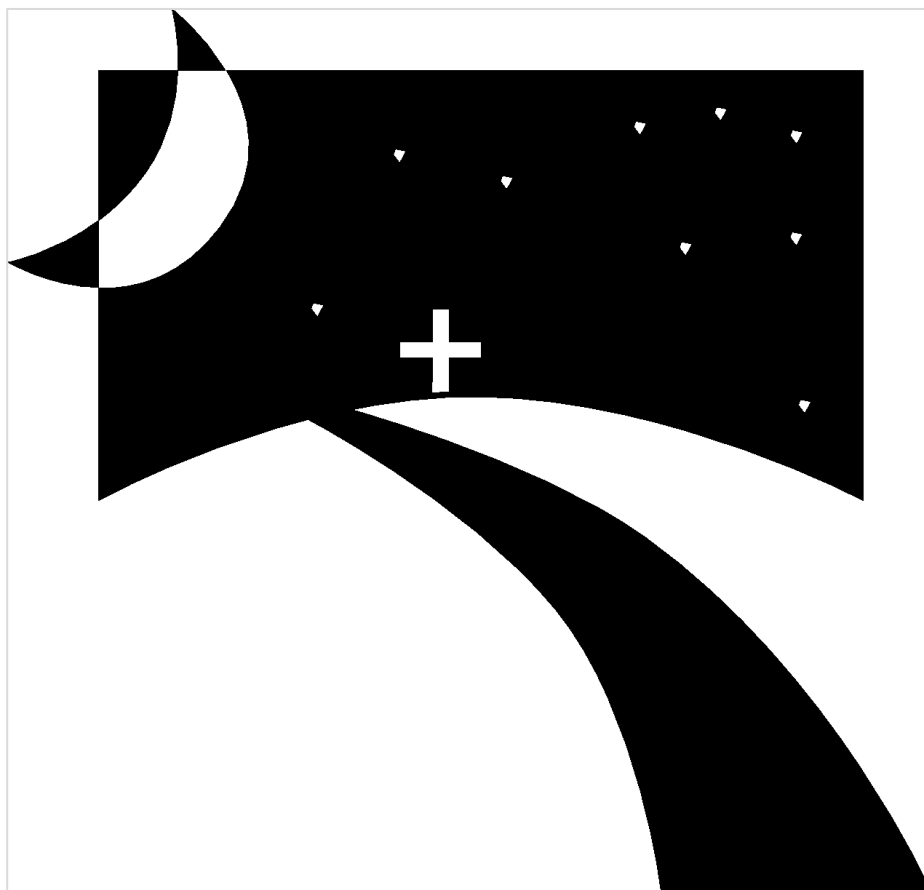


Lenten Bible Study



A Journey to New Life

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Lenten Bible Study: A Journey to New Life

Session One

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for your love and Word for us. We live in a world of sin. Help us to see it, name it, and cast it out, of ourselves, our community, and our society. Guide us so that we may serve our neighbors in ways that will be healing and life-giving. Amen.

Before we begin...

We are at the beginning of our Lenten journey. In the early church, Lent was a rigorous time to prepare for baptism. Later it became a time for public penance. Now, we in the ELCA engage in a forty-day devotional time to prepare for Easter; some use it as a period to prepare for new members and baptism.

This year we invite you to use this Bible study as part of your Lenten journey. We will spend time with the Revised Common Lectionary Scripture readings alongside the problem of sex trafficking.

Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

What do you wonder about this passage? What did you notice this time reading it, that you may not have in the past?

What is sex trafficking?

Quoted from <https://polarisproject.org/sex-trafficking>:

Sex trafficking is a form of modern slavery that exists throughout the United States and globally. Sex traffickers use violence, threats, lies, debt bondage, and other forms of coercion to compel adults and children to engage in commercial sex acts against their will. Under U.S. federal law, any minor under the age of 18 years induced into commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking—regardless of whether or not the trafficker used force, fraud, or coercion.

The situations that sex trafficking victims face vary dramatically. Many victims become romantically involved with someone who then forces or manipulates them into prostitution. Others are lured in with false promises of a job, such as modeling or dancing. Some are forced to sell sex by their parents or other family members. They may be involved in a trafficking situation for a few days or weeks, or may remain in the same trafficking situation for years.

Victims of sex trafficking can be U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, women, men, children, and LGBTQ individuals. Vulnerable populations are frequently targeted by traffickers, including runaway and homeless youth, as well as victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, war, or social discrimination.

Sex trafficking occurs in a range of venues including fake massage businesses, via online ads or escort services, in residential brothels, on the street or at truck stops, or at hotels and motels.

Key Statistics

- Since 2007, the **National Human Trafficking Hotline**, operated by Polaris, has received reports of 22,191 sex trafficking cases inside the United States. **Find more Hotline statistics here.**
- In 2016, the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children** estimated that 1 in 6 endangered runaways reported to them were likely sex trafficking victims.
- Globally, the International Labor Organization estimates that there are **4.5 million people trapped in forced sexual exploitation globally.**
- In a 2014 report, the **Urban Institute** estimated that the underground sex economy ranged from \$39.9 million in Denver, Colorado, to \$290 million in Atlanta, Georgia.”

What surprised you about this information about trafficking? Where do you see this already happening in your community? Who is vulnerable in your community and where might people be most vulnerable?

What does the ELCA have to say?

From ELCA Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation

The ELCA Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation was adopted by the ELCA Church Council in 2001. Social messages explore the church’s response to a specific,

timely topic in order to guide readers to think about a topic of social concern from a Lutheran perspective and to encourage ways to serve our neighbors affected by the social concern.

Even a glimpse of the sex system makes evident that this is not the way life is supposed to be. Sin is the proper term for speaking of what has gone profoundly wrong in God's good creation. Sin is an intruder in creation, resisting and distorting God's intention for human community. Sin is both personal and social. It finds a home deep in the human heart, turning us in on ourselves and away from God and others, and takes on a life of its own in our social structures.

Let us not blink at, gloss over, trivialize, or accommodate ourselves to the sinful evil of the sex system. It is social sin, a structure of evil that shapes and snares persons, and to which personal attitudes, decisions, and acts contribute. In its tangled web, we see the dynamics of sin at work.

Persons become objects to be used for the benefit of others. The sex system denies the human dignity bestowed by God on all. This denial is most blatant in sex trafficking, a form of slavery driven by greed in which captured persons become property, a mere extension of the will of the owner. Yet using persons as objects characterizes all parts of the system: For predators, owners, and managers of the system, 'their' children and adults are instruments for generating income; for sellers, 'johns' or buyers are objects for gaining money or favor with their pimps; and for customers, sellers are 'pieces of meat' to satisfy their every want." (pp. 3,4)

What leaps out at you from these passages?

Putting it all together

Reread the text from Matthew.

1. Does anything new jump out at you after having read this information about trafficking?
2. The problem of trafficking can seem overwhelming and the sin so deeply embedded. Where do you see hope in this passage?
3. Because Jesus was human, he experienced everything humans do, including death. In this passage we see him experience temptation. When confronted with the realities of trafficking, what are you tempted to do? What is God calling you to do?

Action opportunities

- Print posters found at: <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/get-involved/outreach-and-awareness>. Where can you hang them up in your community? Restrooms, restaurants, hotels?
- Research more about the reality of trafficking in your local context.

- Read the *Wednesday Prayer* from Cherish All Children, found at: <http://www.cherishallchildren.org/wednesdayprayer>.
- Read the entire ELCA Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation here, in English or Spanish: <http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation>.

Learn more

Below are resources you can print or share online.

- Myths about sex trafficking: <https://love146.org/slavery/common-myths/>
- How Sex Traffickers Recruit Children <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/why-bad-looks-good/201401/human-trafficking-psychology-recruitment>
- Child Sex Trafficking in America: A Guide for Parents and Guardians: http://www.missingkids.org/en_US/documents/Fact_Sheet_Parents_Guardians.pdf
- Victims and Traffickers: <https://polarisproject.org/victims-traffickers>
- Power Wheel: <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/resources/human-trafficking-power-and-control-wheel>



Session 2

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for loving the world so deeply. Help us to love the world and all of your children. Help us to hear what you are calling us to do, especially in regards to sex trafficking. Help us to see how we can love and serve our neighbors who are caught in this web of sin. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John 3:1-8 (NRSV)

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

What do you wonder about this passage? What did you notice this time reading it, that you may not have in the past?

What does the ELCA have to say?

Foundational Documentation on the Social Message on Gender-Based Violence

"Through baptism, we die and rise in Christ as we are washed by the Spirit through water and marked with the sign of Christ, the cross. Through the gift of baptism, God holds the body together in its vast plurality, in its dying and rising in Christ." (pp.16)

Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement

"We know scripturally and theologically that all bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Violence is rarely justifiable; it is particularly horrific when we permit its perpetuation against some people and their bodies because they are seen to matter less. The church as the body of Christ knows that to harm any member of the corporate body is to harm Christ; to denigrate the temple of the Spirit is to

denigrate the Spirit. This sacred knowledge gives us not only ground in our holy conviction to end this violence, but also an awareness of how these injustices ripple beyond those immediately affected into all of our lives, and into God's heart as well. As significant a web as sin has woven in sexism, the web of the goodness of God's creation and our reconciliation in the grace of God through Christ is greater indeed.

We trust that justification by grace through faith frees us from our ego that throws up defenses against our engagement of violence against women. We have assurance of God's love and forgiveness for all our sin, and we are heirs to the promise of the kingdom. The freedom of God's grace in Christ compels us to act, even as we know we are still enmeshed in sin.

We have the commitment in the ministry of all the baptized to love and serve our neighbors – all our neighbors. This is a commitment to neighbor justice, both in the protection of the vulnerable and oppressed and in bringing justice to perpetrators of harm. It is an act of love to speak truth about the way we all participate in a culture of gender-based violence and to the fact that perpetrators of violence against people with devalued identities are overwhelmingly people with privileged identities. It is neither loving nor does it ultimately serve God or others to shy away from these facts.” (pp. 81)

What leaps out at you from these passages?

Putting it all together

Reread the text from John.

1. Does anything new jump out at you?
2. What does it mean to be born of water and Spirit?
3. The excerpt from *Faith, Sexism, Justice* refers to some bodies “mattering less.” How do you see that manifest in the system of sex trafficking? In stereotypes about people who are trafficked?
4. What does the image of wind blowing remind you of? In what ways can you relate “⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes,” to trafficking and the work against it?
5. Why do we serve our neighbors? Who are they?

Action opportunities

- Find out if there is a Trafficking Task Force in your city, county, or state. If so, see if you can attend their next meeting to learn their current projects. How might you or others in the Bible study get involved?

- Visit the website <http://www.nsvrc.org/organizations/state-and-territory-coalitions> to find out the name of your state's coalition of organizations that serve sexual violence victims. Visit your state coalition's website to learn what they do, training and resources they offer, and if/how your congregation could become a member.
- Work through the modules of *Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement*. Module 5 is specifically about violence. You can find the modules here: <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Women-and-Justice/Faith-Sexism-Justice>.



Session 3

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for meeting each of us in unexpected ways, to listen to our stories, to inspire us to share your love. Open our ears to the stories of those harmed by sex trafficking. Give us all courage in our listening and our speaking. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John 4:5-42 (NRSV)

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the

true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”

²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.

What do you wonder about this passage? What did you notice this time reading it, that you may not have in the past?

Connecting John 4:5-42 with Trafficking

This excerpt is taken from an article/radio news story from American Public Media called “Bought and Sold Victims, not criminals: Rebranding teen sex trafficking.” You can read or listen to the full story at: <http://www.apmreports.org/story/2016/05/12/victims-teen-sex-trafficking>

“The state and the nation are undergoing a sea change in how they understand and combat teen sex trafficking. Lawmakers, police, prosecutors and advocates in the past decade have rebranded what once was called underage prostitution.

Driven by young victims themselves and by veterans of the debate over domestic abuse, they have begun to look at sex trafficking as a public health problem instead of a criminal justice problem. Trafficked girls are increasingly considered victims, not criminals. Police and prosecutors in some places are focusing more

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus of Nazareth. Time and again, Jesus' ministry took the form of healing pain. God, through the church, continues this ministry.

On the cross, Jesus Christ took on all sin and death for our sakes. We no longer need to live with death and sin upon us. And in the resurrection, God, through Christ, is making a new creation, mending what is broken and sending the healing presence of the Holy Spirit to dwell among us." (pp. 9)

What stuck out to you from these readings? Were you surprised by anything? When did you think trafficking first became legally recognized as a crime?

Putting It All Together

1. Where do you see Christ in this article? How is Christ's presence with trafficking victims similar or different to where Jesus is in the story of the woman at the well?
2. Because the woman was fetching water at the well at noon, we can surmise that she was ostracized from the other women of her community, who would have gotten water at dawn when it was cooler out. The fact that Jesus was speaking to her would have been scandalous because she was a woman AND a Samaritan. How can you relate her story to that of the women being trafficked?
3. It's difficult to read Joy Friedman say that she needed to be convinced that being trafficked wasn't her fault and that she was worth saving. Describe from your perspective how you would talk about the freedom of the Gospel for people who have been trafficked.

Action opportunities

- Learn what organizations in your community are providing services to sexual/domestic violence or trafficking victims. Go visit them to learn more about what they are doing and how your congregation might work with them on a project or support their work in other ways. If you are in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area, you can find a directory of organizations which serve trafficking survivors at: <http://www.cherishallchildren.org/beacaringneighbor>
- What laws does your community have to protect people who are trafficked? Educate yourself and then contact your representatives with your concerns.
- Read the entire ELCA Social Message on Gender-based Violence, which can be found in English and Spanish here: <http://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Gender-Violence>.



Session 4

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for your healing power. In the face of shaming and abusive powers, help us to find our own spiritual authority. Open our hearts, so we are no longer ignorant of the injustice of trafficking and we see those impacted. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John 9:1-41 (NRSV)

Note: In some places the word "Jews" was replaced with "religious leaders."

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud¹ on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹ During Jesus' time, people believed saliva had healing properties, especially from a holy person. The kneading of the mud violates the Sabbath practices, showing Jesus was willing to be countercultural when it served people.

¹⁸The religious authorities did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the religious authorities; for the religious authorities had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”

²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

What do you wonder about this passage? What did you notice this time reading it, that you may not have in the past?

Connecting John 9:1-41 with Trafficking

This excerpt is a continuation of the article from Session 3: “Bought and Sold Victims, not criminals: Rebranding teen sex trafficking.” You can read or listen to the full story here: <http://www.apmreports.org/story/2016/05/12/victims-teen-sex-trafficking>

In 2000, Congress passed a law recognizing that many people in the sex trade are not willing participants. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act created new

penalties for anyone who uses coercion, force or deception to make someone perform a commercial sex act. But the main idea was to combat international labor and sex trafficking.

‘And more and more people, even at that early stage, started to say, ‘Well, this is also happening in our local communities,’’ said Amy Farrell, a criminologist at Northeastern University in Boston. ‘In addition to people being transported across borders, there are people that are in very similar ways being moved and coerced in the United States.’

Starting in 2003, states began passing their own anti-human trafficking laws. But they were rarely used. Police continued to arrest prostitutes, including minors...

As police, prosecutors and advocates shift attitudes to help young victims in the sex trade, they also are turning more attention to shutting down the demand for commercial sex... Stings to catch johns are expensive for police and they can be dangerous. But at least the targets are easy to catch.

Traffickers are tougher.

‘They tend to be more wary and more strategic in avoiding police operations,’ said Detective Tim Hoppock of the Austin Police Department... ‘It also can be an uphill battle to get a trafficking case through a courtroom,’ Hoppock said. ‘Victims might not testify, the evidence can be complex and, because trafficking laws are relatively new, it’s often easier for juries to understand drug charges or sexual assault charges,’ he said.

In 2013, Farrell, the Northeastern University criminologist, published a [study](#) that found prosecutors often charged traffickers with other, lesser crimes, for example, promotion of prostitution, which has a lower burden of proof.

‘Prosecutors are more leery of trying an individual they believe is guilty of a crime with a crime they’re less certain will result in a conviction,’ said Farrell. In 2016, she [published](#) a follow-up that found states’ use of trafficking laws is growing, but it’s uneven. California accounted for nearly 40 percent of trafficking prosecutions.

In King County in Washington State, police and prosecutors are tired of simply arresting sex buyers. They want to make it unacceptable for men to buy sex in the first place.

The shift in thinking began with Valiant Richey, a senior deputy prosecuting attorney for King County. Back in 2011, he was confronted by advocates and trafficking survivors who wanted to know why he was prosecuting so many women and children. He had a look at the statistics in his county, and realized they were right.

‘It was dismaying,’ he said. ‘Because I had prosecuted many pimping cases. I knew what these girls and women had been through ... yet here in front of me was

a chart telling me that our community was arresting and prosecuting them far more often than the men who were buying them.’

Meanwhile that year, more than 130 websites were selling sex locally and nearly 7,000 men responded to Backpage ads in a 24-hour period. In 2011, only 39 buyers were charged the whole year.

‘We cannot arrest our way out (of the problem),’ Richey said. ‘Unfortunately there is an opinion that the root cause of trafficking is vulnerability, that there are vulnerable people out there and therefore they get trafficked. That’s totally incorrect. Vulnerability is what traffickers take advantage of to respond to the root cause, which is demand. If there was no demand there would be no business and traffickers would not exploit people.’”

What stuck out to you from this reading? Were you surprised by anything?

Connecting John 9:1-41 and Trafficking

1. Share some examples of times you have associated, or heard other people associate, a physical problem with sin. Share at least one response from a Lutheran understanding of faith to that tendency.
2. Jesus surprises his disciples by saying that the man’s blindness is not his fault, is not a result of sin. How is this relatable in a society that blames victims of trafficking and sexual assault?
3. Who has the authority in the biblical passage? Is it surprising? What “authorities”—people with wisdom and experience—should we look to when working against sex trafficking?

Action steps

- Put the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline number in your phone (1-888-3737-888).
- What are some ways we can advocate for victims of sex trafficking? The ELCA has a national and several state public policy offices which may have sex or human trafficking on their issue agendas. To connect with these offices, go to: <http://www.loppw.org/what-we-do/advocate/> If your state doesn’t have an ELCA public policy office, check with your state’s Council of Churches or similar organizations, which often have public policy agendas. Another resource is a statewide human trafficking task force or sexual violence victim services coalition.
- Use resources on human trafficking, including bulletin inserts, from the Justice for Women Program. [Find them at http://elca.org/Resources/Justice-for-Women.](http://elca.org/Resources/Justice-for-Women)

- How do you teach young people to find their own authority? Think about how many traffickers rely on a young person being taught to respect older people and defer to authority.



Session 5

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the many ways you bring new life and resurrection to your people. Guide us in the days ahead, so those trapped by trafficking may be released as we work to end this injustice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John 11:1-45 (NRSV)

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the religious authorities were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” ²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” ⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

What do you wonder about this passage? What did you notice this time reading it, that you may not have in the past?

What does the ELCA have to say?

Social Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation

“In our time, before God’s victory is fully manifest, our faith in the Lamb struggles against our indifference and cynicism and gives us hope and courage to act. We are to repent of our own complicity in this tangled web, whether that complicity be through active involvement in the sex system, lack of love for our youth, denial of its reality, neglect of its causes, or failure to act. We are called to expose the destructive dynamics of the sex system, tell of the victory, forgiveness, hope, and new life in Christ to all caught up in it, and to join with others to combat its evils.

This calling embraces all dimensions of life in society: personal character, family life, culture patterns, commerce, public policy, law and its enforcement, and social service and advocacy organizations. The sex system itself varies from place to place; some of its activities are illegal, and others are legal (which does not mean they are benign or morally acceptable). People in diverse places of responsibility bring distinct gifts to fight it. Equally committed people may disagree on what laws should be in place or what are the best measures to address prostitution, pornography, and stripping. In light of the scope and complexity of the action required, a multitude of creative and courageous responses are needed. The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America calls upon members, congregations, synods, churchwide units, and affiliated agencies and institutions to give serious consideration to what they should and can do.” (pp. 4-5)

Putting It All Together

1. What images in the scripture passage talk about being bound and trapped? What does this passage say about being free?
2. Name some ways you think the images of resurrection speak to human trafficking.
3. What is God calling you to do? What stone can you pull away? What gifts do you bring to this effort in the different dimensions of your life?

Action opportunities

- Learn how other ELCA congregations are working to end the injustice of child trafficking by reading past issues of the E-Quipped for Prevention newsletter from Cherish All Children: <http://www.cherishallchildren.org/newsletter>.
- Learn about the work of ELCA Justice for Women related to gender-based violence and human trafficking: <https://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Justice-for-Women/Social-Issues>.
- Learn about the work of the Women of the ELCA related to human trafficking: <http://www.womenoftheelca.org/filebin/pdf/resources/UnderstandingAndRespondingToTrafficking.pdf>. You can also read a portion of an article about work being done to address trafficking in *Gather* magazine: <http://www.womenoftheelca.org/gather—advocacy—prayer-and-kindness—january-february-2016-news-501.php?category-id=73>.



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