

Lutheran Spokesman



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Parting Is Sweet Sorrow

It is said that parting is sweet sorrow. When we visit seldom-seen family in another city or state, and it comes time to leave, tears are sometimes shed, for we hate to be separated from our family. We are happy to have seen our family members and we hate to be separated from them.

With that in mind, we might think that the disciples would have been sorrowful when they saw the Lord depart bodily from them. Yet we are told that when Jesus "was parted from them and carried up into heaven, they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Lk. 24:51f).

What was there to be joyful about? After all, their Lord had only recently been restored to them after His crucifixion and death. His resurrection had been almost beyond belief. And now He was being taken from them again.

But He was still with them, for He who has all authority in heaven and

earth (see Mt. 28:19) had assured them that "I am with you always" (Mt. 28:20). When they returned to Jerusalem, they knew that their Lord had withdrawn only His visible presence from them. Furthermore, they knew that they would see Him again when He returned in visible glory, for two angels had told them that "this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

They returned to Jerusalem, looking forward to the joyful reunion that is eternal life. They returned, eager to share that joy with others. They would go and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them into the Christian faith, bringing them into God's kingdom by means of that gospel, preparing others to meet the Savior at His return in glory.

From the angels' words we know

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that Christ's return will be a visible return. The apostle Peter wrote concerning that Day that "the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with a fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10).

Christ said, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him" (Mt. 24:44). That Day will appear to be like any other day. Christ's appearance will be at an unknown time. It will be a visible appearance, after which everything in this world, as we know it, will come to an end.

Unbelievers should fear that Day, and with good reason. It will be on that Day that "He who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:16).

Comfort and Joy!

But the ascension and impending return of Christ are not to frighten the believer. Rather these things bring the believer comfort and joy. No matter how bad things become on this Earth, the believer may always find comfort in the fact that eternal life in heaven awaits. Christ tells us, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:2f).

It is to be a source of joy, for Scripture is clear as to what will happen to believers on the Judgment Day. We read in First Thessalonians 4:16f, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the



voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Imagine that! "We shall always be with the Lord." Always! Never-ending! Eternity with our God and Savior! Believers may truly rejoice that Jesus has gone into heaven before them! Not only has He gone to prepare a place in the eternal dwelling place of heaven, but He will return to take us—you, me, and all believers—into the eternal bliss of heaven!

So it is that when we visit family in another city or state whom we do not often see—and it comes time to leave—tears are sometimes shed, for we hate to be separated from our family. We are happy to have seen our family members and we hate to be separated from them. Yet it is a sweet sorrow, for we know that we will see them again, whether it be at the next family reunion—or in heaven as we rejoice together in eternal life.

Even so, we rejoice with the apostles, for we know that, while our Lord Jesus is with us even now, though unseen, we will one Day see Him face-to-face; and we will never be parted from Him, physically or otherwise, for on that Day we shall "always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

—Pastor Joel Fleischer

Remaining Children of the Catechism

Confirmation is an annual rite in the life of congregation. It is a joyful time as we see our young people armed with scripture speak their faith before the congregation.

Occasionally, though, our pastors' sermons contain warnings that, if history holds true, a certain percentage of confirmands will not be in that congregation in the future. Some may drop out of contact entirely. In other cases, even within a short period of time, there may be no evidence of the Christian faith that is openly professed in examination and confirmation.

Lack of interest in continuing Christian education is not a new problem.

Consider the following quotation: "Besides, a shameful and insidious plague of security and boredom has overtaken us. Many regard the Catechism as a simple, silly teaching which they can absorb and master at one reading. After reading it once, they toss the book into a corner as if they were ashamed to read it again." — This was written nearly 500 years ago by Dr. Martin Luther as a preface to his Large Catechism.

Our Lord instructs fathers to bring up their children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). This was also Luther's intent when he wrote his catechism "for the head of the family to teach to his household." What a great privilege and responsibility it is to have God's lambs entrusted to our care!

A problem arises if the bulk of responsibility for the training of the young is turned over from parents to

pastors and teachers. Even pastors and teachers have to ask themselves how much of their children's Christian Education comes from them as parents and how much from them as called workers.

Parental Responsibility

Let there be no misunderstanding: while pastors and teachers stand ready to assist parents, the primary responsibility remains with the parents.

That responsibility is fulfilled not only in active teaching, but in the example given day after day. For example, if children see that their parents drop them off for Sunday School, while those same parents do not attend Bible Class, the assumption could be made that there is a stopping point for Christian education.

What could be suggested as ways to halt this apparent trend?

1) Recognize God's love for souls — Having recently heard again of the Passion History of our Lord in Lent— and recalling Jesus' glorious resurrection—we see the Lord's love in action for lost sinners. Christ crucified demonstrates God's love for us in no uncertain terms.

2) Regard the soul above the body — It seems that countless hours are spent in preparing our children for the "real world"—and busyness in all sorts of activities is considered to be a virtue. Yet what is more important than

Confirmation

preparing those whom God has entrusted to us for His final judgment? Nothing is more "real" than that.

3) Example-setting — Are we adults (parents) teaching the young that worship and Christian education are something that we grudgingly have to do, or do we live the gospel of Christ?

Confirmation is intended to be a celebration. We hear young people confess their faith in an examination of the chief teachings of the Bible and welcome them as communicant mem-

bers of the congregation. We pray that the Holy Spirit would use the gospel in this sacrament and in the Word as a faith-strengthening tool in their lives.

Fellow Lutheran Christians, let us work and pray to instill evangelically in our children—and in ourselves—the attitude of Martin Luther who said, "I must still read and study the Catechism daily; yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I do it gladly."

—*Pastor Michael Schierenbeck*



Mother's Day Thoughts—

God's Love with Skin On

The thunder crashed and shook the house. The lightning flashed into the room. A little boy cried out in fear from his dark room. His mother came to his side to comfort him. "God loves you and He will protect you," she said. "I know," the boy replied, "but right now I want someone with skin on." So she held him and reassured him until he could go to sleep. (From an article years ago in the *Readers Digest* entitled, "If I were starting My Family again.")

That little boy was expressing, in his own way, the truth that the Apostle John spoke of when he said, "Nobody has ever seen God" (1 Jn. 4:12). We all know and trust in God. We know He can do anything for us. But sometimes, especially as children, we need someone we can see and hold on to—some-

one we can talk to and whom we can hear talk back to us.

That is one reason God gave us parents. Parents are God's representatives to His children. God has entrusted His children into their care. They are to nurture and protect their children, teach and discipline them, love and encourage them in God's place. In short, parents are to be God's love with skin on.

One of the primary responsibilities of parents as God's representatives is to teach their children God's Word. But remember that teaching is done as much through actions as through words. We either reinforce what we teach children from God's Word or we unravel what we teach by our daily life.

Our relationship with our children is a picture of our relationship with God.

The way we deal with our children ought to accurately represent the way God deals with us.

Many think loving a child means we should never spank them or use any harsh discipline. But that is not representing God's love. God says, "Whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). God also says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Prov. 13:4). Discipline serves the necessary purpose of teaching our children how God feels about sin—that sin is a very serious thing that brings punishment.

Discipline With Love

It shows great love when we discipline our children because thereby they are taught to respect the authority of God and to listen to Him and obey Him. Remember, however, to discipline in love. We are not showing God's love if we lash out at our children in anger.

Let us make sure we also represent God's love in *forgiving* our children after we discipline them. God shows His love most in His desire to forgive us, sacrificing His Son in our place so that He could forgive us. When we forgive our children after they have disobeyed, and when we reassure them of our love, that makes God's forgiveness

and love all the more real to them.

God also has a very tender love and concern for all His children. He cares about their hurts and sorrows. He wants to comfort and hold them. He rejoices in their triumphs and delights in their happiness. Parents represent God in showing that tender loving-kindness and affection to their children.

Being God's love with skin on means showing God's love in all our actions. At times that requires a spanking or some other stern discipline; at other times it requires affection. Let's not be slow to apply God's love in either of these directions.

When parents keep the balance between discipline and affection, as expressions of the law and the gospel, then children will better be able to see and understand God's love—and also what it means for them when they hear about it in the Bible.

Since parents are God's representatives, we also owe them our honor and respect, our love and obedience. This month we give special honor to our mothers on Mother's Day. That is a wonderful thing, but let us not forget to honor and love her all year long.

Thank God that He has given us representatives on this Earth so that we can see and feel God's love with skin on.

—Pastor David Reim



Women of Grace, Grace Lutheran Church, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota

Studies In Philippians

**“Rejoice in the Lord always.
Again I will say, rejoice!” (4:4)**

Chapter 3: 17-21

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Please open your Bible and read the section before us.

"You can tell quite a bit about someone by how he acts when he thinks no one else is looking."

This familiar saying is certainly true. However, Christians look at the whole issue in a somewhat different way. The Christian knows that even if no one else knows what he's doing, God knows. Because Christians want to please their Savior God, they will even strive to follow His Word when they are miles away from the nearest human being.

Such a desire to please God even when no one else is looking does not come naturally. It's a fruit of the Spirit Who works through the precious Means of Grace.

Christian leaders in particular know how important it is to set a godly example at all times. Yes, God sees their every action, but just maybe someone else is looking too. Out of love for the souls under their care, Christian leaders will be careful about their words and actions, lest they cause anyone to stumble in their faith.

In this section from Philippians Paul laments over those church leaders who serve their own belly. Paul is talking about leaders who live for their

own sinful ideas and appetites.

In our day there are many pastors and theologians who openly support abortion, homosexuality, and pre-marital sex. According to God's Word these are all wicked things. But many of these leaders openly glory and boast about their support of that which Scripture calls sin, glorying in what should be shameful to them—and it seems they don't care who hears or sees what they say and do. As a result countless blood-bought souls are led astray!

Needed: Spirit-filled Leaders!

The church needs Spirit-filled leaders who love and respect every part of God's Word, and who are careful to pattern their lives after the teachings of God's Word.

Church leaders will never be perfect on this side of heaven. With Paul they will be the first to confess: "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24) Yes, godly pastors, seminary professors, and church elders know they need Jesus' forgiveness as much as anyone. Yet they also will want to catch the spirit of Paul, who speaks of his continual striving to live up to the high calling of a Christian leader (cf. Php. 3:12-15).

Many eyes are watching those whom God has placed in positions of authority in His Church. Christian leaders need to lead by example—by showing those in their care what it means to honor the Savior with a God-pleasing life. They will want to be sensitive to the fact that their bad example can injure the faith of their fellow Christians.

In vv. 20-21 of our section, Paul speaks of heavenly citizenship as well as of Christ's return and the glorious transformation of the body. These verses supply indispensable help to church leaders as they strive to be faithful to their callings.

Christian leaders need to remember who they are! They are citizens of

heaven! Already in eternity God chose them in Christ to be His very own. In time He supplied the sacrifice for their sins, His own Son. Then He called them to faith through the gospel.

Remembering their heavenly citizenship and the exciting day of their resurrection will keep Christian leaders' minds off the cares and pleasures of this world! They will remember what a noble and wonderful thing it is to serve—with their whole heart—the One Who is able to subdue all things to Himself, and transform their lowly bodies to be conformed to His glorious body! With their focus on Christ and eternity, the Spirit will give them strength to joyfully lead by example!

—Pastor Michael Wilke



"CLOSE COMMUNION"

Or: "Who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper?"

Third In A Series

We place as much emphasis as anybody on what Jesus said, "Teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20) and also St. Paul's words about "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). People harm their souls if the Sacrament is used ignorantly in unbelief, with guilt and judgment being incurred (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Spiritual safety—also stability, understanding, and performance—are at stake.

"We should know with whom this Sacrament takes effect," said Pastor Luther. This is more than knowing members' names and faces—but also their confession of faith, ability to give



simple Biblical statements of belief, and their living a life in accord with Scripture.

The burden is on communicant and officiant. Classes are held for instruction and review of doctrine, so as to retain a blessed entryway for both

newer and older members into the "enclosed" intimate Communion. God's instruction (and review!) is everything to us—our life, our hope, our strength.

Wisdom is called for in publicizing our practice, so as not to be too heavy-handed. We invite people to our church in a warm and winsome way, eventually to lead at least some folks to Communion through instruction. At the same time we want to protect them all along the way from careless reception of the (Word and) Sacrament.

One wonders how Pastor Luther and colleagues ever managed it all. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article XXIV) opens by saying that Lutherans offered Communion "every Lord's Day and the other festivals . . . for those who wished to use it after they had been examined and absolved." It was a different spiritual era, to be sure!

Thus a layman I know recently made a suggestion. The idea is to hold Communions in our day at a time other than during the time of the Sunday morning service. There are many Sunday visitors today who expect to commune with us, just as they do at most other churches they attend. Since we are among the few churches whose practice is "close" because of our doctrine, it can make things uncomfortable at times for visitors, pastors, elders, and members. I hear of some Lutheran churches which have the Sacrament on a mid-week night (perhaps not suitable everywhere).

That early Christians—also early Lutherans—practiced Close Communion is indisputable. They did not broadcast time and place to the general public. Early on, non-commu-

nigrants and catechumens were dismissed prior to the Communion portion of the service—quite acceptable then.

It is hoped that any exclusion is only temporary. Our basis for so much of our Communion practice is First Corinthians chapters 10 and 11. Here St. Paul offers a sound basis for orderly distribution, reception, and exclusion. The underlying care is that communicants be taught beforehand how to (safe)guard their souls by being able to examine themselves (11:28) before communing.

This means learning to recognize one's own sin, to confess it, to take the absolution, and to trust the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament. It becomes a blessed habit. Prior preparation is good, but it need not take hours or days. After all, examination assistance is offered right in the Communion service, so that "he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in the words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'"

In a discussion of Communion frequency and preparation at a CLC Delegate Conference some years back, when the question was asked "How long does it take to get ready?" one retired pastor said, "I'm ready now!"

That's the way he felt about going to heaven too. He's with Christ now.

—Pastor Em. Warren Fanning



Women's Retreat Hikers (see p.19)

This sermon was first preached at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Denver, Colorado, June 10, 1967 by Pastor Victor Tiefel; its compelling thoughts are being printed in two parts; Part One appeared in last month's issue—

A Sermon Study of Psalm 23

Part Two

Psalm 23

The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

. . . Consider also that 2) in His Word the Good Shepherd restores your weary soul by leading you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Just as we must constantly refresh our bodies with food and water, so man's soul needs constant restoration with the good food and drink contained in the green pastures and water of God's Word.

We actually become downright weary with our constant sinning and failure to meet the demands of God's holy laws; we become weary and tired in our thirsting for a righteousness which will avail before God. Our best efforts fail miserably to give us that

feeling of satisfying our God. And now comes our tender Shepherd who knows and understands His erring sheep and leads them into a path of righteousness for His name's sake.

Knowing that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Ps. 14:3) and that "we all, like sheep, have gone astray" (Is. 53:6), He proffers unto us His own fulfillment of all God's holy laws: green pastures indeed! "Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe . . . being justified freely by his grace . . ." (Rom. 3:21f).

How soul-satisfying is this information to every human thirsting for and hungering after righteousness which truly avails before God! As sheep of His pasture we need do nothing. We merely follow the voice of our Good Shepherd when He leads us into such green pastures and still waters where true peace and joy are found. He leads us into a path which leads to His righteousness, not ours or of our doing—but His own, "for His name's sake." As Jeremiah (23:6) foretold: "And this is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."

Part 2

But like the picture presented in this beautiful psalm—as the sheep of His



pasture, we do not lie down in one green vale but are ever on the move to higher plateaus, past many dangers here in this life toward the very ramparts of heaven itself.

The sheepfold toward where a shepherd carefully herds his sheep eventually for the long winter night—a place which spells safety and home—completes the picture presented by our psalm. We confess that tenderly the Savior Shepherd, Jesus our Lord, leads us ever heavenward where there will be joys forevermore.

1. We confess that we do not even fear the dark "valley of the shadow of death." In the course of our earthly wanderings, dangers loom on every hand—veritable gorges and deep crevasses, pitfalls where faith falters and panic can set in; predators who would rob us of our simple trust in the inspired voice of our Shepherd; the bad water of human reasoning which would destroy our faith in the Holy Scriptures. But we know that our Shepherd is there by our side: for "Thou art with me." With the rod and staff of the Word You strengthen my faith: "they comfort me." We recognize no other voice. Yes, I fear NO evil—

not even the dark valley of death itself. It finally proves to be a mere shadow when "Thou art with me."

2. "Thou preparest a table"—we confess. In the very presence of my bitterest enemies, my very personal enemies: my own sinful flesh which is still a part of me; my pride which rebels against accepting Thy substitute righteousness and which always wants to boast in its own; those sins which do so easily beset me, so that I am assailed with doubts that I am really God's child, redeemed and holy; my own conscience which accuses me so, and tells me I am unacceptable in the presence of God. In the very presence of all these bitter foes, Thou, my Good Shepherd, preparest a table laden with daily, hourly forgiveness of all my sins, reassurance again and again through Baptism and the Lord's Supper that I am Thy holy child, righteous, with an imputed righteousness charged to my account.

3. I must indeed be anointed— anointed with oil, the oil of Thy eternal love, elected, chosen, called, baptized and set apart by this Good Shepherd.

4. My cup truly runs over—so plentiful is Thy redemption. My Shepherd Savior who taught me, a sinful being, to forgive—not seven times, but seven times seventy—will daily absolve me from all sin.

5. How cannot but goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life and no enemy—no Satanic accuser, no conscience, no law, no moralist—will ever be able to snatch me from the tender care of this Shepherd.

6. Shall I tell you what I think? "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He is even now leading me to that heavenly house. He has told me:

"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (Jn. 14:2f). Yes, I will dwell with my

Shepherd in the eternal fold. That is my faith. That I believe and confess in this psalm, which is now mine.

May the Good Shepherd strengthen and keep you in that faith, and "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). Amen.



LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

"That We Might Have Hope" (Rom. 15:4)

Daniel Chapter 3

Three Men and the Fiery Furnace

These days the television screen is filled with news of how the Iraqi people are enjoying their newfound freedom at the hands of our troops. One of the pictures shown for several hours was of the statue of Saddam Hussein. The statue itself stood about fifteen feet tall, showing Hussein standing with his hand held up in greeting (or perhaps victory). The statue stood atop a 20 foot tall pedestal which had been erected in the heart of Baghdad. Quite a few men were around it trying to pull it down, finally succeeding with the help of an American tank.

That 35-foot-tall edifice made for an impressive show of the power Hussein held over his people. However, that statue paled in comparison with the one built in those very same environs some thousands of years earlier by another Mesopotamian king named Nebuchadnezzar. As the Bible tells us, his statue was "set up in

the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon." It was "an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits (90 feet) and its width 6 cubits (9 feet)" (v. 1). The king had it erected for the purpose of worship, as the king's herald announced: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up" (vv. 4-5). And the penalty for not conforming? "Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (v. 6).

The three Jews whom we know by their Babylonian names—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego—refused to bow down and worship the image. Their refusal was quickly reported to the king: "They do not serve your gods

or worship the gold image which you have set up" (v. 12). When they were brought before the king, they spoke the same for themselves: "We will not serve your gods, nor will we worship" (v. 18).

In Luther's Catechism under the first commandment, this account of the actions and words of those three men is often given as an example of how we should "fear God above all things." If we don't read the account carefully, we could come away with the impression that it was easy for these three men to respect God even more than they respected the king's authority and power. After all, when all was said and done, weren't they saved alive?

A Miracle!

Well, yes, they were—their escape from harm was nothing short of miraculous. Their refusal to worship infuriated the king, causing him to order the fire to be made seven times hotter than before. When the three were thrown in, "bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments" (v. 21), "the flame of the fire killed those men who took [them] up" (v. 22). Then, when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fire, he saw "four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire" (v. 25), and the "form of the fourth [was] like the Son of God" (v. 25).

Immediately the king called for them to come out; and when they did, "the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them" (v. 27). If you have ever had your hair

... The three men didn't know what God would do; but no matter what, they held Him in their highest respect—higher even than this king with his threats of earthly death, who had threatened: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

singed because you got too close to a flame, or had your clothing smell like smoke after being in a smoke-filled room for even a very short time, you have a good idea of how incredible this miracle was!

However, it would be wrong to think that it was "easy" for these men to "fear God above all things" because of the way He delivered them. When this whole thing started, they didn't know how it would turn out! Earlier in the book of Daniel we heard how these three along with Daniel had shown themselves to be "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all the realm" (1:20). Here we find out that the king had "set [them] over the affairs of Babylon" (v. 12). He knew them; he trusted them. So even though the penalty had been "immediate" death, the king was willing to give them a second chance to fall down and worship when they heard the royal orchestra play.

Yet they responded: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ... Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. ... But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods" (vv. 16-18). The three men didn't know what God would do; but no matter what, they held Him in their highest respect—

higher even than this king with his threats of earthly death, who had threatened: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (v. 15)

Is God able to save us? Certainly He is! No matter what the situation or danger may be, God is able to see us through. We believe as did those three; whether God chooses to spare us difficulty or allows trouble to come upon us, still we will respect no one above Him.

In His Word our Savior-God has shown us that He is deserving of that

respect; for He is able to deliver not only from earthly death, but also from eternal death. Jesus Christ's resurrection proves that His death was payment in full for the sins of the whole world. All those who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life!

How joyfully we will confess those words that even the great king Nebuchadnezzar was compelled to admit: "There is no other God who can deliver like this!" (v. 29)

—Pastor Paul Krause



From a Pastor's Desk—

RE: Catechism Instruction and Confirmation Class

I have always used the name "catechism instruction class" when speaking of that class which young people in our congregations take during their seventh and eighth grade years (sometimes starting as early as the fifth or sixth grade years).

That class has also commonly been called "Confirmation Class." Does this name refer only to the fact that the rite of Confirmation comes at the conclusion of the formal instruction period, or does it refer to something else?

I brought this question up many years ago at a pastoral study club. One pastor explained that at the beginning of his classes each fall he told the students that this is called "Confirmation Class" because through their instruction they would be "confirmed" in their faith and in their knowledge of the truths of God's Word.

This got me to thinking about what

the rite of Confirmation means. When young people approach the altar on Palm Sunday or on some other Sunday of the church year, when they kneel down and have the pastor put his hand on their heads, are they being confirmed in their faith? The answer to this question may be "Yes" insofar as the Word of God is being used in connection with this service, and the gospel "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). But we are not to look upon the rite of Confirmation as some magical ceremony whereby special power is flowing through the pastor's hand to the young person.

Why is the word "confirmation" used in connection with this ceremony? Listening carefully to what is spoken during that service, you will catch the explanation. In the rite of Confirmation in *The Lutheran Agenda*,

the following words are read to the congregation: "The catechumens publicly make profession of the true faith, confirming the covenant made between them and God." And again, the following words are read to the confirmands: "You are gathered here before God and this Christian congregation publicly to make profession of your faith in the Triune God and to confirm your covenant with Him." So the young people are doing something toward God and the Christian congregation; they are not having something done to them. They are confirming—that is, acknowledging and agreeing to—the covenant made between them and God at their baptisms. They are not "being confirmed" in the sense that something is being done to them.

The adjectives used in the church to make this distinction are "sacramental" and "sacrificial." Sacramental refers to anything by which or through which God's grace comes to us. Thus Baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments. In connection with His Word and through these ceremonies, God gives us the special blessing of the forgiveness of sins.

Prayer and good works, on the other hand, can be called sacrificial. This should not be understood in the sense that we are appeasing God's anger over sin by doing these things. Even the sacrifices in the Old Testament had no power in themselves to reconcile man to God. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Those sacrifices were valuable because they were pictures of the sacrifice Jesus would later make on the cross. We now use the adjective "sacrificial" to refer to those things a child of God does out of



love for God and in appreciation for what God has done for him.

If we ever think that the conservative Baptist churches are closer to us than the liberal Lutheran churches are—and they are in some ways—let us remember that the Reformed churches (of which the Baptists are a part) have a completely different understanding of Baptism and Holy Communion. They regard Baptism as sacrificial, not sacramental. When a person is baptized he is, according to them, doing something toward God. He is showing that he has accepted Jesus as his Savior. That is also why there can be no infant baptism in those churches. As for Communion, it is viewed as nothing more than a picture of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. They deny that Jesus' true body and blood are received together with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.

On the other hand, prayer has become almost a sacrament to many. We continually hear people talk about the power of prayer as though prayer were a means of grace. Don't misunderstand. Prayer is powerful. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jms. 5:16). But this is speaking of the power of prayer TOWARD God, not a power coming from God through prayer to us. If any blessing comes to us from God in connection with prayer, it is only because we are remembering the promises of God's Word in our prayer—and God showers His blessings upon us through that Word, a means of grace.

Getting back to confirmation—while we are certainly allowed to speak of our young people "being confirmed" in the faith and in their knowledge of God's Word through their instruction in Luther's Small Catechism, let us be aware that such speaking could cloud people's understanding of the rite of Confirmation. Again, in the rite of Confirmation a person is confirming the covenant God

made with him at his baptism.

That is why, in my thirty-three years in the ministry, I always spoke of "catechism instruction" for that class which precedes the rite of Confirmation.

—Gene Rutz

Editor's note: Mr. Rutz is a member of Bethel Lutheran Church, Houston (Spring), Texas. He has recently served as vacancy pastor at Bethel.



SMORGASBORD

• **SERMON EXCERPT.** (What follows is the introduction to a pastor's sermon on March 23, 2003—the Sunday after the outbreak of the Operation Iraqi Freedom war. Text was Isaiah 45:5-8, with theme: "One Nation—Under the LORD God." For the complete sermon contact the *Spokesman* editor who brought this message to his congregation, Redeemer Lutheran, Cheyenne, Wyoming.)

In his Isaiah Commentary, the old-time Lutheran theologian, Dr. August Pieper, writes as follows (though written some 80 years ago, the words speak to us today): "*Since the curse was pronounced upon this visible world and all natural life (Gen. 3) God Himself works all the ruin that afflicts the world, just as it is He who stirs every leaf on the trees and produces every beat of our hearts. Deism and Naturalism have almost obliterated this knowledge of God's work from the Christian mind. Concerning the effect of the World Wars it can truthfully be said, 'Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved' (Jer. 5:3). Christian preaching too sel-*

dom strikes this note. In Luther this point of Christian teaching is very much in evidence. He sees the direct working of the hand of God in the smallest affairs of his own life as well as in the momentous affairs of nations, especially those that involve disaster. See his sermons against the Turks . . . " (Isaiah Commentary, p. 270).

Since I last stood before you, our nation has gone to war against the Turks (as they were called in Luther's day), or against a Moslem nation, as we say today. As far as we are concerned, this is in no way a so-called "holy war" or religious war, as fanatical Islam tells its followers. However, this is not to say that—as far as we Christians are concerned—God is unaware of its occurrence, or that God is rather sitting idly by letting the various nations involved determine their own fate. The Bible is replete with examples and statements attesting to what should be obvious to Christian believers, namely, that God is at work in this shaking of the nations even as He is at work in the shaking of every leaf and the beating of every human

heart! God is at work, we say—but how, in what way or ways? Well, He who "has made of one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26); He of whom it is said that He holds the nations "as a drop in a bucket, and . . . as the small dust on the balance; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing . . . All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless" (Is. 40:15ff) — THIS GOD, Christian friends, is at work in this war, as in the World Wars and all other wars; He is at work working His sovereign will as to each one's appointed destiny. God is at work in this war as in all wars (whether the war qualifies as a "just war" or not) in bringing judgment upon whom He will, calling sinners to repentance. Yes, in a war such as this one—where incredibly we now have a television ring-side seat to frontline action—God is calling us all to repentance and faith in Himself. This is the note we would strike in our message this day . . .

• **IN THE CHURCH WORLD** (*the piece below comes from the March 23, 2003 Sunday bulletin of Resurrection Lutheran Church, Corpus Christi, Texas. Daniel Fleischer is pastor*)

The *LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR* is published six times a year, and is produced by people within the ELCA who are upset at the direction of the ELCA. They object to the ELCA's capitulation to the Episcopal Church on apostolic succession. The most recent issue (January/February 2003) quotes a Canon of the Episcopal church. The Canon said, "When

[ELCA bishops] join our bishops in the laying on of hands, they represent the sacramental intentionality that has been solemnly voted on by their church." In other words, with the ELCA ordination is a sacrament.

The same issue of the *LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR* addresses the ELCA's stance toward homosexuality. It rejects the position of the ELCA. But it makes this interesting observation, one which at least ought to make the WELS uncomfortable, since the WELS apparently is comfortable with Thrivent. The *LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR* says, "Lutheran agencies will support gay projects. For example, in October 2002, the Division for Outreach established a formal relationship with Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA), a gay/lesbian lobby. As a result, LC/NA may apply for national grants from Thrivent Financial Services and have access to synod assemblies."

For those who do not know what Thrivent Financial Services is, it is the amalgamation of Lutheran Brotherhood and the Aid Association for Lutherans. Since Thrivent defines itself as a "faith based" fraternal organization, those who belong to this fraternal society are unwittingly, at very least, being identified with what it supports. Whether Thrivent would actually give grants to the LC/NA, if asked, we do not know. What we do know is that if a fraternal organization pledged to support Lutheran agencies discriminates against a certain agency recognized by the church, it will create for itself its own problem.

Finally, the *LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR* reports concerning Augsburg Fortress website approval of Episcopal

Bishop John Spong who is quoted on the website thusly, "The Church of tomorrow must be able to incorporate all reality. It must allow God and Satan to come together in each of us. It must unite Christ with Antichrist, Jesus with Judas, male with female, heterosexual with homosexual."

We do not know the context of that quote. But in what kind of context does the bishop's statement make sense? We prefer to call it what it is, namely, blasphemy.

The war against Truth goes on. Truth will prevail because God is Truth. Sadly, the victims will be the sheep who are misled.

The *LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR* surely exposes the precipitous slide of the ELCA into the theological wasteland. But in its own way those who publish it are contributing to the malaise that has overtaken Lutheranism in our day. Similar to *Christian News*—which is a counter-publication by some within the LC-MS—it contributes to the problem.

While the two above-mentioned publications are, we are sure, loathed in the ELCA and the LC-MS, what they say finally falls on deaf ears. One can only cry wolf for so long before the cries are no longer heard. Furthermore, concerned people within those bodies become comfortable that someone is speaking out, even while they continue within bodies whose theology and/or official practice has departed from the tried and the true that historically was established upon Scripture.

Scripture is clear that when false doctrine has been detected and exposed, and when it is evident that false doctrine is promoted and defended, action is to be taken. We of the CLC have been

called loveless, overbearing, one dimensional, unevangelical, not mission-minded etc. But what does Scripture say to us? "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Mt. 7:15). "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1). "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17-18).

But where is the gospel in these words of Scripture? The gospel is there in the concern that the Lord has for souls, lest by false teaching they be led away from the salvation faith. The "avoid" in Romans 16:17 is spoken to protect us from "good words and fair speeches" (v. 18) that undermine confidence in the Word and (ultimately) in the promise of salvation.

Confessing Jesus unto salvation involves more than simply nodding assent to His divinity. It includes standing fast in the Word of Truth. While salvation belongs to all who trust in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, it does not follow that they who confess faith in Christ will want to do less than stand fast in the whole Word. From that it follows that they who identify error will also want to avoid it, lest the sheep they serve be lulled into complacency and inaction. •

Opposite—

**CLC Woman's Retreat
Trego, Wisconsin
March 28-30, 2003**



Speakers Jane Murch, Laurie Marzofka, April Lillo, Karen Strike, Sue Eichstadt



Laila Fleischer introduces Beth Kranz



Jan Voit, Nancy Jensen, Dottie Lillo, Norma Rust



Speaker Sandy Roehl



Ruth Sydow, Eunice Roehl pictured above

Grace Schreyer led Sing-a-long at right

Far right Speaker Laurie Marzofka



Announcements

Minnesota Delegate Conference

The Minnesota Delegate Conference will hold its Spring meeting on June 1, 2003 at Salem Lutheran Church in Eagle Lake, Minn. The conference begins at 3:00 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

Agenda:

* A Christian's Evaluation of the Government's 'Sword-bearing' in War"
— Mr. Doug Bester

* Bible Study Presentation: Essayist's choice — Mr. Lawrence Bade

Chaplain — Pastor Norman Greve

—*Pastor Wayne Eichstadt, Secretary*

BB Camp/CLC Youth Camp

This summer there are two opportunities for your children to get to know others in the CLC and enjoy their fellowship on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College. From June 20-22, girls in grades 5-12 can participate in a basketball camp. Beginning in the afternoon of June 22 and running through June 28, boys and girls in grades 4-8 can attend the CLC Youth Camp.

Information on both of these opportunities can be found at www.ilc.edu. Once there, click on NEW and choose Girls' Basketball Camp or CLC Youth Camp. Your pastor should also have information on these events.

CLC Mission Helper Program

The CLC Mission Helper Program is blessed with the responsibility of supporting our overseas mission efforts by initiating, organizing, assisting with and promoting various short term mission opportunities.

The Mission Helper Program offers opportunities for CLC volunteers to participate first hand in foreign mission fields along-side our brothers and sisters in Christ. The program is currently seeking potential financial sponsors. Financial sponsors would be contacted for help after volunteers have exhausted all other means of raising funds for their trip but are still in need of financial assistance. This sponsorship program would allow individuals to participate in the program who might otherwise be unable.

To be involved in our overseas mission efforts by volunteering your monetary treasures to the Mission Helper Program or if you would like more information, please contact Pastor Todd Ohlmann at: toddohlmann@clclutheran.com or (636)225-3458.

Installations

In accord with our usage and order, George Dummann, who was called by Redeemer Lutheran Church, Bowdle, S.Dak. to serve as

pastor, was installed on Sunday, April 6, 2003. Assisting in the service was Pastor Frank Gantt.

—*Pastor Michael Roehl*

In accord with our usage and order, John Klatt, who was called by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Rapid City, S.Dak. to serve as pastor, was installed on Sunday, March 30, 2003. Assisting in the service was Pastor James Naumann.

—*Pastor Frank Gantt*

Anniversary

Messiah Lutheran Church, Hales Corners, Wis. is observing the tenth anniversary of its Christian Day School on June 7 & 8, 2003. Former and present students, graduates, teachers, student teachers, pastors, and their families are invited for an evening of fellowship Saturday, June 7, at Franklin Lion's Park. On Sunday, June 8, at 9:30 a.m. a special Thanksgiving service will be held, with Pastor John Ude as speaker. A program and meal will follow. The special anniversary offering has been designated for completion of the meadow area to provide "green space" for the congregation's children.

All friends of Messiah are invited—according to this announcement from the Messiah Lutheran Board of Education.