

THANK THE LORD FOR HIS WONDERFUL WORKS TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN!

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

**Gethsemane Lutheran Library
11315 E. Broadway Avenue
Spokane Valley, WA 99206**

OH, GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD!
FOR HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER.

Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness,
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness.
He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
And broke their chains in pieces.

He calms the storm, So that its waves are still.
Then they are glad because they are quiet;
So He guides them to their desired haven.
Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness,
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people,
And praise Him in the company of the elders.

Whoever is wise will observe these things,
And they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.

PSALM 107: SELECTED VERSES

NOVEMBER 2004, VOL. 47 NO. 5

THANK GOD!!...for this and that and you and them

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." (Psalm 107:1)

It's been said so many times that perhaps some think it's a cliché, "We have so much to be thankful for." God has provided us with so many blessings, some of which are easier to remember to give thanks for than others.

Perhaps it's easy—when sitting around the table at Thanksgiving with the smell of turkey and stuffing, cranberries and pumpkin pie wafting about the room—to thank the Lord. We really should thank God for our daily bread—for this food and clothing and all He gives to support this body and life.

As we gather in family groups for the holiday, it might be easy to take the time to give thanks to God for the blessings received through family.

While we are at it, let's not forget to

thank God that He has made us His own children through faith in Christ Jesus. We dare not forget the tremendous spiritual blessings that are ours because Jesus is our brother—forgiveness for all sins and the sure promise of life everlasting.

We should truly thank God for all of that too!

How Deep the Well!

The well is still deep. The apostle Paul reminds us of yet another blessing, when he writes: "We give thanks to God always for YOU all, making mention of you in our prayers...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (1 Thess. 1:2-3).

We should also give thanks to God for our fellow Christians—our extended family gathered about us for our mutual encouragement and edification.

Whenever we have opportunity, we

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Editor: Paul Fleischer, 1741 E. 22nd Street, Cheyenne, WY 82001-4138, E-Mail to paulgf@qwest.net; Assistant Editor: Paul R. Koch; Artists: John Fox, Matthew Schaser; Staff: Theodore Barthels, David Bernthal, Wayne Eichstadt, Warren Fanning, Daniel Fleischer, Joel Fleischer, David Fuerstenau, Mark Gullerud, Roland H. Gurgel, John Klatt, Paul Krause, Joseph Lau, Bertram Naumann, Paul D. Nolting, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Peter Reim, Andrew Schaller, Michael Schierenbeck.

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should thank God "for YOU"—for our fellow Christians.

Have we covered all of God's blessings? There isn't enough space here in our little *Spokesman* to list all of them.

However, Thanksgiving Day isn't always a joyful day for everyone. Holidays can be a difficult time for those who have recently said a final 'goodbye' to a fellow believer, to a loved one in Christ. What was once a shared event full of joy now may seem lonely and sad.

Should death dampen our giving of thanks? Our sorrows are chased away by the words of Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Pet. 1:3).

This Thanksgiving let's also thank God for the blessings that He showered upon those who have gone ahead of us to the marriage feast of the Lamb! While we perhaps struggle to fill out a list of things to be thankful for—they do not! Thank God—no more tears, nor sorrows, nor crying; no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Thank You, Lord, also for them!

Thank God . . . for this and that and you and them.

—Pastor Andrew Schaller



O taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! (Ps 34:8)

Counting Our Blessings

In terms of earthly blessings, the passage above certainly applies to Thanksgiving. The succulent turkey feeds the entire family for several meals—the mashed potatoes, the stuffing, the gravy. We come to the Thanksgiving table and we taste and see that the LORD is good!

But it is not only on Thanksgiving Day that we experience this. Any time that we take note of the blessings that God has given us, we taste and we see that the Lord is good.

At different ages of our life we give thanks for different things. As a child, I was thankful for my parents, for my toys, and for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I gave thanks for Sunday School and for the friends that I had at

church and at school.

When I became a teenager I was, like most, probably not as thankful for my parents as I should have been. However, I was thankful for the things that the Lord provided for me through them. I was thankful for Immanuel Lutheran High School and later for Immanuel Lutheran College, as well as for the friends that I was blessed with there. The Lord continues to bless me through those same friends to this day. Though I did not always show it, I was also thankful for the Christian education that the Lord provided for me at ILC.

As we grow and our lives, activities, and responsibilities change, we give thanks for different things than we did in the past.

As an adult I'm still thankful for peanut butter and jelly. But as I have grown, the things I am thankful for have changed with my priorities. I'm thankful for the wife that the Lord has blessed me with and for the children that He has entrusted to us. As I have become a parent, I have become more thankful for my own parents now than I was earlier. While their custodial duties toward me have changed, the Lord continues to bless me through them with their advice, their love, and their friendship.

Yes, at different ages we give thanks for different things, and our appreciation grows for the things with which the Lord has blessed us in the past. So many of His blessings in our past keep on giving—Christian education, a spouse, children, our home, our investments, and on and on; family, friends, cars, boats, grandchildren, medical care, good health, strength and comfort in poor health, and on and on. Each of us could exhaust ourselves in a futile attempt to list all of the earthly blessings we have been given.

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! . . . There is no want to those who fear Him" (Ps. 34:8-9).

By grace we are saved . . .

Our age and our situation in life changes from year to year, even from day to day. But some things never change so long as we are in this world. We are sinners. As we get older we realize the weight of our sins. But God the Holy Ghost moves sinners of all ages to confess their sins and to cry with a penitent heart, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Lk. 18:13)

Our greatest cause for thanksgiving is the fact that God is merciful. That



never changes. Jesus is our Savior from sin. That never changes. "O taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who trusts in Him. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned" (Ps 34:8, 22). Those who trust in Him shall not be condemned, for, "in [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

We see God's grace in His Word and in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; we taste and see His forgiveness as we receive the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of our sins; we give thanks to God that He has called us together to receive these blessings with fellow believers in our congregations.

Turkey and dressing, even peanut butter and jelly, remind us that we have much to be thankful for in this world. But no matter what earthly things we give thanks for in this world, our Savior remains our greatest blessing and the constant cause for our thanksgiving—here in time, and hereafter in eternity.

O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good! And His mercy endures forever!

—Pastor Joel Fleischer

Where Milk and Honey Flows

"God has brought us to this place and has given us this land, 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'" — Deuteronomy 26:9

The above words, of course, were spoken about the children of Israel. When they were still in Egypt, God had promised them that He would bring them out of the house of bondage and bring them into the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The land of Canaan was truly a rich land. When the spies went in to check out the land, they returned with amazing proof of the fruitfulness of the land. It truly was a land flowing with milk and honey—abundant with every good thing.

Isn't the same thing true for us? God has truly given us a land "flowing with milk and honey." We enjoy such great abundance of every good thing. We enjoy a wealth and prosperity that was unheard of in years gone by. Our God is good!

The warning that Moses gave his people also applies to us: "So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 6:10-12).

We have enjoyed the great abundance of our land and God's rich blessings for so long that it is easy to take it for granted. Among our Canadian

brethren there are many who came out of Germany after WW II. They lived through the destruction and the starvation and so many hardships. They still thank God for this land where milk and honey flows.

Taken For Granted??

But for us who have grown up in such abundance, it is easy to forget the Lord who has given us so much. May we daily remember to thank the Lord who has blessed us with such abundance. May we sing praises to Him for His amazing goodness. Let us continually praise God with the psalmist who said, "You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance" (Ps. 65:11).

We truly live in a land where "milk and honey" flows. That is not just because of the abundance of food and earthly riches. Our land also flows with the "milk and honey" of God's Word! Never has God's Word been more readily and abundantly available for all who read and hear.

Sad to say, that too is something that has been taken for granted—and even despised. In the Word of God we receive far greater riches than abundant food and wealth. In God's Word we receive the love and peace of God Himself. We receive Christ Jesus our Lord and the full forgiveness of sins that He earned for us. Through the Word, God the Father, Son, and Spirit come to us and make their home with us (see John 14:23). We receive the milk which nourishes and strengthens

our soul and the honey of God's grace which sweetens even the most bitter experiences in life. In God's Word we receive eternal life by faith in God's Son.

Oh, praise the Lord that He has

brought us into this land, a land "flowing with milk and honey." May we receive all His blessings with thanksgiving, never ceasing to treasure the milk and honey of God's pure Word.

—Pastor David Reim



"Treasures in Heaven"

There is a particular person at our house who is very fond of shopping at the local Family Dollar Store. It's my 5-year-old daughter, who can't wait to spend her money as soon as she gets four quarters together. Then, armed with her life savings, she studies the toy aisle at Family Dollar, looking for a plastic trinket to take home as a special prize. Her parents, of course, remind her that it would really be better to save her money for something that lasts. But with the young and inexperienced, instant gratification usually wins, instead of holding out for long-term value. It takes some maturity to realize that it's better to set your sights on what is truly valuable, even if it means short-term sacrifice and waiting.

That same principle is one that Jesus urged on His followers. He said "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt. 6:19-21).

We all have heavy investments in our families, in the workplace, and in the things of this world. We tend to make the mistake of measuring our

lives by the things we own, even though we know that they are only temporary. Anyone who wants proof of that needs only to visit the nursing home, where people of many backgrounds and previous incomes all have pretty much the same thing now. Better yet, visit the cemetery, where all the striving and attention for the things of this world have come to nothing for the people who are there! "You can't take it with you" certainly rings true when it comes to all those earthly things for which we work so hard, and on which we spend so much time and money.

Yet, there ARE things of great value that we CAN take with us when we leave this world. Jesus calls them "treasures in heaven." The greatest of them is His promise that our many sins are completely taken away, on account of His suffering and death in our place on the cross. With our trust in Him, we have the promise that when we leave this world, we'll be with Him in glory. There we will be united with all our friends and family who also put their faith in God's Son. There we'll have a never-ending life of joy, purpose, and genuine happiness. Faith in these promises and time spent with God's Word ought to occupy our minds and hearts more and more, because these are the things that have true, everlast-

ing value.

Yet, like a child at the Dollar Store, we often are so impressed with life's temporary trifles that we fail to see the real prize. Your bank account won't go with you when you leave this world, nor will any of the things you buy with money. Neither can your family or friends accompany you when it's time to leave this world and enter the next—but Jesus will!

It's time to make a conscious effort to set our sights higher than the world around us. When your heart is set on the true treasure in heaven, where Jesus is, then you can say with the apostle Paul: "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind" (Php. 3:14-15).

—Pastor Bruce Naumann



The Discourses of Christ

Christ, the Light of the World—John 8:12-20

Part One

Jesus Defends His Self-Witness

Nothing can make one appreciate light quite like being in a dark place. In total, utter darkness one cannot know where he is going, where danger lies.

While touring a cave in Kentucky, the tour guide explained that this was an opportunity to experience total darkness, but the opportunity came with a warning. There were sudden and deep drop-offs in the cave, dangerous drop-offs right next to the path upon which we stood. Everyone needed to stay where they were lest someone step off into the deep and die. When the lights were turned off, nothing could be seen, not anything at all; not the person standing next to you, not your hand in front of your face. Everyone was relieved to have the light return. In the light we knew which path to use to return to the surface. There was safety,

security in the light.

Nothing is of greater value than THE Light in the midst of the utter darkness of the world. Jesus declares, "I am the Light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

The light of life! It is there for everyone in Jesus. Following the Light means no stumbling into the dangerous pitfalls that lead to eternal death. This is the security of salvation that we have been given in Jesus. He lights up the path of life that leads to heaven.

Darkness or light? Where is one better off? Can it be possible that people live in darkness and don't know it?

It can be, because so many don't know what Light is. They live in complete spiritual darkness and cannot recognize either darkness or light.

The Pharisees were very quick to challenge this important declaration of our Savior: "You bear witness of yourself. Your witness is not true" (v. 13). It is the world's attempt to discredit Jesus as just another individual who makes preposterous claims about himself. Jesus' defense is clear. His testimony is not unsupported. Indeed, it has the highest support. Jesus replied, "I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me" (Jn. 8:18).

The Father's Endorsement!

The witness of the Father was not hidden or meek. It was bold and emphatic and repeated.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the Father endorsed Jesus as His Son, the Christ of God. At Jesus' baptism the Father's voice from heaven declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17).

The witness of the Father at the transfiguration was again an emphatic endorsement of Jesus as the Son of God—the One who declares the truth of God: "A voice came out of the cloud saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him'" (Mt. 17:5).

Now, while these testimonies of the Father (which come to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) may have had limited original audiences, other incidents had much larger audiences.

Those who witnessed Jesus' miracles saw the wonders of God. At the raising of Lazarus in Bethany, Jesus directed the attention of a large crowd



to the Father when He "...lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this that they may believe that You sent Me'" (Jn. 11:41, 42). The miracle of Lazarus' resurrection was a clear statement which attested to Jesus' divine glory as the Christ of God, the Light of the world. Even the darkness of death had to succumb to His brilliance.

Yes, Jesus is the Light who dispels the darkness of death.

The Father's testimony to this truth is most powerfully proclaimed in Jesus' own resurrection. As it was clearly prophesied in the Scriptures, so the Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus. Peter declared the testimony of David's prophecy to the crowds on Pentecost: "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:30-32).

So hear again as Jesus declares—for all people everywhere, for all time—"I am the Light of the world. He who fol-

lows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"! (Jn. 8:12)

We see how God the Father confirmed this truth. These are not wild claims of an overly zealous, self-proclaimed prophet, but the witness of God's truth about Jesus, our Savior.

Our faith is not unfounded. Our faith is not built upon myth or upon the shifting sands of human judgment. Rather, our faith is based on the sure testimony of God the Father. Jesus remains our Light of life unto eternity!

—Pastor Theodore Barthels



Studies In Colossians

"In (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3)

Chapter 3:1-11

Your Hidden Life

Part of the problem for the Colossians was that Christ was not real to them. This seems to be Paul's take on the situation, as he continually presents Jesus Christ to them in contrast to the false notions brought in by others. Let Christ be real, in all His divine power and majesty ("by Him all things were created" 1:16). Let Christ be real in His organic headship over the Church (1:18). Let the "blood of His cross" be their peace (1:20).

All this is offered as an antidote to external, humanly contrived religion: "These things have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (2:23). These Colossian believers, Paul says, have a hidden life; a loftier existence which they entered through faith in Jesus: "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (1:5). It is this heavenly hope, borne of their faith

in Christ, which sets them above and beyond the earth-bound religion of the pagans. "You were raised with Christ" Paul points out. If that is the case, it is good for them to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

This is your hidden life—the life every believer possesses and is invited to live, even here on this Earth. To be raised (resurrected!) with Jesus implies a dying; burying even. This was mentioned already in 2:12 ("buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"). Baptism points to what happens in conversion, when the sinner turns from sin; when the lost find Christ; when the damned find redemption. This is the turning point in our life, because it gives this enormous new existence, all wrapped up in the fact of a living Jesus Christ.

"For you died..."—died to old ways; died to rebellion against one's Creator; died to the self-centered mind; died to the shame and futility of a carnal (fleshly) way of life.

"Your life"—the one gained by faith—"is hidden with God." The world can't see this new life; but it belongs to us. In Christ we find ourselves at peace with God. Think of waking up one day and realizing that the war that has dominated your life, the hostility that has hung like a gray cloud over you, the fear that has dogged your every move, is gone! Disappeared! Evaporated! In Jesus, that is the case for us. We are now reconciled to God; we now have the promise of salvation, not damnation; we now are secure as children of the Heavenly Father.

Reflecting the Pure and Holy

The reality of our heavenly existence is buttressed by the reality of divine judgment. Despite our new, hidden life of righteousness, we still have the same old sinful flesh, tickled and tempted by the lures of sin all around us. But what the world willfully forgets—that God will judge, just as He did once before—we remember. Paul reminds them in detail of the old lusts which we must daily "mortify" (that is, put to death): from the coarse and lewd ("fornication, impurity, passion" 3:5) to those things that the world

scarcely notices ("do not lie to one another" 3:9). The world may not tremble at the suggestion that "the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience," but just because they say it isn't so, doesn't mean that it isn't.

Your hidden life is a reflection of the pure and holy: "you have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (3:10). And this image is remarkably fluid and adaptable to every person, uniting a vast body of people who are separated by every sort of barrier—racial: "Jews *and* Greeks;" religious: "circumcised (pure, under the Old Covenant) *and* uncircumcised" (barred from salvation under the Old Covenant); culturally inferior ("barbarians *and* Scythians"—a nomadic race from southwest Russia); or economic: "slave *and* free." Whatever their outward circumstance, when one becomes a new man in Christ, that new, hidden, life comes to influence and govern his whole being.

It is also in our hidden life that we find approach to God in childlike prayer:

I pray Thee, dear Lord Jesus,
My heart to keep and train
That I Thy holy temple
From youth to age remain.
Turn Thou my tho'ts forever
From worldly wisdom's lore;
If I but learn to know Thee,
I shall not want for more. (TLH #655)

—Pastor Peter Reim



Large oak felled by Hurricane Frances missed school and church at Immanuel, Winter Haven, Florida. See pp. 19 & 20 for more reports.

INTRODUCING the Books of the Prophets

Isaiah

... How the Lord longed to have His people repent of their wicked ways and return to Him! Isaiah's words overflow with the willingness of God to forgive: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'" (1:18).

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was not the first to do what he did (his book is first in the list of the prophets simply because it is the longest)—nor was he to be the last. He was a prophet—another one in a long line of men sent by God with a message for God's people.

That Isaiah would do this was not of his own doing. It was God Himself who had called him. "I saw the Lord," Isaiah wrote, "high and lifted up," asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah responded, "Here am I! Send me." (6:1-11)

To fathom the message that God had for Isaiah to take to the people, it helps if we know something about the times in which Isaiah lived. The "visions" God gave him "concerning Judah and Jerusalem" came "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). This period of history saw days of prosperity for both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The borders of the two kingdoms had reached almost to the extent of Solomon's glorious reign centuries before.

But with prosperity came a turning away from God, a turning instead to the false gods of their heathen neighbors. When Hezekiah was on the Judean throne, the Jews witnessed the captivity of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, and the attempt by Sennacherib to take Jerusalem and all of Judah, as well. It was only by divine intervention that Judah was spared (see chapters 36-37).

But it was not only Israel that had turned from God; Judah, the southern kingdom, was guilty of doing the same thing. So it was that God sent prophets like Isaiah.

The message brought by Isaiah should not have surprised anyone. Already in the words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy, God had warned His people very clearly: "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you....The LORD will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a

Outline of ISAIAH:

I. God's messages of judgment (Isaiah 1-39)

- * Under Kings Uzziah and Jotham (Isaiah 1-6)
- * Under King Ahaz (Isaiah 7-14)
- * Under King Hezekiah (Isaiah 15-39)

II. God's message of comfort (Isaiah 40-66)

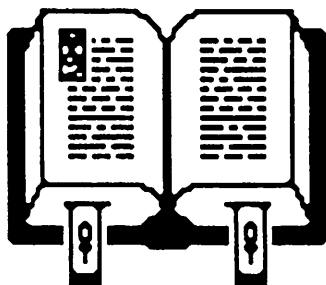
- * God's promise to free the remnant of His people (Isaiah 40-52)
- * The coming of God's Servant (Jesus Christ) as the Messiah King (Isaiah 52,53)
- * The future glory of the New Testament Church (Isaiah 54-66)

nation which neither you nor your fathers have known...Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything..." (28:15, 16a, 36a, 47).

From Cover to Cover —Law and Gospel!

In the book of Isaiah, we have the record of the words God had for His people. And what words they are! The opening verses reveal a Father whose heart had been broken—"The children I have nourished and brought up have rebelled against Me. An ox and a donkey know their owner, but My people Israel don't know Me" (1:2-3).

How the Lord longed to have His people repent of their wicked ways and return to Him! Isaiah's words overflow with the willingness of God to forgive: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18). Over and over again God tried to show them the folly of trusting in military alliances: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, And rely on horses, Who trust in chariots because they are many, And in horsemen because they are very



strong, But who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, Nor seek the LORD!" (31:1) God had warned of the foolishness of worshiping gods made by men's hands: "He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.' And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, 'Deliver me, for you are my god!'" (44:14, 16, 17) He encouraged the people to look at how reliable His Word was compared to that of any other, both concerning what had happened and what was to come: "And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come,

Let them show these to them" (44:7).

But as history would show, all God's encouragement, guidance, and pleading was for naught. And because of their continuing unbelief and disobedience, God had no choice but to follow through with His judgment on them. Through the mouth of Isaiah God laid out in detail just what would happen. After emissaries from the king of Babylon came to visit Hezekiah when God had healed him from a terminal condition, and Hezekiah showed them everything he had, God told him, "Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house...shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left" (39:6).

But this God, this loving and gracious God, could not leave His people in the captivity which was to come. So in chapter after chapter of Isaiah we hear the Lord speaking words of hope—deliverance in the not-so-distant future from the Babylonians at the hands of the Persian king Cyrus: "Cyrus...shall perform all My pleasure,

saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built.' And to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (44:28). But even more importantly, deliverance for the whole world from the captivity of sin, salvation which would come at the hands of the Lord's Suffering Servant, who would take our place and pay the price for us (see the amazing chapter 53!).

From cover to cover, the book of Isaiah is God's message of Law and Gospel, of sin and grace, of captivity and deliverance—the very message which the New Testament church needs to hear as well!

What a record God has given us through Isaiah's pen. In the book of Isaiah we see with our own eyes the gracious way the Lord has of dealing with us, His sinful children!

—*Pastor Paul Krause*

(This article begins a new series. The series is intended to introduce the reader to the books from the Lord's prophets, with the prayer that all of us will be inspired to (re)read these timely messages from the Lord God of heaven! — Editor)



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As explained in last month's issue (when Part 1 appeared), a series of three articles on the subject at hand was written some years back by Pastor Em. Paul F. Nolting. These articles with their compelling message are worthy of review and reflection in our non-confessional day and age. — Editor

CONFESSIONAL UNITY (Part 2 of 3)

Possible?

Is agreement in doctrine possible? The majority would say, "No." The liberals, of course, have no agreement except in rejecting the basic truths of Scripture, such as the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, His miracles including His resurrection, and salvation through the blood of the Lord Jesus. The Fundamentalists believe that agreement in the so-called fundamentals, as verbal inspiration, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, blood atonement, and the second coming of Christ is necessary. Beyond that, disagreement is tolerated. Most Lutherans endorse the policy of a "wholesome latitude of theological opinion," which results in a policy of "agreeing to disagree agreeably." The majority of professional theologians and lay people would surely shake their heads and say, "Agreement in doctrine is impossible—and unnecessary!" And they could point to the present situation in the church, as well as to past church history, to demonstrate their contention.

Possible!

Yet our Lord assumes that the impossible is possible! He said, "if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:30-31). The "if" clause is

not a condition contrary to fact and so an impossibility. If that were the case, then no true disciples could possibly exist on the face of the globe. The Corinthian congregation was plagued with factions, doctrinal differences, and practices contrary to sound doctrine. Yet Paul pleaded with them: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Was Paul living in a dream world? Was he hoping for a miracle? Was he expecting the impossible from the Corinthians? Not at all! He wrote this first letter to achieve that unity, and he was confident that the desired unity would be achieved through the Word by the Spirit.

Clarity of Scripture

Unity in what we believe and confess is possible because the Scriptures are clear. To some the evidence seems to conflict with that statement. How can the Scriptures be clear when there are so many contradictory teachings afloat, all claiming to be the truth? The Scriptures are clear because the Holy Spirit says they are clear. The psalmist declares, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). The function of a light is to show the way; the Scriptures are able to do just that. A



child is able to become wise unto salvation by reading and hearing the Scriptures; a university graduate may well read the same Scriptures and remain illiterate in matters of salvation. A child can understand; the most gifted of saints can well spend his entire lifetime searching the Scriptures without doing more than scratching the surface. The fact that the Scriptures are clear does not mean that understanding them is without difficulty.

The Problem

The problem doesn't lie with the Scriptures, but with man. Sin has affected the mind of man, darkening his understanding. The result is that "the natural man receiveth not the things of

the Spirit of God; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Sin has made man think in a work-righteous rut. Salvation by character, "be good, do good, and you are good," is as natural for every person as the law of gravity. The result of this condition is that man so easily and naturally seeks for and finds a reflection of his own opinions in the Scripture, or he adjusts the words of Scripture to his preconceived notions of what they should be saying. Thus instead of letting the Bible instruct him, man wants to teach the Bible as to what it should say and teach.

The Christian also has this problem, for every child of God retains his flesh—indwelling sin—as long as he lives. As we read our Bibles our flesh attempts to corrupt the message—without our even realizing it. That is why we need the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, and that is why confessional unity can only be imperfect.

(To be concluded)



SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

Seventh in a series

"When it seems hardest to pray we should pray the hardest."

This church sign gives us the opportunity to discuss prayer. It is beneficial for us to consider from time to time the nature of prayer, as well as its purpose and power. This is true especially

because of all the false claims regarding prayer being made all around us.

Many people regard prayer as almost a sacrament. In the Pentecostal churches there has been a confusion

between the *sacrificial* and the *sacramental*. On the one hand, Baptism and the Lord's Supper have become nothing more than symbols of something that has already happened in the Christian's heart. Thus, being baptized and attending Communion become things the Christian is doing toward God, sacrificial things. On the other hand, prayer has been set forth as a two-way communication between the Christian and his Lord, and something through which and in which he receives blessings from God, namely, sacramental.

At this point, let me say something which may sound wrong to some of you: The Lord does not speak to us in and through our prayer. This does not deny that during a prayer, whether in private or in the public worship service, a Christian may think of certain phrases of the Bible, and that the Lord does bless us through His Word. Nor does it deny that many blessings come to the Christian as a result of his prayers. But the prayer itself is nothing more than the Christian speaking to the Lord.

Is it being too technical to make this distinction? Does it seem that we are splitting hairs? When people are being misled by false doctrine, it is sometimes necessary to get very technical and specific. In the past, false doctrines regarding prayer have led to such things as prayer wheels, in which small pieces of paper on which had been written short prayers, were placed on a

wheel which was then turned to "send" the prayers up to God. And we all know how Roman Catholics recite the rosary in the mistaken belief that they will be heard for their much speaking (see Matthew 6:7).

Then there are the televangelists, who invite people to send in their prayer requests (along with a donation), as though the evangelist's prayer will be more effective than the prayer of the simple Christian. And there are those who feel that if a large group of Christians sets aside a specific time when all of them will pray for the same thing, this will somehow be more effective than if each of them simply pours out his heart to the Lord. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

The church sign we have before us is true in that it urges us to pray at all times, not only when we feel like it. Many churches put undue emphasis on the Christian's feelings. Yes, we should have strong emotions about what the Lord has done for us in sending His Son to save us from sin, death, and the devil. But those feelings are a result of the gospel working in our hearts; the Lord's work is not a result of our feelings.

There is an old gospel song that says, "Every time I feel the Spirit moving in me, I will pray." Fine, but let us pray also when our feelings of spirituality are not as strong. It is natural to ask the Lord to help when we are in trouble, when we have problems of various kinds. But let us not forget to thank the Lord when things are going well, and pour out before Him not only our complaints but all our thoughts and feelings. He can handle all of them.

And while we are to "pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17)—that



is, our hearts are to be attuned to the Lord in every situation in life—let us not forget to leave the answer to our prayers in the Lord's hands. Abraham was persistent in his prayer that the Lord spare the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the believers who lived there. The Lord answered the prayer by rescuing Lot and his daughters before He destroyed the cities.

I am not sure what the sign means when it says, "when it seems hardest to

pray." Perhaps they are thinking of those times when a Christian feels far away from God because of his sins, including his sins of neglecting God's Word. Then it is especially important that we repent of our sins against the Lord and against whomever we have wronged, so that we may be assured that the Lord has forgiven us all sins.

May we all look forward to the time when we will be able to communicate with the Lord directly in heaven.

—Gene Rutz



FROM A PASTOR'S DESK—

LC-MS FREE CONFERENCE

Last week (September 10-11, 2004) I and a layman from our Resurrection congregation—as well as the pastor and some laymen from our sister church in Spring, Texas—attended a free conference in Brenham, Tex. The conference was sponsored by congregations and pastors of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) who are troubled at the direction in which LC-MS is going. There were up to 500 people in attendance. Though we are not members of the LC-MS, we were interested in the proceedings, since the subject of the conference was the future of confessional Lutheranism in a mainline Lutheran synod.

In the course of the discussion after one essay, I and one of our laymen spoke. One LC-MS layman made positive reference to our CLC congregation, St. Matthew in Dallas. In addition, we were able to visit with laymen and pastors over dinner and at coffee breaks. We distributed some CLC literature.

The essays delivered were not distributed. One was by Dr. Kurt Marquart (a candidate for synod president at the summer Convention); another was by a pastor of the Texas district. On Friday evening a pastor—who left the synod after the July LC-MS Convention—gave a summary of the Convention. The essays were interesting and instructive, and in our judgment "right on." The essayists, as well as people who spoke from the floor, recognized that LC-MS has departed from the old way. It was clear that they recognized that the LC-MS is no longer the church of the "Brief Statement." It was not uncommon to hear the word "heterodox" (false teaching) used to describe the LC-MS. There was comment made that the LC-MS has been heterodox since the "Statement of the 44." That is a strong indictment, recognizing that error—and the toleration of it!—has been in the LC-MS for fifty years. It was clear-

ly stated that, in the present circumstance in the LC-MS, it is the gospel and the sacraments that are at stake.

Our disappointment was that, while the analysis was correct, the course of action was not. Both essayists, while speaking strongly of the problem, were less bold when it came to proposing action. The word here was "caution." There was even a suggestion that they wait to be "kicked out," leading one laymen to ask what they would have to do to be kicked out. A suggestion was made that the group write a confession of where they stand and present it to the synod. This might get them kicked out. A counter proposal was made that they simply present the "Brief Statement" to the LC-MS as their confession and suggest that the LC-MS follow it. One essayist agreed that one should leave if he felt conscience-bound to do so; nevertheless, he also suggested that group action might be more effective. This prompted your pastor to ask privately, "Whatever happened to individual conscience?" Over dinner we did speak with a highly regarded pastor who stated on the floor that he was going to lead his congregation out. He mused, "Whatever happened to Romans 16:17?" One essayist suggested an "in statu confessionis" ("state of confession") approach, during which the people are instructed carefully in preparation for leaving.

While we agree that the people should be instructed carefully, one wonders what has been happening over the last decades. Have pastors not been instructing their congregations?

There were good statements on the floor, many made by laymen. One gets the strong impression that if the leaders of the confessional movement in the

LC-MS would take decisive action and leave the heterodox church, which they acknowledge will probably have to be done, there would be a sizeable number of laypeople who would follow now. But, in our judgment, this has been one of the weaknesses that has contributed to the problem. Leaders who have analyzed correctly have confused the people by doing nothing. They have always looked for a ray of hope that would permit them to stay in the "beloved synod."

In a lighter but still serious vein, one pastor remarked that the Brief Statement says that a church is not heterodox by the casual intrusion of error, so long as the error is combated. He then asked the discussion leaders if it might be that in this age the LC-MS is confronted with a "casual intrusion of truth." When it comes to that manner of discourse, it is time to leave!

This was not a conference during which any resolutions were adopted.

We are happy that we attended. Frankly, it reminded us of fifty years ago when the issue was joined in the Wisconsin Synod, out of which the CLC was born. It gave us a new appreciation of the blessings which we have in being of one heart and mind, able to proclaim the precious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word," and give courage to those caught in the web of error and the net of synodical heterodoxy to come out from among them and be separate.

Precious souls are at risk by delaying in the face of acknowledged heterodoxy.

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
Resurrection Lutheran Church
Corpus Christi, Texas

SMORGASBORD

• HURRICANES

When Hurricane Charley hit the state of Florida in August (the first of three!), pastors of two of our Florida congregations—Paul Larsen, Church of the Lutheran Confession, North Port, and John Schierenbeck, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Winter Haven—sent out reports. Thankfully, there was no serious bodily injury among our memberships there, though there was considerable property damage. We share portions of the pastors' reports.

From Pastor Larsen: *"One of our members, Marcy Schaller, had sent an earlier message with news of the impending hurricane. . . . Marcy's message brought responses from several in our CLC, laypeople as well as pastors. We want to acknowledge with sincere thanks all the prayers and expressions of fellowship we received. While the strongest part of the hurricane missed us by about twenty miles, our area did receive quite a bit of damage. . . . Our*

electricity here at the parsonage was restored (about three times) on Saturday, and nothing at all at the church until about 10:00 a.m. on Sunday. Even then, our a/c was not functioning, and we sweltered in 90 degree heat and humidity during the worship service. Two of us are going up on the roof of the church again this morning to cut loose the remnants of the damaged roofing material, and cut down some plastic sheathing until the repair crew can be here. But the damage to the organ and the rest of the water-soaked areas may mean that these will all have to be replaced. . . . The Lord did indeed spare us from what could have been a great disaster and loss of life. When we realize how His almighty power is greater than the most powerful storm, we do experience a new sense of trust in His mercy. One is moved to think more deeply upon the fear of the disciples in the tempest on the Sea of Galilee, and more deeply yet on the power of the Savior in calming



"The large oak missed the school," said Pastor Schierenbeck, after Frances hit.



By the roots of the large oak, Teresa (Mrs. Neil Bernthal) & Joel

the storm with His command. Surely, we have a merciful Lord! . . . "

In his September 2004 presidential letter to our pastors, Pastor Schierenbeck gave this perspective on the hurricane: *"Things changed August 13 in the space of one hour. Hurricane Charley hit central Florida. This storm revealed the power of God Who from everlasting to everlasting is Lord. This storm revealed that man is a creature of the day and is as the grass of the field. This storm also caused us not to forget (for a little while) all the benefits of the Lord. We tend to take for granted comfort benefits like power, a hot shower, drinking water, food, lights, and even shelter from the stormy blast. Our modern generation has forgotten how to function on its own with no internet or prepared foods. For a brief moment we remember that the Lord is in charge. We also remember that simpler is better. This storm also gave us opportunities to help others. Instead of thinking only of ourselves, we see opportunities on every hand to help others. The troubling thing is how easily we conclude that it is the function and duty of government or the insurance company to meet all our needs. As we wait the possibility of another hurricane this weekend, we commit ourselves into God's gracious hands. It will take a while to sort out the needs*

of our congregations (Live Oak, North Port, and Winter Haven) in Florida. If there are any special needs, you will be informed.

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed."

(Note: As this is being printed, Florida is being hit with a fourth hurricane in six weeks. We pray for the health and well-being of our Christian brothers and sisters.)

• OUR FOREIGN MISSIONS

Missionary Koenig regularly sends e-mail accounts of his gospel work in our foreign missions. Of course, these are available only to those who do e-mail, or to those whose pastors reproduce them for their congregations. The reports are always exciting, as we hear and witness how the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:17).

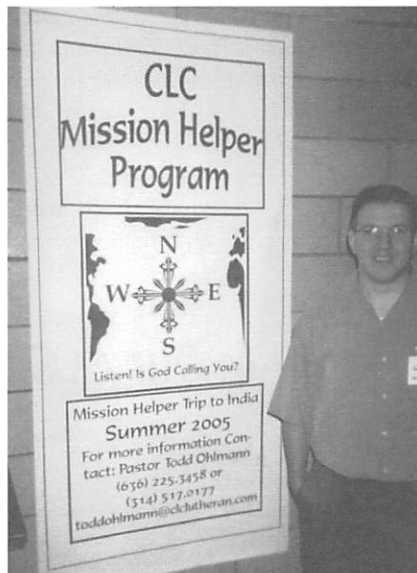
Late in summer 2004 Pastor Todd Ohlmann, Faith Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Missouri was granted six weeks off by his congregation to join Missionary Koenig in outreach efforts in India. Here is just a sample of the reports which Pastor Ohlmann e-mailed back "on my last day in Chennai, South India."

. . . Yesterday, after the second day of classes, as we drove back to the motel to have a meeting with two of the lead pastors of the BELC, Pastor D. Paul and Pastor Rajamani, Pastor

Koenig and I discussed the past two days of events. Pastor Koenig commented that it will be interesting to come back in twelve months to see how many of these men are still with us. Some will most surely find the doctrines we teach unacceptable and go in a different direction. But what more can you ask for from the Lord than opportunities like this to share the gospel and train men who are willing to hear and listen to the truth of God's Word, knowing that they will take the truth that we are teaching out to the souls of India who are lost and condemned in the darkness of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism and Islam.

I know it is hard to grasp such a situation, but think about this scenario for a moment. Your pastor reports to the church council that an independent pastor in a city 20-30 miles away has found your website and is interested in learning more about the CLC. So your pastor agrees to meet with him next month. When he arrives, the pastor has gathered twelve other pastors who are interested in hearing what your pastor has to say. They cover some of the teachings that are predominately divisive, such as Baptism and Lord's Supper. These pastors listen to everything your pastor says, accept it and agree to meet again next month.

The following month your pastor shows up and there are twenty-four pastors who have showed up, some of them traveling several hours by bus, car and motorcycle to hear and learn the truth of God's saving word because they have never had the privilege of formal training in the Word. Again, two days worth of classes go well and they agree to meet each month for three days for the foreseeable future.



Pastor Ohlmann and poster (at summer Convention)

Can you imagine the excitement this would generate in your congregation and around the CLC, if 24 pastors were interested in meeting three days of each month at their own expense to hear and learn the truth of God's Saving Word? Well, this scenario, by the grace of God, is reality here in India—and not just here in Chennai but also in Nellore, Vaniyambadi, Sri Kalahasti, Nagalapuram, Cuddapah, and Rennigunta. There are as many as 192 men meeting three days monthly for training with the five lead pastors of the BELC. Then also remember that these men are serving congregations in Hindu-dominated villages ranging in size from populations of 350 to 30,000. Many, if not most, are the only Christian church in the village, and those who attend the worship services have been recently converted to Christianity. These are not converts from other Christian denominations, but those who have been truly called

out of the darkness of the heathen idolatry of Hinduism. Praise and thank the Lord that He has so privileged our small church body to be a part of this great harvest!

The Tamil expression for "Praise the Lord" is "Stotaram." They begin many of their prayers with a triple

Stotaram, much like our "Holy, Holy, Holy" reference to the Trinity. So, in the words of our India brothers and sisters here in Tamil Nadu, I bid you farewell for now, giving praise to our good and gracious Lord. Stotaram, Stotaram, Stotaram!

In Christ, Pastor Todd Ohlmann



In Our CLC Classrooms—



Valerie Bernthal is currently serving St. John's Lutheran Church in Okabena, Minnesota, as the lower grade teacher.

A 2003 graduate of Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Valerie is the youngest daughter of Pastor Mark and Ruth Bernthal of Middleton, Wisconsin.

Many in Valerie's immediate and extended families have been teachers as well. She feels teaching is the best way to use the gifts God has given to her. In the classroom she particularly enjoys teaching science and history. Outside the classroom Valerie enjoys walking, reading, and traveling.

Anita Meyer is currently serving Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Valentine, Nebraska, in a one-room school.

Having grown up near Spring Valley, Minnesota on a farm, Anita feels comfortable in the wide-open spaces of Nebraska. It was her love for working with children which led Anita to enroll at Immanuel Lutheran College where she could study to be a teacher. She graduated in May, 2003, and is serving in her first full-time call.



Anita enjoys the variety and challenges of her job—it is never boring! In her spare time, she enjoys the outdoors, especially hiking, biking, and fishing. She owns a black lab named Jasmine.

Anita is the daughter of Melvin and Irma Meyer.



Dedication in Spokane Valley, Washington



On Sunday, June 29, 2003, members and friends of Gethsemane Lutheran Church and School broke ground on the northeast corner of their church property for a new duplex teacherage. On February 29, 2004, many gathered to joyfully dedicate this home to the glory and praise of the

Triune God. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1). The congregation is appreciative of the CLC's loan-funding through the Church Extension fund.

—*Pastor Robert List, reporting*

Front and back sides of
Gethsemane's duplex
teacherage



Announcements

Grade School Tournament

The 20th annual CLC Grade School Basketball Tournament will be held at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Thursday through Saturday, March 17-19, 2005. Individuals who wish to register teams or who would simply like more information should contact Professor Mark Kranz at mark.kranz@ilc.edu or Teacher Ted Quade at tquadel@wi.rr.com.

Service of Dedication

Grace Lutheran Church in Fridley, Minnesota, will dedicate its stained glass windows on November 14, 2004 at a 10:00 a.m. worship service.

We thank the LORD for the zeal, love, gifts, and talents He provided so that our worship home might be adorned with these beautiful expressions of His grace in Bible history.

We invite our CLC family to join us in this service of Dedication. Light refreshments will follow the service.

—*Pastor John Ude*

Change of Address

The new mailing address for Faith Ev. Lutheran Church of Cambridge, Wis. and its pastor is

Faith Ev. Lutheran Church
%Pastor Kevin McKenney
321 Armenia Street
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538

Minnesota Pastoral Conference

Host: Bethel Lutheran Church, Morris

Dates: October 5-6, 2004

Agenda:

- + New Testament Exegesis: 2 Thessalonians 3:6ff—Pastor James Albrecht
- + Old Testament Exegesis: Genesis 49:8-12—Pastor Bruce Naumann
- + Scriptural and pastoral aids for counseling the depressed—Pastor Paul D. Nolting
- + Does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 contrast time with eternity, or the incomplete pre-canon era with the completed canon era?—Pastor Norman Greve

- + Helping parents deal with children who are indifferent to God's will—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt
- + Pastoral confidentiality and legal requirements of the State for disclosure on certain circumstances—Pastor Theodore Barthels
- + Tiahuanaco and the Flood—Pastor John Ude
- + CLC Constitution, Bylaw 6, Right of Appeal—Roundtable Discussion

Chaplain: Pastor John M. Johannes

—*Pastor Rick Grams, Secretary*

(Though late, printed here for information—Ed.)



Women's Fellowship,
Good Shepherd
Lutheran Church,
Rapid City, South
Dakota