled situations one group of asylum in order that their hardship will deter others from claiming protection, and so from the risk of drowning?

Is it clearly and simply ethically unjustifiable when the disrespect for people's human dignity is inflicted to secure goals that have nothing to do with their needs or their wrongdoing?

Further Resources

Go Back to where you came from (series 1 and 2) – SBS (available from ABC shops)

No fire Zone: the killing fields of Sri Lanka – harrowing but allows the viewer to appreciate the background of some of our refugees. (Available from the Tamil Refugee Council of Victoria)

The Lost Boys of Sudan - The experience of young people in South Sudan during the civil war. movie and YouTube

Rainbow Bird Cavouras, Czenya (2007) (Adelaide: Wakefield Press)

Rainbow Bird is a deeply moving children's picture book written and illustrated by 14-year-old Czenya Cavouras, who is now in high school. It tells the story of a refugee journey from a destroyed homeland to a desolate detention centre and finally, to future of hope. *Rainbow Bird* is quietly harrowing, has a unique author voice, and is ultimately inspiring and uplifting.

Asylum seeker ethics is simple by Andrew Hamilton, Eureka Street, 19 March 2014

5. Now where to and who with? **Bible Study 1 – Unity in Diversity**

Participant Notes:

Following the Flood, Genesis 10 outlines the origin of the nations which developed from Shem, Ham and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. The Tower of Babel powerfully explains our cross-cultural communication difficulties.

Read Genesis 11: 1-9

Note: The Hebrew in Genesis 11:1 is more literally translated, "...of one lip and one set of words."

Genesis 11:9 Babel is a play on the word "confuse".

- What do you hear? What do you notice? What stands out to you?
- What do you understand to be the reason for God scattering the people by confusing their language?

What do you understand would be the immediate difficulties faced by the people that led to their scattering?

Many years later representatives from these nations would gather in Jerusalem (see Acts 2, Pentecost) and hear the Good News of the Saviour in their own language, showing that Jesus will reunite what sin and rebellion has separated. Moreover in Revelation 7:9-12 we see and await the experience of the great work of the gospel reversing the effects of Babel.

Bible Study 2 - One Body Many Members

Participant Notes:

The theme and image of one body with many members – with each member essential for the wholeness of the body – is set forth in clarity in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. This image of the one body stands at the centre of this study.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Leaders Notes:

The rebellion was directed against the judgment of God and therefore against the will of God (Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 9:1).

The name Nimrod (10:8-9) means, "Let us rebel". Nimrod apparently later deified himself as the chief of the Babylonian gods as Marduk. The pantheon of the Babylonian gods is linked to identity of the various "gods" and "goddesses" of Rome Greece, India, Egypt, and other nations. These pagan deities were also identified with the stars and planets -- the "host heaven-- with sun worshipping occupying a central place. It was these ancient Babylonians who systematized the gods by formalizing their identity with the Zodiac.

Behind all these "gods" and the images made to represent them (Romans 1) is Satan, the Deceiver. A decision is made to build with bricks and mortar rather than stone. This was a superior method of constructing long-lasting structures than the sun-dried bricks that were easier to make. Stone with clay mortar was also less durable. Heat-treated in a kiln, these Babylonian bricks were intended to enable buildings to last a very long time. The tar employed for mortar was easily found in the asphalt pits that were common in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley.

God sees that humanity is at risk of self-destruction as it was prior to the Flood and so in compassion, God directly intervenes in the situation. He does this not because He is merely angry, but because He knows what will happen if He does not take action. God is clearly desperate in His desire not to exercise world-wide destruction again.

God confuses the very element that unites them – their language. Language of course involves much more than just the words. It also involves what the words suggest as well as the ability to understand gestures and unspoken messages. You may wish to refer the group back to the pictures in part 3.1 of this study.

What is the meaning for you of being baptized into one body?

What is your picture of the oneness of the body of Christ?

What was happening in the church in Corinth at that time? As a group select different parts of chapters 1 to 11 to find the issues that Paul was trying to address.

In the group read aloud 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and 14-27.

And what about the world and our church today? How do you hear this reading within the reality of our world and the body of the church? Which members of the body are being disrespected or dishonoured? What would it mean to fully live as the body of Christ in this place?

Participant Notes:

For further discussion and action

Christ is the head and we have been called by God into his body, the church. It is a changed body; a transformed body, in need of constant renewal for sure but one called for his purpose; of his leading. It is our Good Friday and Easter moment; our Thief on the cross and our Road to Emmaus moment. We are called to understand and reflect on his purpose for the church and to be church. Reflecting is a renewing of the mind.

Romans 12:4-5, 1 Cor 12:7, Romans 12:2

How could we take any of the things we have learnt from the African community about joyfulness, faithfulness, spiritual dedication into our service?

What can the African refugees give to the LCA to improve the life of the church? E.g. hunger for Bible study, passion for evangelism, joy in worship (music, song, dance), understanding and acceptance of different cultures, caring beyond paternalism, showing students in Lutheran schools a different view of the world and of Christianity? How can we enable this to happen?

How can we sow the seeds of a congregation with dwindling numbers sacrificially give up some of its real estate assets to support ministry which is growing because of African refugees?

How could your congregation be helped to experience the joy of supporting the new ministry opportunities provided by our new neighbours?

Leader Notes:

Consider these words of Paul to the church in Corinth within the context of their life together as a community of early Christians. If we read the 11 chapters that precede these verses, we find Paul openly addressing a church with divisions and controversies. He challenges his listeners to confront those divisions and deal with how they are to live with one another. He notes jealousy and quarrelling among the people and the power that some have been asserting over others. In seeking their own advantage, they have been serving their own needs and keeping others out. Some have been setting rules for others to follow, arguing about the need to follow Jewish law in order to be a Christian.

It is a world not unlike ours, filled with division and separation – some asserting or being ascribed power over others; some having more resources and using them at the expense of others; some using the Word to keep others out.

As we embark on the journey of being one body in Christ, we live with all the challenges and tensions of living as the body of Christ. Our jealousies and quarrelling, our divisions and separations, our misuse of power – all these are not new in life together within the church. But it is clear in these verses that Christ calls us to live as new people – to live as one body, with many members; to live in unity within our diversity.

Is our way of planning the “right” way of planning within African cultures?

How might the LCA/your congregation best be able to experience a different view of being Lutheran from our new neighbours? Could we all learn some e.g. Nuer and Dinka and incorporate this into an African Ministry Sunday service in a spirit of welcome or incorporate some African religious art in our church or LCA media or even commission some African expression of the Christian faith for banners or learn African drumming for hymn singing?

What would you like to know more about? What do you want to pray about in church or at home?

Write the petition that could be included in the Prayer of the Church on this topic for your congregation next Sunday.

What text or aspect of this study would you like your pastor to preach on?

How far is the following what you would want to say to any of your new neighbours after these Bible studies?

“Brothers and sisters, I would like to learn from you. I would like to see how you make decisions and do things. I would like you to tell me what Christ means to you. Then I would like to encourage you to be all that God wants you to be.”

How have these studies been helpful?

May God richly bless your journey.

Prayer and Songs to open and close Bible Study sessions

The following may be used to open or close the study sessions.

The servant king (AT 261)

Now thank we all our God (TIS106)

Make me a channel of your peace (TIS 607)

What does the Lord require (TIS 618)

Sent forth by God’s blessing (TIS 531)

When God almighty came to be one of us (TIS 281)

This is my Father’s world (TIS 149)

Brother let me serve you (TIS 650)

A new commandment (TIS 699)

Lord let me see (TIS 681)

A pilgrim and a stranger (LH 480)

There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy (TIS 136)

No longer strangers (AT144)

Prayer

The group may like to make a list of petitions arising from a session’s study which could be included in a concluding prayer.

References and acknowledgements

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