

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken." — John 10:35



*New Year
New
Mercy*

Happy New Year!

Pastor David Reim · Vernon, B.C., Canada

Do you ever wonder what is so new about “New Year”?

Oh sure, we add another number to the counting of years. We will call it 2014 instead of 2013, but does that really make it new?

The world still has the same problems. Our flesh is still plagued with the same sins. A succession of broken resolutions reminds us that we haven’t really changed. We truly ought to have been consumed in God’s wrath long ago.

We remember that Achan was stoned to death because he coveted and took some of the plunder of Jericho for himself (Joshua 7). We think of the man who was stoned because he gathered sticks on the Sabbath Day to build a fire to cook the manna (Numbers 15). Remember how Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead because they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5).

Are we any less sinful than they? Because of the many times we have sinned, shouldn’t we have been struck down with God’s righteous judgment? ABSOLUTELY!

We conclude with King Solomon, *“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been in ancient times before us”* (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).

Ah, but wait! There is something wonderfully new. Jeremiah speaks of it with joy and relief. *“This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:22-23).

By the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed. His compassions do not

**It is by faith in Jesus that God’s mercies and
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Every day when we wake up we have a clean slate,
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fail. Take those glorious words to heart. All God’s wrath against our sins burned against Christ who by His innocent sufferings and death paid the penalty we deserve (see Romans chapter 5).

It is by faith in Jesus that God’s mercies and compassions are new for us every morning. Every day when we wake up we have a clean slate, with all our sins wiped clean by the blood of Christ. None of our past sins hangs over our head. God says that He will “*remember no more*” (Jeremiah 31:34) our sins.

Not only that, but God’s mercy and compassion continue to take care of us and provide for all our needs day after day. He doesn’t have to consider if we deserve His provisions day by day, for His mercy and forgiveness are new every morning. He never tires of blessing us. Every day His heart is fresh and new with loving care for each of us as His dear children, bought by the blood of His Son.

With God’s mercy new every morning, we truly enter a new and wonderful year—another year bright with hope and confidence in our Savior-God. The sins and troubles of the past year are truly past, and we know the future is likewise in the loving hands of our eternal God.

So, dear reader, “Happy New Year!”—it’s another year made happy by God’s unfailing mercy.

*Ev’ry morning mercies new
Fall as fresh as morning dew;
Ev’ry morning let us pay
Tribute with the early day;
For Thy mercies, Lord, are sure,
Thy compassion doth endure.
(TLH #537:1)*

Seeking the Christ

Pastor David Fuerstenau · Ketchikan, Alaska

Many things in life seem to be unfair. Thus it is often asked: “By what measure of fairness will God condemn to everlasting punishment those who have never heard the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus?” A rebuttal question might be, “Did they ever seek out God and His Christ?”

Surely the evidence and cause for such seeking exist, for *“the heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1), and *“His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”* (Romans 1:20).

Natural law and conscience testify that things are not right between the creating, law-giving God and His sinful creatures. And while it is true that *“...how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?”* (Romans 10:14), it is also true that God is near to all those who would seek and find Him (Acts 17:27).

Creation as well as the dealings of God in history bear witness that He is good. That alone should prompt all people to grope for God. The problem is never lack of knowledge, but how knowledge is used and misused. Thus the question: How many actually seek the Christ?

The traditional Epiphany account concerns certain men from the East who definitely sought out the Christ. They saw how the heavens declared both His glory and His earthly presence by a special star. By listening to and following that “preacher,” they found the Anointed King who had come to save them from their sins and rule in their hearts. They worshipped Him and brought Him gifts.

They were truly wise men.

Consider that their searching involved some real effort and even danger. It is highly probable that these men were Gentiles, outside the family of God’s Old Testament people, and they enjoyed none of the advantages the Jews had. Yet they sought the new-born King of the Jews as if He were their own.

The Magi sought Christ despite distance and physical challenges. Artists depict them as riding on camels, and perhaps it was so. Their

journey involved hundreds of miles, many days, a detour, heat, sweat, sand, bugs, and everything disagreeable associated with ancient travel. Nothing was easy or convenient, yet they turned not aside in their quest.

The Magi were educated ‘wise men,’ but they didn’t allow their education, worldly knowledge, and human reason to hinder their seeking. They had the ability to look high into the heavens but were not too proud to humbly bow down before the Star of Jacob. They examined the stars, identified a special one, and then used revelation and logical conclusion—not to debunk or decry this special sign but to understand and follow it to their destiny.

These men sought the Christ despite enemies and scoffers. No doubt they braved brigands and cutthroats along the way. Matthew does not identify their native country, but surely it had its own false religions and pantheon of gods. They exposed themselves to ridicule just for making the trip, as Noah must have been ridiculed for engaging in a project his neighbors scorned as half-baked at best. Perhaps they were even accused of treason for seeking a foreign Jewish king. But the Magi sought...they found...they confessed.

**How wise and blessed they were,
for in Paradise the King will confess them.**

Are we seeking the Christ in the same dedicated way as did the Magi? We also are Gentiles, but the gospel doors have been mercifully opened to us. And while we have fallen short of the glory of God, there is no difference, for God so loved the world. Jesus redeemed and atoned for the sins of the world. For Jesus’ sake the Father justified the whole world of sinners.

People used to walk in order to worship the King. Then they rode on animals and in buggies. Modern cars are like living rooms on wheels, with hardly a hint of discomfort. What is our excuse for not seeking the King and His righteousness in public worship?

Some parents may question the wisdom of higher education, fearing their children will be enticed, re-educated, and lose their Christian faith. Granted, it is a danger, but ‘we walk in danger all the way,’ not just for four years. Reason and education are not necessarily the enemies of God, but how many students continue to seek the Christ while they are attending school? They should, for after all, “*in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:3).

The culture in which we live increasingly mocks Christ and His people. Pundits suggest that Christian ‘hicks’ should not be allowed to vote, for they are a danger to society. False religions abound. Thus seeking Christ will involve tribulation (as Jesus foretold), yet by seeking and following Him true Christians learn to know the truth. And that truth in Christ Jesus will set them free from sin, Satan, death, and eventually all tribulation and sorrow.

Are we seeking the Christ by scanning the heavens for a special sign? While that was appropriate for the Magi and even the shepherds, we have the star of God’s Word, which is true, bright, holy, effective, sufficient, complete, and shines from the heart of God. Its prophecies point to Christ. Its testimonies declare that He is the crucified and risen Son of God and Savior of the world. In that beautiful Morning Star (Revelation 22:16) we behold the very glory of God and bask in His grace.

So, make the journey—daily and weekly! Give it some effort and sacrifice. Bend your knees; offer your gifts of thanksgiving and faith. Wise and blessed are they who seek the Bright and Morning Star—who trust the Star, worship the Star, and keep His radiant Word. Then in the third heaven we shall surely see, face to face, His shining countenance.



AN EPIPHANY DEVOTION

The Reason for the Season

Pastor Jay Hartmann • Corpus Christi, Texas

The word *Epiphany* means to show forth or make known. The Epiphany season of the church year affords us an opportunity to see Jesus as He truly is: “*our great God and Savior*” (Titus 2:13), the One “*in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (Colossians 2:9).

We see Jesus’ glory as the only begotten Son of God. We see it in His miracles and His teaching. We see it even in His wondrous grace in willingly coming into the world for the likes of us. Jesus came to make the complete payment for the sins of all who had lived or ever would live.

In Spirit-created faith we see our Savior as He is: “*the eternally blessed God*” (Romans 9:5). During Epiphany it is important to be reminded

that our Savior is almighty God who came with all power “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we now see and believe in Jesus as “...the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Throughout Holy Scripture we are repeatedly assured that Jesus is indeed God and Savior. In the epistle to the Hebrews it is said (to Jesus!): “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8).

A few short weeks ago we witnessed our Savior as the lowly Christ Child born in a stable and laid in a feed trough, seemingly helpless, yet He who lay there was and is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:15-17).

Sad to say, most people consider Jesus as someone less than God. It is simply unscriptural to deny that Jesus is God, and blasphemy to say so.

It is vital to know and confess the true divinity of our Lord before the coming Lenten season when we once again will bear witness to His death. During Jesus’ passion the world sees Him as a mere man—weak, beaten, and dying. The unbelieving cannot see His death as the greatest act of love and sacrifice ever known. They fail to understand that the only way forgiveness of sins and life eternal could be won was through Jesus’ death as the sinners’ substitute.

Jesus didn’t die as a broken and beaten man, but rather as our Redeemer with a shout of victory! “When Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46). What humility on the part of the Savior, for He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).

Rejoice, fellow redeemed, as with the eyes of Spirit-given faith we see the majestic glory of our God and Savior! “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever, Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).



The Value of Life

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt • Mankato, Minnesota

One doesn't have to search far to find examples of human life being devalued. The periodic acts of violence in our nation's schools and streets are regular reminders. So too are the statistics of abuse—physical and chemical—whether self-inflicted or by others. Statistics tell a similar tale in the running record of suicides, assisted suicides, abortions, and what borders on euthanasia.

These sad and sobering realities cut a wide swath with many and varied contributing factors, but they can all be traced back to a fundamental devaluing of life.

Our society—which wrings its hands at the plague of school violence and at the same time champions a woman's right to kill her unborn child—can't understand its own contradictory message. It can't see the common thread between these events, nor can it understand that its actions and messages contribute to the very behaviors it is trying to stop. Blinded by sinful human logic, the world misses the light of God's Word, and for that reason it cannot understand how life devaluation is the foundation of every one of these events.

Life devaluation begins when the Creator is denied.

Just think about the difference in how we value earthly possessions depending on their origin. A machine-made blanket purchased at a discount store will keep me warm. A blanket carefully hand-crafted by my grandmother and given to me will keep me warm but will *also* remind me of my grandmother's skill and love.

When a person is led to believe that his existence is due to random chance, and that the complexities of his body and mind have come about undirected—in other words, that he is little more than a superior animal—then there will be no more value or interest in that life than whatever selfish pursuits might acquire.

On the other hand, when one is led to know that the origin of one's existence is from the creative power of the one and only almighty God who skillfully designed and created all things, who created mankind unique from the animals (in His image, Genesis 1:26), there will be value and interest in that life as a gift from God.

Knowing and believing the truth that God has “...made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity” (Job 10:8) gives the proper understanding: God is the giver of life and He gives it for His purpose. Rather than being seen as a disposable item in a throw-away society, life will be seen as a gift from God with a purpose—a gift to treasure, to use, to preserve.

The psalmist understood the correlation between being a creature of the almighty God and ordering one’s life according to His will. “*Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments*” (Psalm 119:73).

Knowing that we are the creative work of God informs us that our almighty and holy Creator has an interest in what we do and has provided His will for us. On the other hand, if human life is devalued to an animal-status which exists by evolutionary chance, there will be no responsibility seen to a creator and no real value in following that creator’s “code of conduct.”

Knowing our Creator reveals and teaches the value of life, but even that is not the greatest source of value. As great and amazing as our creation is, our greatest value is in our redemption.

When life becomes difficult as we face the effects of sin, to our troubled, sinful hearts God declares our value: “*The blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). “...*You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1:17ff).

God’s gracious work of redemption gives us a value that exceeds silver, gold, and any earthly thing; it was worth the blood of His only begotten Son. Simply amazing!

The value of human life is declared by God’s creation and then heightened by His redemption of us sinners. This value belongs to every unborn soul growing in a womb, every distressed teenager, every unemployed worker, every cancer sufferer in pain, every elder who is virtually unable to care for self, and everyone in-between—yes, all of us.

“*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift*” (2 Corinthians 9:15)—a gift which gives genuine and lasting value to life. Let us pray that many in the world around us will come to understand this value of life and act accordingly. May we be emboldened to be the lights that bear this truth and proclaim the value of life—a value first given by the Creator God and further shown when He redeemed us through His only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus.



"...The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me."

(JOHN 10:25)

Stilling the Storm

(in our lives also)

Pastor Theodore Barthels • Austin, Minnesota

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (MARK 4:35-41)

"Don't you care?"

That question comes to mind when people appear to be insensitive to other people's circumstances. People are suffering but others are unconcerned. Regrettably, this happens even in our own lives—not only that others have been insensitive to us in times of trouble but also that we have been so involved in our own little worlds that we miss the distress others are experiencing.

Could that ever happen with the Lord?!

In the midst of the disciples' peril, the troubling thought came into their minds, *"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"*

In weakness of faith we too may find similar thoughts rising in our hearts and minds. Nothing brings the fear of perishing to the forefront more than calamity. The huge typhoon that struck the Philippines killed many, and others are struggling and suffering because of the destruction caused by this great storm. Late season tornadoes went ripping through the heartland of America, killing eight and injuring many more; thousands lost their homes and earthly possessions. *"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"*

The Lord looks down from heaven and sees the peril that we face, and He cares. He cares for us far more than we appreciate in our weakness of faith. All the trouble, distress, and death came and comes into the world because of sin. The Lord knows that sin is the source of our trouble and brings upon us the greatest of all calamities, including eternal death in hell. He cared that we were perishing, so God's only begotten Son came down to Earth to bear our sin. Because of His great care for us, He endured all the trials and temptations of this life. Finally, He endured the curse of God, suffering and dying on the cross because He cared that we were perishing! *"Jesus gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father"* (Galatians 1:4).

From this truth of the gospel we are assured that in all our trials and troubles the Lord indeed cares for us. He shall deliver us from every evil.

That is the lesson the disciples learned in the midst of that great storm on the Sea of Galilee. They turned to the Lord—their weakness of faith evident in their prayer—and the Lord delivered them. He delivered them with the power of His Word: *"Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.*" Jesus' questions remained before them, *"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"* (v. 40)

Those questions lie before us also. Why is it that so often in life we are fearful, and our faith is so puny? Do we fail to recognize the greatness of our God? Do we forget that the Lord Jesus is God Almighty? Do we forget the power of His Word and the greatness of His love for us? *"The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea"* (Psalm 93:4).

Indeed, the Lord is mighty! He would have us know and appreciate His power and His control over all things.

This reality of Jesus' identity struck home in the hearts of the disciples, *"And they feared exceedingly!"* ... *"Who can this be?"* (v. 41) The answer to that question brings comfort and assurance during the storms we face in our lives.

On that day the greatness of the Lord was revealed for us both in His power and in His loving concern. We may think we are perishing, but the Lord brings us His peace. He commands, and the storm is stilled. It is truly the power of His Word which continues to calm the storms in our hearts and in our lives.



MEDITATIONS ON JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT:
MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTERS FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

JUST ASK

Pastor John Klatt, Rapid City • South Dakota

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (MATTHEW 7:7-12).

When friends or neighbors want to let us know that they are willing to help us, they will sometimes say, “Just ask.” They want to assure us that they will not be annoyed if we ask for their help, and they will welcome the opportunity to be of assistance.

This kind of sincere assurance is most welcome, making it easier to ask for someone’s help when we need it.

If we welcome such an invitation from a friend or neighbor, how much more should we not welcome Jesus’ invitation when He says, “Ask, and it will be given to you”? The Savior’s willingness and ability to help far exceed that of any person in this world who might make us such an offer.

The Lord Jesus also knows His believing children’s weaknesses and their vulnerability to doubt and fear. We are always in need of encouragement when it comes to prayer. He encourages us first by inviting us—not once but three times! And by adding the invitations to “seek” and “knock,” He is giving us permission to be persistent.

Jesus does not want us to be discouraged in our praying when the answer that we are looking for does not come quickly. He does not want us to judge Him by the standards of men, who soon become annoyed with someone who comes back repeatedly with the same request.

Jesus follows up His threefold invitation with a threefold promise to His believing children. Everyone who in response to this invitation comes to the heavenly Father with a prayer will surely receive an answer. Whoever seeks the Father’s help will surely find it. Whoever knocks at the Father’s door will find it opened.

To further encourage us in prayer, Jesus gives the illustration of a father answering his child's requests for something to eat. The request is for basic food that the child needs to live, grow, and thrive. The child here is not asking for candy, desserts, chips, or soda; he is asking for bread or fish.

What parent would refuse such a request from a hungry child? What parent would respond to a child's request by giving something useless like a stone, or something harmful like a snake or a scorpion?

If such is the case with human parents who are sinners and tend to be selfish, then how can we doubt that God will give us what we need when we ask Him?

What the Father gives in response to our prayers will always be "good things." Human parents generally know how to give good gifts to their children, as Jesus says, but their gifts are not always good. Parents sometimes indulge their children with gifts that not only do not help them but may even be harmful.

**By contrast, our heavenly Father's gifts
are always good, always just what we need.**

God, who is so good and gracious in answering the prayers of His believing children, would also have them act toward others in the same spirit, doing to them whatever we would want them to do to us.

In this way we show that we are true children of the Heavenly Father.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

"As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household."

(Martin Luther)

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: NOT A BIG PROBLEM?

Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Bearing false witness against one's neighbor is not a big problem?

It's a HUGE problem in politics, advertising, internet services, national and international trade—and it all comes from perverse hearts. The child of God laments his own dirt first of all—whereby we sinners bear false witness, disrespect our neighbor, and allow ourselves other slippage from God's will.

It's a problem of the human heart and spirit simply because humans

are in love with sinning. The love of sinning generates all sorts of dishonesty and deceitfulness—including this sin of bearing false witness against others. It takes the Holy Spirit to keep us from slipping back into this generic, elemental sin. Lord, have mercy on us!

If we wonder whether all species of deception are included, “not only is lying prohibited but false and unfounded evidence in general; and not only evidence before a judge, but false evidence of every kind, by which the life, married relation, or property of a neighbor might be endangered” (*Keil-Delitzsch Commentary*, Pentateuch, II, p. 124).

God puts it to us point-blank: “*Do not lie to one another*” (Colossians 3:9); “*Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor*” (Ephesians 4:25); “*Do not speak evil of one another, brethren*” (James 4:11).

Protecting the good name/reputation of others is not small change, as Shakespeare noted: “He that filches from me my good name robs me of that which enriches him not, and makes me poor indeed” (*Othello*, III, 3).

Scrolling back to the main point: this sin doesn’t just pop up out of nowhere; it’s generated in the dark corners of a crooked heart. God knows our innards better than we do: “*Let none of you [even] think evil in your heart against your neighbor...*” (Zechariah 8:16-17).

Let’s admit to the sin of thinking that we are superior to the other fellow—and thus thinking less of him. Our self-indulgence of demeaning the other fellow makes us feel better about ourselves—and that’s plainly sinful pride, one of Satan’s favored deceptions.

It doesn’t require a PhD to know that pride and false witnessing are twin sins! No excuses, please!

So what’s to do? Let us repent, pleading Jesus’ righteousness to sweep away our sin-dirt and beseeching the Holy Spirit to preside over our hearts.

Then let us put this good resolve into practice, knowing that loving others is the key to our keeping this commandment—for loving others enough to protect their good name against slander bolsters their stance with family, neighbors, employer, and with the public in general. That’s what we want for them as well as for ourselves.

The Eighth Commandment

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or say anything that might ruin his good name and reputation; but we should defend him, speak well of him, and explain all his words and actions in the best possible way.

We will protect others from slander, defamation, and gossip when the Spirit cultivates in us the attitude that Jesus sponsors: *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12).

When we put ourselves in the other fellow’s shoes, we come to realize that he doesn’t want to be slandered any more than we do; he wants his actions seen in the best possible light just as we want others to view ours; he wants his mistakes to be forgiven just as we want ours forgiven. Our neighbor needs help just as we do—to enjoy good relationships with others.

It’s not that anyone deserves better—for nobody merits charitable treatment—but rather that we are all sinners and all beggars in need of charity.

By the way (and perhaps it’s a main point, after all), you may have noticed that the first and foremost of Satan’s trickery was to bear false witness against God!

He maligned God’s person and defamed God’s character with a bald-faced lie to His children. When Adam/Eve fell for it, they committed the primordial sin—the sin of disbelieving/discrediting God.

The angels wept, and God raised His fist. He would not surrender His children to Satan, to perish via their disbelief in/of His inherent goodness and love for them.

How to go about doing it?

First off, He would bring humans to see Satan as their enemy, changing their companionship with Satan into animosity against him. Cameraderie would be changed to dislike; friendship to hostility. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman...”* (Genesis 3:15).

Next, God would send His great Champion to squash Satan’s control over humans: *“I will put enmity...between her Seed and your seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”* (Genesis 3:15).

Satan has a nemesis, and He’s Jesus, our Savior. Hallelujah!

In sum: our heavenly Father brought restoration to His dear children with the Truth about the Seed who would undo the murder done to their souls, restoring them to Life and resetting their Way-ward compass—all of which is encapsulated in Jesus’ wonderful declaration: *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”* (John 14:6).

Indeed, the Eighth Commandment carries rich food for our souls.

All praise be to Jesus for rescuing us from Satan’s false witness against our heavenly Father, for strengthening and nurturing us via the Truth of

God's Word, and for forgiving all the iniquity we commit in thought, word, and deed against our neighbor.

Lord Jesus, please stay by our side today and always! Amen.

IMMANUEL LUTHERAN COLLEGE CHAPEL MEDITATION

GOD'S OBSCURE SAINTS

(Fourth in a Series)

This edifying series of chapel talks comes from the archives of our *Spokesman* Assistant Editor, Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch • Eau Claire, Wis.

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

(ACTS 9:36-43)

When two of God's children are properly matched in Christian marriage, they balance and fulfill one another; we appreciate God's wisdom in this arrangement. That's also the way God intends His Church to function, that each member performs his/her special function and helps build up the whole organism into the blessed entity that God would have it be. God has blessings for His Church through its members that are female, including the obvious blessings of wifehood and motherhood. Yet some of you may never have a spouse,

and since in every generation there is a higher percentage of females than males, this will affect women more than men; those who never achieve marriage with a life's partner will miss the blessings that come with a Christian spouse.

That having been said, what of the Christian woman who has no man to be her earthly complement? What is her role in the communion of saints? Today we have before us one such example—it's Dorcas (Greek for Aramaic *Tabitha*), who lived in the seaport of Joppa back in the good old days. She was content with her place in God's scheme of things, and she functioned as the spirit in her urged and directed. She served with the same attitude that was in Christ, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Here is her story, recorded in Acts 9, verses 36 to 43.

Since no mention is made of a husband or children, we may deduce that this lady was single, and if she had also renounced other familial ties in order to follow Jesus, she had gained much and lost little, for she knew Jesus received her as His sister, and into His family she was adopted. Having thus known the love of God for her, that love spilled over to others in a generous stream of compassion for anyone and everyone in need. She was "*always doing good and helping the poor*" (NIV), for her heart activated every channel of her intellect, and she sparkled with pleasure to find ways to serve both her Savior and the homeless, hungry poor. She had the equipment, you see—the love, the compassion, the sympathy; doing good comes second nature when a heart is full.

Then, with no explanation given, she became ill and died. She departed from her body—but not from the hearts of those who loved her, appreciated her, and missed her presence in their lives.

Then it came time for the funeral, so they sent a messenger over to the next town, asking Peter to conduct the funeral service and to help them recover from the empty spot she had left. Such a fine Christian lady deserved special honor also in her funeral and burial.

They reviewed for Peter how she had weaved, spun, and sewed garments for others; her talent as a seamstress made her a living, and her friends treasured each cloak, shawl, or tunic that was a memento of Dorcas' interest in them and love for them.

We can understand their sense of loss; perhaps they had not appreciated her enough during her life, for such a gentle, soft-spoken non-self-assertive person can be taken for granted. When the lid on the casket closes, it's too late to say "Thank you" to a friend. "Gone but not forgotten" is one of life's sad sayings.

As Peter listened to their lament, he may have wondered if the Lord had removed Dorcas from her friends to teach a lesson—and if the lesson had now been learned, would the Lord see fit to recover Dorcas from her grave for their sakes? That might be beneficial to Dorcas and to her friends, and it would bring glory to the Lord Jesus.

So Peter prayed all these factors into Jesus' hands. Then Lord Jesus gave His answer, for when Peter said *"Tabitha, arise! And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive."*

What a testimonial to the power of Jesus at the right hand of the Father! What a demonstration of the love of God the Father! *"And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord."*

Is there a lesson God would have us learn from this short history of one of His obscure saints?

Perhaps it is this: God has a place for the unmarried woman in the Christian family, for she can exercise her love for God and fellowman as an individual child of God. If she has the kind of heart Dorcas had, she can be blessed with many loving Christian friends, besides bringing blessings to others through the life she leads.

God has a place for the unmarried woman in the Christian family, for she can exercise her love for God and fellowman as an individual child of God.

This is not above or beyond our reach, for it is God who works in each child of God both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Perhaps you know someone in your home congregation who is a saint such as Tabitha was, and if so, give her the respect and love she deserves. Put it into words that she can hear before she is placed into her casket!

May God grant that each Dorcas and Tabitha of our generation may have what she had and live as she lived, for she was favored by Jesus and loved by her friends—and she still lives in our hearts as one of God's obscure saints and our sister in Christ. We thank You, Lord Jesus!

SECOND OF TWO INSTALLMENTS

How Can Christians Help Those Struggling with Addiction?

Chris Sumey, MD, member of St. Paul Lutheran Church (CLC),
Denver (Lakewood), Colorado

The first installment of this commentary characterized addiction and its detrimental effects on a person, both body and soul. But what can we do to help when those close to us have an addiction?

First, we need to make sure our own sinful pride is in check. The temptation is strong to consider ourselves

somehow above this problem of addiction. One may think, “This would never happen to me,” “I would never allow things to get this bad,” or even, “That person must not have very strong faith if he/she is in this situation.”

If we are to openly discuss another Christian’s addiction with them, we need to make clear we are doing so with the utmost humility. *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). *“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (Matthew 7:4-5).

Similarly, if someone is returning to the church after a notable absence for help with a vice such as substance abuse, we will not want to react with disdain or an “I told you so” attitude. Rather we should heed the parables of Jesus in Luke chapter 15. I envision that the prodigal son did not deliberately squander his wealth but rather was ensnared by evils such as alcohol abuse, gambling, and the like. Not until he hit rock bottom did he humbly return to his father for help. Likewise, our first reaction when confronting someone with an addiction should be to rejoice that the Lord has guided a lost sheep back to the fold.

Editor’s Note:

After hearing Dr. Sumey’s presentation at our District Delegate Conference, we invited him to share a condensed version with our readers. We thank him for doing so. We would encourage (as Dr. Sumey does below) any who are suffering from an addiction to be in contact with their local pastor for further scriptural guidance and counseling. The first installment appeared last month.

If someone approaches us seeking help with his addiction, we do not need to carry this burden alone. Encourage the person to reach out to the pastor, as well as to be open with family and friends. This will not only widen the safety net but it will add accountability. It is advisable to seek help from a counselor and/or physician who is well-equipped to identify underlying mental health disorders and to deal with issues of substance withdrawal. They may also be able to offer substitution therapy, which aims to replace the harmful substance with a safer medication.

With a few specific exceptions, quitting a drug “cold turkey” is usually the way to go. Too often I see patients who want to taper off tobacco or alcohol very gradually, but because they don’t have a clear stopping point in mind, they inevitably lose sight of their goal. The substances that may be unsafe to quit immediately are alcohol and sedative medications (benzodiazepines and barbiturates). Those with heavier use are more at risk of withdrawal, which can include tremor, agitation, hallucinations, seizures, and death. If someone is ready to quit drinking alcohol but has a substantial daily intake (or if they have had withdrawal symptoms before), the aid of a physician should be sought.

One of the most important aspects to successful drug cessation is the person’s environment. A smoker whose spouse continues to smoke in the home will have a difficult time quitting. An alcoholic man whose entire social life revolves around the bar will soon be back drinking again. The substance or behavior needs to be as inaccessible as possible, and this usually requires a complete change, even including moving away from the alcoholic roommate or finding all new friends. *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’”* (I Corinthians 15:33).

As powerless as one can feel to overcome an addiction, it is vitally important to emphasize the wonderful works that God has already done for us. He guides us through our daily Christian walk. Our redemption has already been accomplished by Jesus’ suffering and death. The Holy Spirit continues to work saving faith in our hearts. When Christians are toiling against the Old Adam to overcome these temptations, let them recall: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (I Corinthians 10:13).

Here we are reminded that we are never alone in fighting a particular temptation; many others have struggled with the same problems. Also, we should not despair and give in to the habit because the addiction is just

too powerful, genetic, or “hard-wired,” but rather approach each new temptation looking for the way of escape through prayer, studying God’s Word, and reaching out to fellow Christians.

The most powerful tool to combat addiction is God’s Word. Those who are abusing or dependent upon substances or addictive behaviors need to be reminded first of their sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Lest someone be led into despair, we also want to provide the blessed gospel message, as the apostle does in the very next verse (1 Corinthians 6:11).

How to balance the law and the gospel is best based on the individual case. Are we dealing with a contrite, active member of the church with a heavy burden of guilt or with someone who is not well acquainted with his Savior and sees no real harm in his substance abuse? Ultimately, we know that no one can say it better than the Holy Spirit Himself. Therefore we will want to sit down with the individual and pore over the Scriptures for guidance, praying for deliverance from such a hardship.

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”
(James 1:12).



THE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

“The Fellowship of Kindred Minds”

Pastor Mark Gullerud • Bowdle, South Dakota

An essay titled “What place does the church (small “c”) have in a Christian’s faith-life?” was presented to a CLC Pastoral Conference at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyoming, in September, 2013. This is the second of two parts from that essay (abbreviated by the editor).

ACTS OF FELLOWSHIP

At the beginning of the New Testament church, St. Luke reports in the book of Acts, *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and*

fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God..." (2:42,46,47).

Since Christians are united in one body—the body of Christ—it is natural for them to join in acts of fellowship, a mutual relationship or partnership in which believers participate together in spiritual things.

Like-minded Christians welcome the opportunity to gather together to worship and sing the praises of God's holy name. David expressed this sentiment when he wrote, "*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'*" (Psalm 122:1).

The acts of fellowship include celebrating the Lord's Supper together. In that Sacrament Christians give public expression to the wonderful unity of faith God has established among them. At the same time they bear witness to Jesus' sacrificial death which atoned for their sins (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Believers also want to unite in prayer to the throne of God. In regard to shared prayer, Jesus has given the promise, "*Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven*" (Matthew 18:19). About joint prayer Luther writes, "Combined prayer is precious and the most effective, for which reason we also come together, and from which also the church is called the house of prayer. Oh, if God would, that any gathering might pray in this manner, so that a common cry of the heart on the part of all the people might rise to God, what immeasurable virtue and help would follow such prayer! What more terrible could happen to all the spirits of evil?..." (*Gospel of Matthew*, R.C.H. Lenski, p. 685f)

What Luther writes concerning prayer to thwart the devil can also be said of everything else that God provides for our spiritual and eternal welfare. The old evil foe will do everything he can to prevent isolated believers from having a home church or to cause believers to leave the fellowship of a Christian congregation so that they are out there on their own in the world.

MUTUAL HELP AND SUPPORT

When "*God sets the solitary in families*" (Psalm 68:6) by making us part of a Christian congregation and synod, another important purpose is that we might help and support one another.

As the writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:23-25). How important it is to help and support one another so that when the Day of the Lord comes, we will be ready to meet the Lord. To that end, how needful it is to keep on assembling together around God’s Word and Sacrament (Colossians 3:16; Luke 11:28), and thereby be spiritually interconnected in our lives.

The support network of the church [congregation] involves being there for others in many ways. When Christian brothers and sisters are experiencing various trials of life, have suffered loss, are sad or distressed, the Lord wants us to be there for them, offering words of comfort, encouragement, and hope.

There are times when fellow Christians are in need of material help. Consider how the early church gave help and support in that case: “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need” (4:32-35).

MISSION OUTREACH

Our Lord also wants us to join our hands and resources in doing mission work. All Christians have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). By sharing our resources we can reach farther out into the world with the gospel of Christ.

By supporting our local congregation we have a preaching station where unchurched souls can hear God’s Word and receive God’s instruction. Through outreach efforts the unchurched can be sought and found for the Lord.

Through our mission contributions we also help support our Immanuel Lutheran High School and College (Eau Claire, Wisconsin) where young Christians are trained to be pastors, teachers, and

lay-leaders in our congregations. Our offerings also help to support outreach in many foreign countries where the Lord has opened doors for the gospel.

Thank God for setting the solitary in families by gathering Christians into congregations and synods committed to the Word of God! In and through these fellowships we are blessed in many ways, and together we have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel of our Savior both near and far.



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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“ . . . THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN . . . ” — JOHN 10 : 35

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