



Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries

Joel R. Workin Scholarship Packet

Date: April 22, 2019

To Proclaim Candidates for Rostered Ministry

From The Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholarship Committee: Michael Price Nelson, Greg A. Egertson, the Rev. Jeff R. Johnson, the Rev. Matthew James, the Rev. Becca Seely, and the Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

Thank you for being a public witness to God's extraordinary love for our world!

We are pleased to invite you to apply for a scholarship for publicly-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual + Lutheran candidates for rostered ministry. The eligible applicant must be a member of Proclaim, the professional community of publicly-identified gender and sexual minority Lutheran rostered ministers and candidates (a program of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries). All application materials are due **Friday, May 17th, 2019**.

This scholarship is given in the name of Joel Raydon Workin, one of our movement's extraordinary saints. Joel was one of the three seminarians who came out as gay to their Lutheran candidacy committees in 1989. Joel and his classmates who came out were subsequently refused ordination in the ELCA. This brave act of faithful witness was the spark that ignited a movement of resistance and affirmation of gender and sexual minorities called to rostered ministry in the Lutheran church which eventually gave birth to what is now Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries. Joel passed away from AIDS on November 29, 1995. Upon Joel's death, friends and family established a fund to honor his memory. Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is the custodian of the fund and scholarship. Each year, Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries names a Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholar.

This year, we are pleased to announce that the award comes with a financial scholarship of \$6,500 for qualified educational or candidacy expenses to a gender and sexual minority candidate for rostered ministry who embodies Joel's passion for justice and faith in life and ministry. In addition, the Scholar will be invited throughout the year to be involved with various ELM activities. We request that all funds be used prior to May 1, 2020 and that if possible, all funds are used for a single event or activity.

Previous Workin Scholars include the Rev. Jen Rude, the Rev. Matthew James, the Rev. Julie Boleyn, the Rev. Laura Kuntz, the Rev. Emily Ewing, the Rev. Rebecca Seely, the Rev. Asher O'Callaghan, the Rev. Gretchen Colby Rode, the Rev. Amy Hanson, Justin Ferko, Christophor Gilbert, the Rev. Benjamin Hogue, and S. Leon LaCross.

Application Materials

The Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholar is someone whose character and abilities are consistent with Joel's legacy. Among these are: academic excellence, personal and professional integrity, courage in response to the church's discriminatory policies, a passion for social justice, faithfulness to Jesus Christ, and potential to become an effective leader in church and society.

A complete scholarship application must include the following components:

- A cover letter, briefly introducing yourself to the committee.
- A brief paragraph response to a prompt (below on pg. 3).
- An essay - enclosed in this application packet are copies of three of Joel's essays and sermons from Joel's book, *Dear God, I'm Gay - Thank You*. Please select one of the included pieces and write a 1,000-5,000-word essay in reflection. Joel was a brilliant writer and your essay is one of the most important parts of your application.
- A copy of your current resume. Please note any Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries/Proclaim activities.
- A professional recommendation from someone (professor, pastor or other rostered professional) who can testify to your qualifications specific to this honor and award. The recommendation letter should be on official letterhead.
- Copy of your transcript from seminary or divinity school (unofficial is fine).

All materials are due no later than Friday, May 17th, 2019.

All application materials must be submitted electronically in PDF to workinscholarship@elm.org. Please put "[Your Name] - Scholarship Application" in the subject line. You may submit your letter of reference with other materials, or your reference email it directly to workinscholarship@elm.org.

The scholarship committee will notify applicants of its decision on or before May 29, 2019 (Joel's birthday). The 2019 Joel Workin Scholar will then be publicly announced and the \$6,500 grant presented.

On behalf of the Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, Joel's family and friends, and the members of Proclaim, we commend this opportunity to you and invite your application. We hope that you will consider honoring Joel's memory in this way.

Please contact Amanda Gerken-Nelson at amanda@elm.org if you have any questions.

2019 Joel Raydon Workin Memorial Scholarship for LGBTQ Seminarians



Joel Raydon Workin (1961-1995) was born in Fargo, ND, and grew up on a farm in nearby Walcott. He took his diploma at Kindred High School in Walcott, received his Bachelor of Theology from Carlton College, Northfield, MN, and his Master of Divinity from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, CA. In 1986 Joel interned at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Inglewood, CA. In the fall of 1987, Joel came out publicly as a gay candidate for the ordained ministry and was certified for call by the American Lutheran Church (a predecessor body to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Following this courageous and faithful act, Joel's certification was revoked by the ELCA and his name was never placed on the roster of approved candidates waiting for call. Joel's ministry continued in Los Angeles, however, at the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and as Director of Chris Brownlie Hospice. On December 30, 1988, Joel married Paul

Jenkins, whom he loved. Joel was a member of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, North Hollywood. He and Paul were active in Lutherans Concerned/Los Angeles and Dignity/Los Angeles. Paul died of AIDS on June 6, 1993.

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Joel loved to read, to dance, to play the piano and to sing. An avid gardener, he took pleasure in renovating the duplex he and Paul purchased in the Silverlake district in 1990. He enjoyed traveling, especially to any city where "Angels in America" was playing. He loved his family and his friends; he also loved debating, discussing and exploring a wide range of ideas. His wit and humor, keen mind and gentle spirit, and his love of life are sorely missed and fondly remembered.

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In the last weeks of his illness, Joel gave his friends and family permission to sponsor an endowed memorial fund in his name. **The Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholarship Fund** was thus established upon Joel's death from AIDS on November 29, 1995. In keeping with Joel's wishes, awards from the fund are used to provide scholarships to publicly-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer seminary students who proclaim God's love and seek justice for all. The fund is managed by **Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries**, through the InFaith Community Foundation.

Applications due Friday, May 17th, 2019.
See www.elm.org/workin-scholarship for details.

2019 Joel R. Workin Essay

Joel Workin was known for his prophetic and expansive voice. His friends refer to his “faithfulness to Jesus Christ, humor, incisive mind, and deep, caring spirit.” Even now, decades after these essays were written, Joel’s words are fresh and relevant. We bring Joel’s voice to life each year as we invite Workin Scholar applicants to read and respond to Joel’s writing in new ways. Each year, we seek to find Joel’s voice in new ways through new voices.

Please submit the following two pieces of writing.

1. Please write a paragraph or two in response to the following question: What is the prophetic word that gender and sexual minority people can bring to the church today?
2. Please read Joel’s essays and sermons included in this application packet. Select one essay or sermon and write a 1,000–1,500-word reflection.

New Beginnings

Sermon on the First Sunday after Epiphany / January 1985

Texts: Psalms 45:7-9; Isaiah 42:1-7; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17

Today, the Baptism of our Lord, is a day of many beginnings. Today we remember the beginning of Jesus' ministry, which was initiated, Mark tells us, with Jesus' baptism by John. Only a few weeks ago was Christmas, the beginning of Jesus' life; one week ago was Epiphany, the beginning of Jesus' appearances to the Gentiles, and in the second lesson for today we read of the beginning of the apostles' ministry to the Gentiles. The new year, 1985, began a short time ago. Today recently began, as did our service, and this sermon.

Beginnings are everywhere. You are beginning to wonder what I am going to talk about, and on this day of beginnings, I want us to reflect on our own beginnings and on the fact that we are always beginners.

On the island of Shikoku, one of the islands that make up the nation of Japan is a circular pilgrimage route, first traveled, so the story goes, by Kobo Daishi. There are eighty-some temples on the island that are markers of the pilgrim trail, and the Henro, the pilgrims, starting wherever they please, essentially circle the island on their pilgrimages, visiting each of the temples in turn. This pilgrimage has no end, but it is ever beginning. The pilgrim can say that he or she completed the whole route when the original starting point is reached, but even then the pilgrim has not so much arrived at an ending, but rather at a place from which to start again.

Our lives, I think, are like the Shikoku pilgrimage. Somewhere, somehow, sometime, we were baptized and this baptism sets us on a pilgrimage. From that time on we are beginners every day, every moment, as we attempt to live as baptized children of God. Isaiah's servant prophecy, which was fulfilled in Jesus, concerns us, too; for in our baptism we have God's spirit upon us. God has called us in righteousness and has taken us by the hand.

The trouble is that we often do not really like to be beginners. On the endless journey upon which God is leading us, on that endless pilgrimage of Shikoku, being a beginner means that we won't always have all the answers. It means that we must ever be open to God and God's leading, willing to learn something. How much easier it would be to just arrive somewhere and have everything settled. No more questions, no more novelty.

Peter, in today's lesson, shows us what it is like to lead the life of a beginner. Now, Peter was not really much on being a beginner. Just as things were going well in his preaching to the Jews in various parts of Israel, Peter starts to have these strange dreams about eating animals which Jewish dietary laws clearly forbid him to eat. "Surely no, Lord," Peter replies to the very idea of his sitting down to a ham dinner, but Peter is told in the dream not to consider unclean what God created clean. It takes three times through, but Peter finally gets the message. He goes to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and there baptizes Gentiles and thus begins the mission of the church to the entire world, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Peter's announcement that "I now perceive that God shows no partiality," is the statement of a beginner. Previously, Peter was a prisoner to old ways and old laws; old preconceptions blinded him to the light of God's teaching. But Peter became a beginner who was open to the new thing which God was speaking to him. God broke down the walls which threatened to enslave him and that same God, who sent Jesus to be a light to the Gentiles, called Peter and the early church to smash down the walls that would separate Jew from Gentile. It was, then, not only the Gentiles who needed to see the light, but Peter and the early church as well; for they needed to realize that God indeed does not show favoritism.

The light of Christ has come to give us a new beginning and to make us beginners. Without a beginner's mind, a mind open to God's leading, Peter would have been a prisoner, and so, too, are we prisoners when we do not have beginner's minds.

For what kind of minds do we really have, what are we really like? Are we like God's servant who does not shout or cry out or raise a voice in the street? Do we have in us a mind that does not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but humbles itself? Are we open and humble before God, acknowledging our ignorance and preconceptions? Are we listening to God's call no matter how new, how seemingly strange or novel?

Or are we, instead, prisoners of past ideas and old conceptions? Do we choose the darkness because it is familiar rather than the light which is unpredictable and breaks in upon us new at every moment? Are we captives of security rather than slaves to the freedom of God?

It is so much easier to know, to know what is going on and to feel at least a bit in control. It would have been so much easier for Peter if God would have just followed the old rules. Wasn't it

enough of a new thing that Christ came to the Jews? Why does God have to keep pushing and pushing? ‘Round and around Shikoku we go, never an end in sight, never a place to stop and say, “Finally, we have arrived.” If only we could set up a little prison of security somewhere. But every time we do, God shatters it: “Truly, I perceive that God shows no partiality.” Blind eyes are opened, captives are set free. Security comes only in being led by God.

We are all prisoners, I think, to so many things, refusing and unwilling to be beginners, always trying to stay protected and secure in our dark dungeons.

It was during my freshman year at college that I remember God beginning to blast away at some of my prison walls. Before being bombarded with all the ideas that I faced at school, before the New Testament course and hearing about form criticism, text criticism, and the synoptic problem, I was fairly secure in my beliefs. Former presidents of the Walcott Luther League usually do, you know, have it pretty together religiously. But to have everything that I held dear called into question and from all sides, was a very frightening and growing experience. “So the Bible was really written down by human beings, people with prejudices and an editorial point of view just like I might have. So this book and my religion do not have guarantees but ask that I trust in God and in God’s workings through humanity.” Slowly and sometimes painfully, my eyes opened a bit to the power of God and God spoke to me through classes, professors and friends.

And the great paradox of this whole liberating, un-prisoning process, the process of becoming a beginner, is that just as my prison walls enslave others, so too does my freedom free others, and grant them a new beginning.

Peter and the early church’s captivity to the old law would have meant darkness for the Gentiles, but the church’s new beginning meant light to the Gentiles. My captivity to some sort of mystical view of scripture meant the imprisonment, the boxing in, of God. It was only as the walls crumbled down around me that the box into which I had placed God also began to crumble.

In our freedom, then, we set others free. By becoming beginners, we give others, also, the chance to begin.

I am a slave to white middle-class America; its values, ethic and beliefs are more a part and parcel of my being than I even know. Only when that imprisonment ends will the oppressed, the black, the poor, the brown, the disabled find the chains which bind them loosened and be given a

real beginning.

I am a slave to a male dominated-and-oriented society-and-religion and when the darkness and constriction of that system is lifted, then will women and God be freed from the darkness in which they are being held.

I am a slave to my own selfish interests, wants and desires. I kill conversation by worrying about papers I have to write or books I have to read. I blacken the accomplishments of others by my greed and envy. I am deafened to God's call by the shouts of my own passion. And until I am freed from this bondage to self, until I can live fully in the present God-given moment, my presence will not bring light but darkness to meals, friends, to any situation.

We are all slaves to something, many things, and by our enslavement, we enslave others as well. Opportunity for beginning surrounds us but we sit in our encrusted security, unwilling to begin or give others the chance to begin.

It is into this frozen situation that God, Our Beginning, Our Alpha, comes. God, who sent God's Son to enlighten our darkness and loose our chains, says, "I will take you by the hand. I will put my spirit upon you and you will begin your ministry of new beginnings, of setting prisoners free and being yourself set free."

Everyday God calls us to the pilgrimage we began at baptism. We begin again each moment. Even though it seems that we have been around the island of Shikoku so many times, that we have been to all the temples before, God says, "Here, I will take you by the hand, my little beginner, and with my guidance you will see the light and will be a light. I will show you new things, and old things in a new way. Do not be a prisoner to the past, to the way you and I related to one another years ago or yesterday. I take you by the hand today, now; follow me. You are empowered by my Spirit to be ever beginning so that you can give others new beginnings."

"Do not try to be big stuff. I am the teacher, you are the beginner. Do not expect all the answers, but be glad that I give you the strength to ask and to live the questions which so many prisoners do not dare even to ask. Do not expect security or an easy life either. You were baptized into the death of Jesus Christ and in your life you will know the suffering of that body, given for you. You have no security except to be led by me.

"Sometimes you will fail, you will choose darkness over light, the security of prison over the

uncertainty of freedom and beginning, but there is no darkness which is dark to me, no prison which has walls that can keep me from you. For you were baptized into the power of Christ's resurrection, too, not only into his death. And you share in the wholeness and hope of that resurrected body, given for you.

“I, the eternal beginning, the Alpha, have made you my eternal beginner. Everyday and every moment, I take you by the hand and whatever your darkness and whatever your dungeon, I will help you live fully and freely, open to the present, its teaching, its potential, its meaning. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light; I will open your blinded eyes and will free you, a captive, from prison; I will release from the dungeon you who sit in darkness.

“And led by my hand, strengthened by my grace, and called by my Spirit, you will do the same for others. You, my light, will be a light. You, my beginner, will give others new beginnings.”

Amen.

The Light of Lent

A Lenten homily/March, 1985

The readings we have tonight for the fourth week of Lent are, of course, very familiar to us all. We have here little encapsulations of the gospel. These words, “God loves,” “God sent,” “the light has come into the world,” truly are good news. This is the stuff we Christians are all about, right? Or is it?

If this is true, if we are all about light, love and grace, then what, I wonder, is this fascination we have with Lent? You see, I have this theory that we all really love Lent much more than we admit or even know. We might have a little reservation, some uneasiness, but by and large we would find it okay if it were Lent all the time. Now this feeling has nothing to do with what the church is telling us about Lent, that this is a season of preparation, of repentance, that this is the church’s springtime. No, we don’t want our Lent like that.

Rather, we want a Lent of darkness and gloom. That is the way we like it, those are the associations we usually make. There is something about the darkness, even the agony of the season that calls to us and that allows us to say, “Yes, I recognize this place, I can get along here because I know how this place works. It’s not great, but it’s home.”

We like our Lent dark and dreary because then it leaves us alone in our shadowy isolation. It gives us time to dwell on ourselves, when we don’t have to be so concerned about others, time to wallow a bit in our own darkness, to pretend that we really do want to get out of that darkness, which is usually a lie; and, moreover, that even if we did want out, we could do it by ourselves, an even bigger lie.

So here we sit, a people of light, grace and community who still love the darkness and isolation: a people who would rather enumerate sins than repent of them; a people who turn Lent into darkness because if we did not, if we let Lent truly be, it would kill us. It would kill us. If we gave ourselves over fully to God, to Lent and the Light, it would be the death of our darkened selves. This is why we always have some reservation about Lent, why the happy, good news lesson of this evening strikes us as out of place in this supposedly morbid season, because this season and its message could change us – if we let them.

If we let it, Lent would kill our love of sinning, but think of your favorite sin and see how

attractive an idea that sounds. Lent would kill all our delusions of self-worth and grandeur. If we really gave ourselves over to Lent, it would drag us, kicking and screaming, like the Israelites in the wilderness, into the promised land of light, and there we would have to leave behind our darkness. We would have to leave behind the darkness we say we hate, because as Christians we ‘ought’ to say we hate it, but really don’t. We would leave behind the darkness we already want to leave but just can’t because of its power, and we would also leave the darkness that we don’t yet know surrounds us.

It is not that we don’t love the light. That is not why we fear the Lent that might be. It is not that we have not heard the good news, that God loved the world *so much* that God sent God’s child. No, the problem is that always between us and the light, between us and Easter morning there stands Good Friday and the cross. Between us and the light, there stands a lot of dying that *we all have to do! There stands the cross upon which we must each hang our favorite sins and pretensions.*

Nailed to the cross are all my excuses about not having enough time, about being too busy, too tired; nailed there are our mumblings about being too old, too young, too middle-aged to grow, to change, to learn; nailed there is any resting place we have on the road to justice and peace. The cross strips us bare and exposes all that we are, all our failings, to the light. And hanging there, naked and afraid, there it is that we truly hear the good news. “Clothe yourself in the light.” For the light does not demand our perfection, but our presence.

Lent calls us again to the light. Often the light is painful to our unaccustomed eyes. Lovers of the dark, we stand wincing and blinking against the light’s penetrating rays, for the light is restless; it never leaves us be; it does not allow us to pretend that our darkness is something other than darkness, that we don’t have areas in our lives that need change. It draws us out of our isolation into community and connection with our true selves.

The light unfailingly shows us where we must die. Yet beneath the pain and death the light demands in our lives – and the cross is always there – there is an underlying feeling we have of basking in the light’s warm rays, of being alive, nurtured, cared for and truly accepted. The light may never let us be, but it always takes us where we are and loves and envelops us right there.

As people of the Light we freely confess our love of darkness. But darkness is not the last word in our lives. We confess, too, the power of the light, the power to change and transform, a

power so great that it makes the cross, the instrument of our death and misery, the instrument also of our healing and our wholeness.

Drawn and empowered by that light, and by that cross, we live our lives.

Amen.

The Installation of Pastor Jeff Johnson

Sermon on the Third Sunday After Epiphany/January 1990

First United Lutheran Church, San Francisco

Text: Matthew 4:12 – 23

(This sermon was preached at the installation of Jeff Johnson, following his irregular ordination on the previous day. Joel preached without notes. This is a transcript of his sermon with some editorial adjustments.)

We are here today to embark on a great adventure. It is an adventure, as Lynn Siegel said to me yesterday, that's a long time coming. Centuries in coming. And as I was trying to recall - and maybe you can comment on this, Jeff - when I first heard word about these ordinations, it was last summer and the tentative date was Reformation Day. And if we had been gathered here on Reformation Day, our theme would have been courage, renewal, and we would have used phrases like "Here we stand." We would have celebrated the radical Gospel heritage that is ours as Lutherans, as heirs of Martin Luther. But the ordinations didn't happen on Reformation.

The next time that would have come around would have been Advent, the four Sundays before Christmas. If we had been gathered here on Advent, our theme would have been hope and expectation and repentance. We would have celebrated a foretaste, a little sneak preview in these events, of what the future of the Church would be like. Because what's going on here is God's future for the church. But the ordinations didn't happen in Advent.

They didn't happen during Christmas when we would have celebrated incarnation.

But yesterday - at last - on the second Saturday after Epiphany, it happened. And today, on the third Sunday after Epiphany, we are here and our theme is light and darkness. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine!

Today we celebrate the Epiphany, the manifestation, the appearance, the coming out of God and God's light into the world. If ever there was a sign of God's love breaking in on our often dark horizons, certainly that explosion of light yesterday and the events of this whole weekend are signs of that. And if I can be allowed this paraphrase of the national anthem, what's going on here is like a bomb bursting in air, giving proof through our long dark night that our God is still there!

As we gather here, our text for today is Matthew's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the beginning of God's coming out into the world, God's light coming to us in the person and the actions of Jesus. We are here to celebrate and remember another ministry which is beginning: the ministry of Jeff at this church. That, too, is a sign, an appearance, an epiphany in anticipation of God's light into the world.

But before I go on and make grand and glorious comparisons between Jeff and Jesus - which is why he asked me here today - we need to take a cue from our text and start out with something a little more sobering.

"Having heard that John had been arrested..." That's how, according to Matthew, the story of Jesus and his ministry begins.

Now I will grant you that John is not a major character in this story in our Gospel text today. But he's there, and it seems for some reason that Matthew thinks it's important for us to know that while Jesus is beginning his ministry of light, John is sitting in the darkness. For some reason, Matthew thinks it's important that we know that, while the prophecies of Isaiah are being fulfilled, and while Zebulun and Naphtali are basking in God's glorious light, John has been arrested and is in prison. The significance of this is not really clear.

But let me suggest this: John, for Matthew, was the last of the great ones. And like the great prophets, like Isaiah and his prophecy of light shining in the darkness, John pointed to someone else. He pointed beyond himself to another - to Jesus. To the Light. That's what John did. That's what all great prophets do.

But as the last of the great prophets, John was in some ways the end of an era. Something was coming to a close while something new was beginning, and the arrest of John signals for Matthew the end of the old, and a new beginning with Jesus the Light coming into the world.

Let me also suggest that for us here today, John is Matthew's reminder to us of the men and women who have gone before and pointed beyond themselves to this very day. John is a symbol for us of the men and the women, the gays and the lesbians, the clergy and the laity - and I am so bold to count Jim Lancaster and myself among them - who have pointed ahead to this day.

Having quoted from one national anthem, now let me read to you some lyrics which some have called the Black national anthem:

*We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.
Out from the gloomy past, till we now stand at last,
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

These words bring us back to light. But remember John. He'll be back later.

So - Jesus and Jeff. (We talked about the other J, and that was John.) Now this story from Matthew - parts of it make sense, but there are parts of it that are hard for us to relate to. The stuff about the prophecy being fulfilled and the Light coming into the world, we can all sort of relate to that. We know what it's like to be in darkness and to have revelations and to have God break into that. And we know what this Gospel of the realm of the kingdom is, because that's what we preach. That's what ministry is about. That's what Jeff's ministry is about, and this congregation's ministry, and LLGM, and the ministry of all God's people. Our ministry is about preaching the Good News of the realm of heaven.

But then there is this stuff about "Follow me." I think there's something about that that doesn't always jibe with our everyday experience. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of women and men." That's what Jesus says to Peter, Andrew, James and John. He comes out of the desert, walks down to the Sea of Galilee, says twelve words, and they up and follow him, right? Twelve words, and they up and leave their jobs, their livelihood, their family, their friends, and up and follow Jesus! It just seems a little improbable to me. A little strange - let alone something we can relate to.

Imagine you're out in front of your little coffee shop in the Castro sweeping the sidewalks and this guy walks by and says, "Follow me, and I will make you a sweeper of women and men." You'd think that's a little odd, right? I mean, if you actually dropped your broom and went after him, and left your business and your home and your family behind, I'd think you're a little strange too! Like I said, it's hard enough to believe, let alone relate to.

This guy, just out of seminary, comes along and says, "Follow me," and we will establish a Lutheran ministry of, by, and for gay and lesbian people. Now I admit it's more than twelve words later, but I stand here today in front of a congregation which has up and followed. I stand here today in front of a congregation which has left the order and the rules behind, which has left harmonious

relations with fellow Lutheran congregations behind, and up and followed. I stand here today in front of a congregation which is united with people, many of them here from across the country who have committed their energies, their monies, their very lives and security to this idea, this thing which we call LLGM - people who today installed as their pastor this strangely ordained guy into this strange ministry that is going to make it by a wink and a prayer, that is tenuous at best. But here we are, and we're doing it. And I thought that Peter, Andrew, James and John were weird!

But their story is not a strange story. Their story is our story. The Light has come into the world, and we, the people of Light, are addressed by the Light: "Follow me." So like Peter, Andrew, James and John, we up and we follow and we preach the Gospel of the realm of the kingdom.

A few weeks or months after John was imprisoned, he sent some of his disciples to Jesus (I told you that John would be back) and they had a question for him. They asked him this: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear. The dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

Jim and I are headed back to LA tonight. But in a few weeks, or months, or a year, we'll call or we'll write or we'll come up, and we'll ask someone, "So is this the one, or should we look for another? Is this God's light breaking into the world, or should we look for another?" So tell Jim, tell Joel, tell John what you hear and see. In fact, I hear that there is a representative of the bishop's office here today, you don't have to identify yourself, but you can tell that fox, too!

Tell him that the Lutheran churches are filled to the brim. Tell him that we're preaching the Gospel to gay and lesbian people and to all God's people. Tell him that light is exploding in the Lutheran church across the country. Tell him that on Reformation Day we will stand and say, "Here we stand. We can do no other." Tell him that during Advent, we will celebrate this breaking into the world, this foretaste of God's future. Tell him that during Epiphany, we, the people of the Light, will burst forth from darkness. Tell him that during Lent we will follow that Light no matter what the cost, no matter what the cost. Tell him that during Easter, we know that that Light will burst out of that closet, the tomb, and will shine stronger and brighter than ever, and nothing, nothing, nothing will stop that Light. Tell him that all of God's people are gathered around this great welcome table!

There's an old hymn that I learned from God's people down in Inglewood at Holy Trinity,
and it goes,

I have decided to follow Jesus!

No turning back, no turning back!

So you tell John, Jim, Joel, and the bishop. You tell the world that we have decided to follow
Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

Amen.