

40 Commentary

September 3 **Divine DNA**

Genesis 1

It has become common for people to get their DNA tested. We want to know where we came from. Who are we related to? Are there potential illnesses or strengths that we have inherited from our ancestors? The first chapter of Genesis gives us our Divine DNA. People get hung up about the “how things happened” in the creation story and risk missing the point of the entire Bible. All things begin in God and all of us regardless of gender, race, or culture are related to one another. Not only are we related but we are made in the image of God. And as a part of our divine DNA we are given responsibility to care for this creation. This unity and purpose is the beginning of the story that takes place in all the books and chapters that follow.

September 10 **When Everything Broke**

Genesis 3

In life there are tragic mistakes, misunderstandings and suffering. The entire story of the Bible is about a broken relationship. The unity and purpose that human beings had in Genesis 1, with God, gets blown to pieces here in Chapter 3. Within our Divine DNA is the freedom to make choices and this story of Adam and Eve shows the results of not choosing to be faithful to God. In church language this chapter is about **sin** and the result of sin is death. We are broken apart from God, one another and the creation that we live in. This is a huge idea. Human beings have free will. Adam and Eve represent all of us. The choices they make and the fundamental brokenness experienced is something we all wrestle with. The thousands of pages that follow in the Bible are a chronicle of human struggle and misery. And they are also about the lengths that God will go to try and repair what is broken in these verses.

September 17 **Life as A Calling**

Genesis 12

In the ancient world everything revolved around your tribe or clan. Your identity and very survival depended upon belonging to a tribe. You and everyone else in your tribe would work hard, acquire wealth, fight battles and make sacrifices for the well-being of your group. Everyone belonged to a tribe. When God calls Abram to leave his home and form a new tribe that would exist to bless all other tribes this is a revolutionary and new idea. God did something new. God made a covenant with Abram. A covenant is a relational promise made between two parties. The covenant made between God and Abram was a promise that as God blessed Abram and his people so they were called to be a blessing to others. The covenant is the first step on the journey to restore all people to the harmony of a relationship with God, one another and all of creation.

September 24 **Wrestling with God**

Genesis 32

Jacob's story is one of shady dealings, sin and redemption. Reading this chapter will make you want to go back and read more about him. In this chapter he is preparing to go back and face his brother Esau who he had ripped off and alienated from their family (tribe) years before. Jacob is a man seeking forgiveness and when he has put everything

on the line God shows up and they wrestle; the eternal struggle we all face of bringing our will under control and allowing God's will to reign in us.

October 1 God is Personal Exodus 3

God asks Moses, a murderous refugee, to return to his nation of origin and face down the most powerful ruler on the face of the planet with a stick. That should grab our attention. To make it even more interesting Moses comes up with every possible argument as to why he can't and doesn't want to do it. Yet in the midst of this is a turning point in the Biblical narrative. God enters into the story in a new way. God is given a name and tells us that the cries of the oppressed have been heard and justice will come. No longer a mysterious presence; God becomes personal.

October 8 The Cornerstones Exodus 20

The Ten Commandments are recognized as the ethical and moral cornerstone of western civilization. Each one of these commandments is important in and of itself. But what is important, in the large picture of the Bible, is that God is providing us with an understanding about what is on his heart so that we know the kind of behavior that is pleasing to Him and that which is not.

October 15 We Make Our Gods Exodus 32

This is a story which reminds us how at times we all are our own worst enemy. The first of the commandments that God gave the Israelites was to honor him and not make their own God (Idols). And yet with the first taste of freedom they decide to make gods of their own to worship. Human beings are still creating their own gods and worshipping them. This is the first sin that we read about in Genesis 3 all over again. Moses seeks God's forgiveness on behalf of his people but the price paid is steep.

October 22 Total Commitment Deuteronomy 6

There are two very big ideas in this passage. The first is the declaration which is the foundation of Jewish theology and ethical teaching, *"The Lord our God the Lord is One..."* This is the same theme we have seen already over and over again. This is also the source of what Jesus teaches us as being the "Great Commandment". We are to love God with our entire being and our neighbor as ourselves. For Moravians this is a core value that has driven our missionaries around the world.

Tucked in here is another very important idea. It is about how we pass this kind of faith along to our children. In our church we understand that spiritual formation is so much more than classes and programs. It is in the rhythms of daily life and through our relationships, that children gain an understanding of loving God that will help them to a much deeper faith throughout their lives. This approach to spiritual formation is found in the teachings of Moravian Bishop John Amos Comenius and continues to influence us today. Faith is about a relationship and we best learn that when we...*"talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

October 29

A Vision From God

Ezekiel 47

Dr. Amy Ghodes Luhman writes: In the 25th year of Israel's exile to Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel is brought by the hand of God to a vision of a new Israel with a new magnificent temple at the center of that vision. This chapter describes the entrance of that temple and the flowing water that comes from the temple. A shining bronze man with a linen cord guides Ezekiel to the water and measures it out for him incrementally, from ankle-deep, to knee-deep, to waist-deep, finally to a flowing river that is deep enough to swim in. This may be how we experience the church or our faith and our leadership abilities. We begin ankle deep and are slowly and wonderfully guided into a time when we can dive in and swim with confidence. Ezekiel and the man continue along the river flowing from the temple and find all the life that swarms from these living waters. Fresh waters flow where once the waters were stagnant, an abundance of fish of many kinds, trees producing all kinds of fruit and leaves for healing. Swamps and marshes, however remain, they are left to produce salt. Our lives can be abundant and healing, full of very good things as well as those swampy bits that help us produce salt (endurance, faith, perseverance). God will guide us each step of the way.

November 5

Love

I Corinthians 13

This is the number one requested reading at weddings. But it is about so much more than the feelings a couple may have for one another. This is one of the greatest poems in all of history and it describes the divine love that God has for us. In the Greek Language, in which it was written, the word for love is *Agape*. It is the sacrificial love that God has shown humanity in Jesus. It is the love that we are called to live out in all of our relationships as well.

November 12

Justified

Romans 5

The grace of God is something that defies description. It is like someone you don't know giving you their winning Powerball ticket, or finding out that you are receiving a fortune from an inheritance given to you by a stranger, or you are given a lifesaving organ donation from someone who you don't know and on top of that they intentionally give their life in order to save yours. Jesus gave more than this for us and through him our sins are forgiven. *"At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."* This is the grace of God.

November 19

The Deepest Mystery

Romans 8

In this single chapter we are given the best explanation of the deepest mystery of the Christian faith; The Grace of God. Dr. Craig Atwood writes: - For what can separate us from the love of God in Christ? Nothing. This conviction that nothing in life or death can separate us from the love of God is the basis of Moravian pastoral care and theology. This is where our hope lies.

November 26 Walk the Walk**James 1**

A core value in the Moravian Church is that the measure of a genuine faith is not in what we say but in how we live. Our lives should be comprised of humility and action. The Book of James is a very important source of teaching for us.

December 3 New Beginnings**Nehemiah 8**

Dr. Amy Ghodes Luhman shares about this passage: A powerful, often overlooked, glimpse at the people of Israel returning from the Babylonian exile and coming together once again as a people in Jerusalem as they are allowed to rebuild their temple, their faith, their community. The family names are listed as they gather before the priest and scribe Ezra and ask for the Book of the Law of Moses to be read to them. It is their written story, their identity that has held them together though being scattered and exiled from their land. The people listen to their story read to them; interpreted for them so that they can understand once again that they are a chosen people, God's people. They weep together, shouting AMEN and lifting their hands in the air and bowing their faces to the ground, they feast and celebrate together; they became a community again. Shared story creates our identity as Christians, as Moravians. We see this same HOLY gift of community and identity at synods, district conferences, church anniversaries and church camp. We celebrate our shared story together and become one.

December 10 An Ancient Promise**Isaiah 53**

Here in an ancient prophecy we find one of the best explanations of Jesus. The character and mission of the Messiah is described in these verses long before Jesus enters this story. It is our introduction to the idea that God is going to take a new and radical step to reach out to his lost and struggling children.

December 17 God Becomes Flesh**John 1**

This chapter explains the most radical moment in this long story of salvation. The Creator enters his creation. Human efforts cannot reconnect us to God. The only way to fix the broken relationship between God and humanity is for God to walk and live with us. A limitless God becomes a frail human, experiencing all of the sufferings, joys, heartaches and temptations that we face.

December 24 In the Most Unexpected Way**Luke 2**

In a backward place, in troubled times God becomes human. As a helpless soon to be refugee baby God decides to save the world. We find here the angels and shepherds and the poetry of Jesus birth.

December 31 Teaching and Practice**Mark 4**

Teaching and Miracles. Throughout the Gospels (The stories of Jesus) we see a consistent pattern of Jesus teaching people about the coming kingdom of God by telling the stories (Parables). These teaching moments are usually interrupted by Jesus taking action. He would do miraculous things. He was showing the power of the Kingdom of God. This chapter is filled with several parables and an incredible miracle.

January 7 The Greatest Commandment Mark 12

The events of chapter 12 of the Gospel of Mark are about those with authority (the Chief Priests, Teachers of the Law, and Elders) and those from other competing groups within Judaism (Sadducees and Pharisees) challenging Jesus' authority and knowledge. It should be noted that these discussions take place after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his attack on the money changers in the Temple. It is probably understandable that these folks felt threatened by Jesus.

They try to trap him in public discourse but he manages in each case (the parable of the tenants, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, Marriage at the Resurrection) to turn their words against them and demonstrate his own wisdom and knowledge.

Finally he is challenged about the Law, the very heart-beat of Jewish life. "What is the Greatest Commandment?" they ask, knowing that all the commandments are important. He answers by quoting from Deuteronomy 6 which we have studied earlier: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Jesus then identifies a commandment from Leviticus 19 as the second greatest; "Love your neighbor as yourself."

These two commandments still stand at the very center of both Judaism and Christianity today and are a point of agreement that can erase many fears and struggles between the two.

Mark 12 is about Jesus teaching that those with titles or positions of power are not those who can most accurately bring God's word to the people. Those who love God and love their neighbor are those who God recognizes as righteous. A new idea for Jesus' time and one still applicable in ours.

January 14 The Heart of Jesus Matthew 5

Dr. Craig Atwood writes: The Sermon on the Mount: Gregory the Patriarch founded the Unity of the Brethren (Moravians) in order to live according to the "law of Christ" found in Matthew 5-7. He felt that the only meaningful definition of Christian was "follower of the teachings of Christ." Faith alone does not save. Faith must be completed in love, and the law of love is in the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes used to be part of Moravian catechisms and liturgies.

January 21 How you Live Matters Matthew 25

This parable of the Sheep and Goats is a very important passage at the Sturgeon Bay Moravian Church. For years we have used this as the basis for all of our many mission efforts in the community and beyond. Jesus commands us to care for those who are in need. Our efforts do so is an act of obedience to His will. We have held that the best way for us to learn the mind of Christ is by doing the things he would have us do and the first place to start is serving those in need.

January 28

Crossing Boundaries

John 4

The main story in this chapter is Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman at a well. What is lost in our time and culture is how radical and imaginable this would be in that time. Jesus, a Jewish religious leader, should have had nothing to do with this person because of her race and gender. Yet here we have a candid conversation that tells us much about the kingdom Jesus the Messiah brings. It is a kingdom of equality for all people and it is a kingdom of truth and love. Jesus actions in this chapter crosses boundaries that the world still wrestles with today.

February 4

The Lost

Luke 15

Chapter 15 of Luke contains 3 parables, all about things lost: The Lost sheep, The Lost Coin, The Lost Son.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is told in response to a complaint that Jesus associates with and socializes with sinners. In essence Jesus says a Shepherd has to value all his sheep and try hard to bring one lost one back to a flock under his care. God rejoices over a sinner who has regained their way.

The Parable of the Lost Coin is similar in that a woman searches diligently for the one coin out of ten which she has lost. She rejoices when she finds it and invites her neighbors to rejoice with her. In the same way, Jesus says, the angels rejoice when one sinner repents.

The Parable of the Lost (or Prodigal) Son is much longer, more complicated and much better known. A son who has squandered his inheritance, leaves home, wanders homeless and hungry and then finally repents and returns to his father's estate begging. He is welcomed back with rejoicing and a feast in his honor.

Many modern readers, and probably many who heard them in Jesus' day, understand the idea of these parables; that God values each and every one of his children. Many of us though cannot help but identify with the sheep who did not stray, the coins who were still in the pocket, and the older son who stayed home and did what his father asked. Essentially we want to look at the unfairness of it all: "I stayed home. I took care of all your fields and workers and business faithfully and now you are giving a feast and celebrating the one who failed you and denied you in every way. It isn't fair!"

Flannery O'Connor wrote a world famous short story entitled "Revelation" in which she addresses this very question. She emphasizes the joy not of the shepherd but of the Lost as they dance their way into God's Kingdom. We need to remember not just that we are all lost sinners but also that "the last shall be first and the first shall be last!"

Perhaps these parables are both a reassurance of God's love and a call to humility.

February 11 God Loves All People Acts 10

Rev. Maggie Wellert helps us read this chapter about change in the early church that speaks about change today: When someone asks, "What is a Moravian?" we often answer by sharing the stories of our beloved traditions: Advent Stars, Christmas Eve Candles, the Right Hand of Fellowship, Love Feast, Spiritual Renewal. We love our traditions and they seem to define us. God reminds Peter that long-standing traditions, even long-standing laws, are all subject to change! The birth of God in the person of Jesus redefines the world: there is nothing profane! All is sacred....and we might be invited to let go of the sacred past for the sake of the world today! The Holy Spirit moves when and where She pleases—touching and changing lives....even when we're happy with what we've got!

February 14 The Power of Confession Psalm 51
Ash Wednesday

The King David that we learned about as children was a great hero but he was also a flawed man. He wanted another man's wife and made sure he was killed in battle so he could claim her as his own. He was confronted by the Prophet Nathan and came to see clearly the terrible sin he had committed. This Psalm is his confession. These are the words of a person laying open his soul in the light of truth seeking forgiveness. This is a model prayer for Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Lenten season.

February 18 When God Asks Too Much Genesis 22

This is one of the most disturbing stories found in the Bible. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son and Abraham seems more than willing to do it. We no longer live in an age where people would slaughter animals or people to appease the gods but it was common in that ancient time. This story is a commentary about a new way and a very different God. This is a story about Abraham's unflinching trust in God and God's recognition of this faithfulness. God will provide the sacrifice which in the New Testament means God will sacrifice his son Jesus for the sins of the world.

February 25 Suffering Job 38 (42:1-6)

Dr. Amy Ghodes Luhman helps us understand one of the most important stories about suffering in the Bible. Job is a righteous and good man whose life has been turned from blessing to agony and he demands from God an explanation. He does not stop talking to God, in fact, he finds it very hard to be quiet. He demands an answer from his Maker as to why bad things are happening to him, a good man. After 37 chapters God does answer Job, God answers Job with creation itself. God pours out to Job all that God does as creator and points out to Job that he is not the only creature on the planet. All of creation is from the hand of God, and chaos may happen. Humanity is not in control of creation, and instead must trust God in the uncertainty of life. Job belongs to God and is a part of the magnificent and astounding creation that God calls forth. When Job begins to understand this he admits he only understood God through hearsay (teachings of others), now he has experienced God first hand and is truly humbled.

March 4 Confidence to Face Giants 1 Samuel 16

Dr. Amy Ghodes Luhman helps us understand the complexity of King David:

The story of the beginning of King David, remembered as the Golden King of Israel, even with all his later faults. In the beginning it is the prophet Samuel that chooses David over his older, taller, seemingly more suited brothers. Young David is not even invited to the anointing party. He is with the sheep, he is the runt of the family, although a good looking one, with a handsome ruddy complexion and beautiful eyes. He was an able shepherd and a skilled musician, not traits needed for a king. But God saw things differently than did the crowd gathered, God saw even more deeply than the prophet Samuel himself. God chooses for leadership by standards that we may not understand. Our talents may be counted and understood differently by God than they are by our own culture and community. The Moravian denomination could certainly be understood, by size and station, to be the runt of the litter of churches that grace our world, but God may see and know differently, so we lead when we are chosen, with confidence, as did David.

March 11 The Gift of Meaning Psalm 139

This Psalm speaks to the intimacy we can feel with God. This is an idea very important to Moravian teaching and practice. We believe that we experience our faith and that it sparks in us deep emotions of love, acceptance and meaning. This is a poem filled with passion for God and the sense of being loved and known by the one who made us.

March 18 Words of Wisdom Ecclesiastes 3

Dr. Craig Atwood explains the importance of the Book of Ecclesiastes – “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity”, says the preacher. Comenius and the early Moravian Brethren believed that this little book of the OT teaches us that our salvation is not in this world. We need to learn to let go of our selfish grasping after things, even worldly honor, and find our happiness in Christ alone. Chapter 3 teaches us about the seasons of our lives.

March 25 God Suffers Mark 15
Palm Sunday

Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Mark covers the period from Jesus appearance before Pilate to his death and burial. The Gospel of Mark is probably the earliest written of the four Gospels and it is very much the most succinct. Jesus, arrested by the Jewish authorities, is then brought to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Prefect. The account of the trial before Pilate is minimal saying only that Jesus did not defend himself against the charges of blasphemy and insurrection brought against him. Pilate hands Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified. Jesus is mocked by the soldiers, forced to wear a purple robe befitting his status as “King of the Jews” and is given a crown of thorns. After the mockery Jesus is led off to be crucified.

While on the cross he is again mocked by those who hang him; “Come down from the cross and save yourself.” This must have been Jesus last temptation as a human being because certainly he could, at several points along the way, have saved himself.

Jesus cries out "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" just before he dies. Psalm 22 begins with these same words. It is reasonable to assume that those around him were familiar with this Psalm and would have realized that a man dying on a cross could not get the breath to speak many words. Later, looking back on Psalm 22, the early Christians saw an account of what happened to Jesus that day. Although Psalm 22 begins with the words of a man in despair it ends with faith and hope; "future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for He has done it!"

The curtain in the Temple that covers the Holy of Holies where God's Ark is, rips in two at Jesus death. From now on all people can approach God through Jesus thus fulfilling Jacob's dream of a pathway to heaven.

Jesus is buried by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the ruling class that persecuted Him. The burial is witnessed by Mary Magdalen and by Mary, mother of Jesus. And then we wait for Easter.

April 1
Easter

Victory Over Death

Matthew 28

Moravians are known as the Easter People. On Easter morning the first words we are to speak: "*The Lord is Risen...the Lord is Risen Indeed!*" This is the heart of our identity as Christians. We believe that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from dead. In this he conquered the power of sin and death that seeks to enslave humanity and cuts us off from God. This is the watershed moment in the Bible. All that has happened in the many chapters before points to this moment and all that comes after are the results of this moment.

April 8

New Beginnings

John 3

Dr. Craig Atwood offers this explanation of the importance of the Chapter of the Bible that had the most recognized verse John 3:16. "Zinzendorf often preached on the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night to ask how to be saved. Jesus tells him that he must be born from above. Zinzendorf saw that Jesus depicts the Holy Spirit in motherly terms as the one who brings new, divine birth. Nicodemus does not appear in the Gospel until the very end when he helps bury Jesus, clearly indicating that he had experienced the New Birth."

April 15

Stop and Listen

Acts 9

Rev. Garritt Fleming shares with us one of the most important ideas in all of scripture. By the power of God we can change! Garritt writes, "Saul, also known as Paul (Acts 13:9) was a Jew who lived during the early days of the Christian church, then an outgrowth of the Jewish faith led by those who confessed Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Saul was a man proud of his heritage as a Jew (Philippians 3:4-6) and passionate about his faith, to the point of persecuting those he considered enemies of Judaism -- those who believed in Jesus (Galatians 1:13-14). As Saul headed to Damascus to arrest more followers of Jesus, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3). Saul is brought to his

knees as he then hears a voice that identifies himself as Jesus say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul had gotten it wrong in his persecution of Christians -- he was actually rebelling against God, as he confesses later that he acted in "ignorance and unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:13). Yet Jesus showed him mercy by confronting him on the road to Damascus, stripping away his credentials as a righteous Jew, blinding him (Acts 9:8), and then remaking him through the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:7) to profess Jesus as Lord and to serve as a messenger of Jesus to non-Jewish people.

Through Saul's conversion experience, we are reminded of our own stubbornness to hearing the voice of Jesus, of our need for forgiveness, and our need to stop and humble ourselves so that we may listen to the Lord's will and plan and not our own."

April 22 The Lengths God Will Go Jonah 1

What happens when God tells you that you need to go and share his love with the people who have oppressed, murdered and caused endless suffering for your people? That was what Jonah was asked to do. So was God doing this to save Jonah's enemies or was he doing it to save Jonah. Jonah runs and God pursues. You should read the whole book!

April 29 Virtues of Faith Galatians 5

Rev. Maggie Wellert shares insight about a chapter that explains the virtues of a Christian life: There is nothing you can do that will make God love you more. There is nothing you can do that will make God love you less. The law that matters most to Moravian Christians is the law of love—the new commandment offered by God through Jesus Christ: love one another as I have loved you. Jesus taught us that love is grounded in compassion, attentive to the suffering of the other, willing to take on that suffering in order to offer relief that is life-giving to the other. A life lived from this perspective will indeed bear the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit that the world covets—fruit that feeds only me!

May 6 The Way of Life Psalm 23
Music Sunday

These are some of the best known words in all of Scripture. It is the most often read passage at funerals and memorial services. But it is not a passage about death it is all about life. An abundant grace filled life where we find incredible intimacy with God who cares for us as a shepherd cares for His sheep.

May 13 The Tie that Binds Ruth 1

This simple story about the bond between two women is also a part of a bigger story of how their journey ends up healing a larger family of tribes. Rev. Maggie Wellert gives us incredible insight into this as she writes: Ruth, the Moabite woman, is an "outsider" three times over in the patriarchal culture of the day: a woman, a foreigner, a widow without a son. She commits herself, however, to her mother-in-law, a Hebrew widow who is also without the protective care of father, husband, or sons. Ruth chooses to stay by Naomi's side, taking the risk of traveling back to Naomi's home land of Bethlehem in Judah, rather than take her chances finding a husband in her own home land of Moab. Their fierce commitment to one another sustains them as they live into God's promises, trusting in

God's faithfulness. Commitment to the covenant of God means we risk exile, defeat, challenge, living as outsider. We belong to God—children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and of one another. We are related not by blood, but by the love of God coursing through us, body, mind, and spirit.

May 20 The Revelation of John John 21

The end of the Bible sees a great circle being completed. God and humanity are fully reunited with one another as they were all the way back in the beginning. Rev. Maggie Wellert shares: "See, the home of God is among mortals." So much of the time we Christians consider our journey with Jesus as an escape plan—getting away from the pain and suffering, the power of death and tears—our escape is to be with God in a faraway Heaven. The witness of Revelation is that God's home is here...God's choice is Earth...God's commission is for us to serve God by serving neighbor, here in our home, daily for each day of life. Eternal life is not an escape plan—it is a plan of restoration and reconstruction...living each day as faithfully as possible, changing lives one heart at a time, doing all that we can to share God's love by who we are and what we do—an everlasting witness of life in and with God. God is here, now? Where have you seen God at work today in our home, in God's home?"

May 27 It's All About Love I John 3

Dr. Craig Atwood shares with us the great importance of this chapter as it has impacted Moravian history. During the period of crisis in the early days of Herrnhut, Zinzendorf led a Bible study in his home. They focused on the first letter of John and in their study and prayers they learned that it is not doctrine that unites us, it is divine love and forgiveness. They resolved to "agree to disagree" about many doctrinal matters and treat each other with respect and brotherly love. This helped lead to the great revival on August 13.

Extra Credit

Do you want to push harder and farther? Some of our contributors have offered more of their favorite chapters of the Bible. Check them out!!!

Dr. Craig Atwood's suggestions:

John 17 - The "high priestly prayer" was Jesus's "Last Will and Testament" given to his followers the night before he died. Jesus is praying to the Father, but in the presence of the disciples so they will know his will for the church. He prays for the unity of the whole world as lovers of God. This passage was the motivation for Moravian missions and Moravian work with other churches.

Revelation 20 - The Bible ends with the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, with the image of a New Jerusalem. This image of the millennial kingdom on earth inspired many generations of Moravians to sacrifice their wealth, time, reputations, and lives building the millennial kingdom.

Dr. Amy Ghodes Luhman Suggestions:

Genesis 45 - This is near the end of the story of Joseph, a younger brother, beloved by his father and betrayed by his elder brothers. It is a story of family brokenness, national power and weakness, need and provision. God is at work in this familial relationship in a way unexpected and powerful. God does not always use broken situations for healing and hope, but God does here, because Joseph allows himself to feel deep sorrow as well as deep love. Love wins, in this case, Joseph is not only allowed to experience healing in his family, but he is also able to use his power to show generosity to entire nation in need, his homeland.

Rev. Maggie Wellert's Suggestions:

Matthew 1 - A genealogy? Boring! How is this critical to Moravian teaching and practice? All the other genealogy chapters of Scripture list only men. This ancestry tree includes the names of five WOMEN: Tamar, (Genesis 36); Rahab, (Joshua, 2, 6); the wife of Uriah—Bathsheba; Ruth, the Moabite (Book of Ruth); and Mary. The mothers and grandmothers of Jesus of Nazareth: women who were foreigners, each of whom has a sexual indiscretion attached to her story. The mother and grandmothers of Jesus were outsiders...and listed by the writer of Matthew to be sure we know the lineage of Jesus of Nazareth. No one deserves to be cast aside; all are welcome in the family of God. Sisters, too, are precious to God...no exceptions.

The Prophet Isaiah 43: 1-21 - We belong to God. Each of us, you and I, are precious in God's sight, honored, and loved. This is the good news of God's promise, presence, and power. Therefore, there is nothing to fear—Paul will later say that nothing can separate us from this God of love...N.O.T.H.I.N.G. We are witnesses to his promise, presence, and power by how we live each and every day. When we fail, there is always restoration. When we fall, we get up again, renewed for God's work of ministry for the sake of the world. We are a light to the nations. This is most certainly true. Thanks be to God.

Contributors:

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Dr. Craig Atwood is the Charles D. Couch Chair for Moravian Theology and the Director of Moravian Studies at Moravian Theological Seminary.

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The aforementioned contributors are cited in the chapter commentary they wrote. The chapters where authorship is not indicated were written by Rev. Reeder Herrick and the Rev. Dr. Matthew Knapp