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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken." (John 10:35)



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Remember Your Baptism

“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

(Acts 8:36)

When the Ethiopian heard the message of Jesus as the Christ, Who willingly gave His life for the sins of the world, he desired to be baptized into Jesus’ name. Would anything hinder him from receiving this great blessing and from being received by God? Would the color of his skin, his nationality, or his past sins make him unacceptable to the Lord? What joy and relief when Philip took him down into the water and baptized him! Nothing would hinder him from receiving the grace of God in Baptism and being made a child of God. No wonder *“he went on his way rejoicing.”* (Acts 8:39)

Do you want to go on your way rejoicing today, tomorrow, every day? Then remember your Baptism! Whether you can actually remember the day you were baptized or simply know that you were baptized as a child, remember the fact that you were baptized. For that is the day when you were connected with Jesus and everything He did for you.

Whenever you sin you deserve to die, for *“the wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23) Remember your Baptism and rejoice, for that is when you were united with Jesus in His death. *“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death.”* (Romans 6:3-4) His death counts for you, and all your sins were paid for.

Your Baptism also connected you with Christ’s life. *“We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (verse 4) We now have a new life with Christ. *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now*



Would anything hinder him from receiving this great blessing and from being received by God? Would the color of his skin, his nationality, or his past sins make him unacceptable to the Lord?

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

When you are tempted to sin, remember your Baptism, for *“how shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* (Romans 6:2) Therefore *“consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* (verse 11)

Do you ever fear that you are not fit to be a child of God, that perhaps something might hinder you from being with Him forever? Remember your Baptism, for that is the day upon which Christ clothed you with His perfection. *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* (Galatians 3:26-27) Nothing can hinder you from being in God’s presence now or forever.

Remember your Baptism! That is the day you were connected to Christ, clothed with His righteousness, saved, and given new life. We remember because we want to continue with Him forever. *“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of*

His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.” (Colossians 1:21-23) Remember your Baptism and continue in that glorious new life with Jesus

Christ. With Jesus in our lives, we can go on our way rejoicing.

David Reim is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Vernon, British Columbia.



A Fruitful Christian Life

In our family, there are few things we enjoy more than a freshly picked tomato out of our garden. As I write this article, the soil has been prepared and the tomato plants are in the garden and have been caged. We know that we will have to make sure the plants are watered and protected from little hands over the coming months. Our hope is that by the time this August edition of the *Lutheran Spokesman* arrives, we will be harvesting some of the first-fruits from our tomato plants.

However, those fresh tomatoes are not going to magically appear in our backyard. Nor are those plants going to survive if they are not regularly watered. We need the plant first, and then we need to take care of the plant in order to enjoy those delicious, vine-ripened tomatoes.

If you can understand this simple gardening illustration, you can understand what Jesus is teaching us about the Christian life in John 15. In John 15, Jesus talks about good works in the life of a Christian. He compares the Christian life to a grapevine. As with tomatoes, you cannot have grapes without first having branches, and you cannot have branches without first having a vine.

Jesus is the Vine. He is the life-source for all Christians. Every believer has been grafted into the Vine through faith. Through faith, you are one with Christ. He gives you life. Without Jesus all spiritual life withers and dies. *“Without Me you can do nothing,”* the Vine says. *“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered.”* (verses 5-6)

In the Vine, those Christian branches remain very fruitful! *“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”* (verse 5) Through Word and Sacrament, Jesus builds us up in the faith. In the Gospel we hear of how Jesus lived a life free of sin, faithful to all of God’s commandments, loving His neighbor and praying for His enemies. And then we are



If you can understand this simple gardening illustration, you can understand what Jesus is teaching us about the Christian life in John 15

told that His perfection is given to us through faith! In the Gospel, we also hear of how innocent Jesus laid down His perfect life to pay off our debt of sin to God. In the Gospel we are assured that because of Jesus, God remembers our sin no more. In Holy Communion, our Savior feeds us with Himself—His body and His blood.

Our Lutheran Confessions put it this way: “First faith is kindled in us in conversion by the Holy Ghost from the hearing of the Gospel. This lays hold of God’s grace in Christ, by which the person is justified. Then, when the person is justified, he is also renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, from which renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works then follow.” (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, III, 41)

The Gospel is the essential nutrient that our faith needs. It is the Water of Life which keeps our faith alive and active. Abiding in Jesus, in His Gospel, He promises us that we will be fruitful Christians, producing all sorts of good works.

What do these fruits of faith look like? They look like our Savior. They look like a husband loving his wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. They look like a wife submitting and showing respect to her husband, as to the Lord. They look like children honoring their father and mother in the Lord. They look like Christians helping their neighbor to improve and protect his property, as well as defending his name and reputation.

All these fruits of faith, and more, flow out of the Vine. And these good works will glorify the God who sent His beloved Son to save you. *“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.”* (verse 8) Therefore, listen to the Vine, Who says to you, “Abide in Me, and you will be fruitful Christians!”



Nathan Pfeiffer is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Spokane, Washington.

CW HYMN 147, TLH HYMN 207

“For Your Baptism Which Has Saved Me”

What, would you say, is water worth?

There’s no question that, as an element necessary for life, it is of great value. And yet, its prevalence on earth makes it relatively inexpensive. On a rainy day it’s even free.

There are, however, versions which do fetch a higher price. The bottled variety, for example. A liter can sell for around a dollar. And, according to the bottlers, with good reason. Labels often identify it as water that has been “purified.”

So what about the value of water which is even more special? If a dollar is a fair price for water that is purified, what is the value of water that is purifying? Purification, after all, is something desperately needed by everyone, since every person is born impure and has sinned.

God created a perfect Adam to live in His holy presence. But when he broke God’s command, the human soul became soiled, “*And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.*” (Isaiah 64:6b) Adam and Eve doomed their descendants to destruction through their defiling deed, for the holy God cannot tolerate in His presence that which is less than perfect and pure.

He who is holy, however, is also merciful, and He provided a purifying agent powerful enough to remove all condemning guilt. He provided the blood of a spotless Lamb.

The apostle John stated, “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” (I John 1:7b) When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, the world was cleansed of its guilt. “It is finished!” He declared. Nothing else was or is needed to restore our standing with God.

There is, however, another liquid of which Scripture speaks, and to which it attaches the function of cleansing. Water. Water, that is, which has a very special additive. Water which is connected to God’s Word, the water of Baptism.

“*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*” (Ephesians 5:25b-27)

Paul, who powerfully proclaimed that man is justified by the blood of Christ (Romans 5) also spoke of being cleansed by the water of baptism. “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through*

the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5)

Baptism does not atone for sin. The blood of Christ did that. But water attached to God’s Word has saving power. Since Baptism is pure Gospel, which the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith, it “*now saves.*” (I Peter 3:21)

So much more than a symbol. So much more than a sign. So much more valuable than any other water on earth. Baptism is the regenerative, purifying flood of assurance that our sin has been forgiven and our guilt is gone—an assurance articulated in a number of hymn texts, such as those by the Danish clergyman Thomas Kingo, as translated by the American Lutheran pastor and teacher, George Rygh.

All who believe and are baptized
Shall see the Lord’s salvation;
Baptized into the death of Christ,
They are a new creation. (LSB 601:1)

Thomas Kingo (1634-1703) was a prolific poet who compiled a hymnal which became the standard for many years in numerous Danish and Norwegian congregations. George Rygh (1860-1942) later made several of Kingo’s hymns intelligible to worshipers in America by way of his well-crafted translations.

For the joy your advent gave me,
For your gospel’s great reward,
For your baptism which has saved me,
For your supper and your Word,
For your death, the bitter scorn,
For your resurrection morn:
Lord, I thank you and extol you,
And in heav’n I shall behold you. (CW 147; 5)

The purifying water of the sacrament of Baptism.

It’s priceless.

Yet costless.

How gracious of God!

John Reim is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.



Who Alone Answers Prayers? The Lord, He is God!

1 Kings 18:1-39

From its inception, the nation of Israel was intended to be a people through whom God's Covenant Promise was to shine forth. After they immigrated into Canaan, however, we read what would become a common refrain, "Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." (Judges 2:11, and others) The cycle of apostasy, judgment, and revival marks their history.

When Ahab ruled as king, he and Jezebel institutionalized idol worship in Israel. The Lord God responded to the king's enforced famine of the Word with a famine of food on the land. The drought happened just as Elijah had told Ahab. Baal, the so-called god of fertility, brought no harvests.

Rather than repent, Ahab sought to kill God's messenger; so God sent Elijah safely away to Zarephath where a widow provided for him. Three years later, the Lord sent Elijah back to Ahab. The king accused Elijah of causing the misery that befell the land (shifting blame was as popular back then as it is now). Elijah, however, correctly identified Ahab as being responsible for the trouble, since Ahab had forsaken the Lord and followed Baal.

Elijah challenged Ahab to a spiritual showdown. Going in, it looked like a bigger mismatch than David and Goliath. On the side of Baal, four hundred fifty prophets. Representing the Lord God, one prophet—Elijah.

They met at Mount Carmel, with the children of Israel watching. Elijah confronted the people. Most had chosen a kind of spiritual limbo, siding with neither the gods of Ahab nor the God of Elijah. It was time to decide who to follow. They were about to see a powerful demonstration that should help them get off the fence.

The prophets of Baal prepared their bull and placed it on the altar. Throughout the morning they leapt about and called on Baal to send a fire that would set the sacrifice ablaze. No fire came. At noon Elijah mocked them, suggesting that their

god might be meditating, or traveling, or sound asleep. They cried louder and cut themselves, but the silence continued until the evening. This was the same kind of response they always received to their prayers. Now it was painfully obvious: no one was listening, so no one paid attention.

Then Elijah beckoned the people to come near to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been broken down. After placing the pieces of bull on the wood laid out on the altar, Elijah commanded that the sacrifice and the wood be drenched with water not once, not twice, but three times. Everything was saturated and the trench around it was filled with water. He then offered a simple prayer that gave all glory to God and called on the people to repent:

"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." (verses 36-37)

The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the sacrifice, the soaking wet wood, the stones, the dust, and even the water in the trench. Someone paid attention to *that* prayer! Then the people fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (verses 36-37)

In John 17:11 Jesus prayed for His Father to guard and keep us, and God will answer His prayer as surely as He answered Elijah's. The drama may not seem as vivid, but the Lord will seek out and deliver His sheep when they stray. The almighty God is also a gentle Shepherd who saves His sheep also from themselves.

Delwyn Maas is pastor of Gift of God Lutheran Church in Mapleton, North Dakota.



Heroic Acts of Faith

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”

(Hebrews 11:8-12)

Last month we learned that Hebrews 11 is a sort of “hall of faith,” where God highlights for us various heroic acts of faith. How would you define a “heroic act of faith”? Considering how differently man and God answer that question reveals why faith itself truly is a gift from God.

Man sees that phrase, “heroic act of faith,” and focuses in on the heroic part. To be “heroic,” man reasons that an act of faith must be something exciting, something big, something that draws attention. Therefore, man conjures up his own ideas regarding “heroic acts of faith”: walking barefoot in the snow, climbing a staircase on one’s knees, handling poisonous snakes without being bitten, to name a few.

Contrast this with what God reveals. By faith, Abraham moved his family and lived in tents. By faith, Sarah expected to give birth to a child. Man reads this and says, “But these are just everyday occurrences!” What man sees as ordinary, God says is extraordinary! To man, a “heroic act of faith” is one that must be seen by others. To God, a “heroic act of faith” is one that simply flows from clinging to His promises. *“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”* (1 Samuel 16:7)

Abraham’s move consisted of leaving his home country, as well as his extended and immediate family, though God gave him no indication as to where he would be moving. But what God did give Abraham was many precious promises. Promises that God would watch over him, to make him a

great nation, and the Gospel promise that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And so, Abraham “went out, not knowing where he was going.”

When Abraham reached the God-intended destination, God promised to give the land as an inheritance to Abraham and his descendants. But throughout his life, Abraham only tented in this land, moving from here to there, and the only real estate he actually owned was a burial place purchased for his wife. By faith, Abraham knew that a greater inheritance awaited him, *“for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*

By faith, Sarah clung to God’s faithfulness and promise that she would give birth to a child. There was no logical, medical evidence to suggest that this could happen, since Sarah was past the age of conceiving and Abraham was *“as good as dead.”* Sarah trusted and believed because God said so.

What do all these “heroic acts of faith” have in common? A simple and steadfast reliance on the promises of God’s Word. Acts of faith then are not heroic because of what man does, but because of what God does and promises. It’s not the *activity* of your faith that is great, but rather the *object* of your faith—the holy God in heaven, Who loved you so much that He gave



His only-begotten Son to die for your sins that you might ever live with Him. Believe it. Amen.

Chad Seybt is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

“Is it okay to use music by groups such as *Casting Crowns* or *Mercy Me* in our worship services?”

There is incredible freedom in the New Testament Church. We are not bound to a certain style of music nor a particular type of worship service. Our brothers and sisters overseas are not required to use page five in *The Lutheran Hymnal* or page twelve in the *Worship Supplement*. Nor are we.

But what is permissible is not always profitable, and could be detrimental. The apostle Paul addressed issues of Christian liberty in 1 Corinthians 8-10. His conclusion? “*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.*” (1 Corinthians 10:23) When it comes to choosing songs for public worship, here are a few questions to consider:

Is its theology correct?

Luther loved music because it conveyed the Word in a way that nothing else can. Next time you’re feeling down, open your hymnal and sing some of your favorite hymns. Before long, your faith will be bolstered and your mood lifted. Such is the effect of music plus the Word.

But what if a tune is connected to false doctrine? If a song’s theology is suspect, then the last thing we should do is sing it, especially in church.

This is not a knock against all groups in this musical genre. This is a reminder to be vigilant. Most Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) groups are not confessional Lutherans. That doesn’t make them bad. It just means that their theology warrants examination, and at some point, false doctrine may show up in their songs.

Does it point to me, or to Jesus?

Some songs are very subjective. That, in itself, is not the problem. The problem is that songs don’t always point us away from ourselves to Christ. The greatest news this world will ever hear is based on the objective nature of justification. Jesus paid for our sins when we were still His enemies. Our salvation was a completed product before we were ever brought to faith.

Any song that diverts attention away from the objective work of Christ and toward me is dangerous and wrong.

Does it edify the group?

Congregational worship is corporate worship. The word *corporate* comes from the Latin *corpus*, meaning “body.” What is done in the worship service affects the whole body. From infant to elderly, from teenagers to fifty-somethings, from singles to married couples—we gather in worship as ONE. Decisions about liturgy and style rightly belong to the whole congregation. The Bible lays down two important principles: “*Let all things be done decently and in order.*” (1 Corinthians 14:40) And, “*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.*” (1 Corinthians 10:24). Disregard these, and any song can become “*a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.*” (1 Corinthians 13:1 ESV)

Doing things in good order does not lock us into the wheel-ruts of what we’ve always done before. God gives special musical abilities to each generation. The choir concerts at our Immanuel Lutheran College reflect a masterful mix of traditional and modern arrangements. Both edify the body because both direct us to Christ alone. The key is to find balance between what is well-known so that everyone can participate, and what is fresh so that people don’t daydream or lose interest.

Few denominations can rival Lutherans in their passion for church singing. This is largely due to the theology our hymns convey. Few things engage heart and voice like the message of God’s grace to us in Christ. Whether traditional or contemporary, our hymns should always be profitable and never detrimental.

As always, if you have further questions on this topic, or would like a more complete discussion, please talk to your pastor. He’s called as your spiritual shepherd and will be happy to study and apply Scripture with you in these matters.

James Albrecht is pastor of St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Okabena, Minnesota.



THE ROAD TO REFORMATION

In preparation for the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are presenting a brief survey of the life of Martin Luther. The series will culminate in the October 2017 issue with an account of his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses.

Luther Finds the Pearl of Great Price 1514-1515

Luther struggled mightily to find peace with God and certainty of salvation. We have seen how he drove himself mercilessly to achieve this while he was a monk, and was himself driven nearly to despair in the attempt. But this peace came to him in quite a different manner. Late in his life he described his experience in this way, "Then I felt as if I had been completely reborn and had entered Paradise through widely opened doors. Instantly all Scripture looked different to me." He also mentions a tower in the Black Cloister in Wittenberg in which he studied as the place of this discovery. "And my conscience and spirit were lifted up, and I was made certain that it is the righteousness of God which justifies and saves us."

When this took place is not precisely known, but it is widely thought to have been in the fall of 1514.

What led Luther to this point? First and foremost, we note that Luther was now constantly immersed in the study of Scripture. He lectured on the Psalms (1513-15), then on Romans (1515-16), next on Galatians and Hebrews (1516-1518), and finally back to the Psalms (1519), for he thought that now he might be prepared to understand them.

Secondly, he preached often, both in the cloister to his fellow monks and then several times a week in the town church. One year he is said to have preached 170 sermons! That's more than three a week! Thus, his entire attention was given to trying to understand and teach the Bible.

His first lectures were based on the standard text of the time: the Latin Vulgate. But God in His wise planning had arranged that, just at this time, it was possible to return to the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, and Luther was among the first to do so.



And what was that insight that opened the gates of Paradise to Luther? In a word, the doctrine of justification.

Erasmus, a noted scholar, had prepared a more accurate Greek New Testament by diligently collecting and comparing a large number of manuscripts. Luther used the first edition almost as soon as it was printed. He used the second edition in translating the New Testament a few years later.

John Reuchlin, a lawyer and accomplished linguist, had published a Hebrew grammar and dictionary a few years earlier, in 1506. This made him controversial because many people suspected he was sinfully collaborating with the Jews. And

when the Dominican monks sought to persuade Emperor Maximilian to burn all Hebrew writings in his empire, Reuchlin bravely opposed them, and found himself in serious danger. One of the few people to offer him support in this controversy was Luther, who certainly did not want the Hebrew Old Testament destroyed. An interesting side note

is that Reuchlin was the teacher and great uncle of Philip Melancthon, Luther's friend and colleague, and an invaluable help in his translation of the Old Testament.

And what was that insight that opened the gates of Paradise to Luther? In a word, the doctrine of justification. Wrestling with the expression "the righteousness of God," he came to understand that it was used in two different ways in Scripture. Sometimes it is that righteousness that is in God and prompts Him to punish the unrighteous sinner. But when Paul says, "*The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith,'*" (Romans 1:17) it is referring to that righteousness given by God and received by faith. This is Christ's righteousness, which covers our sins, and on account of which God declares us holy. This is the foundation of the Reformation message,

the pearl of great price, recovered by Luther and given to us to treasure.

Norman Greve is pastor of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iron River, Michigan.



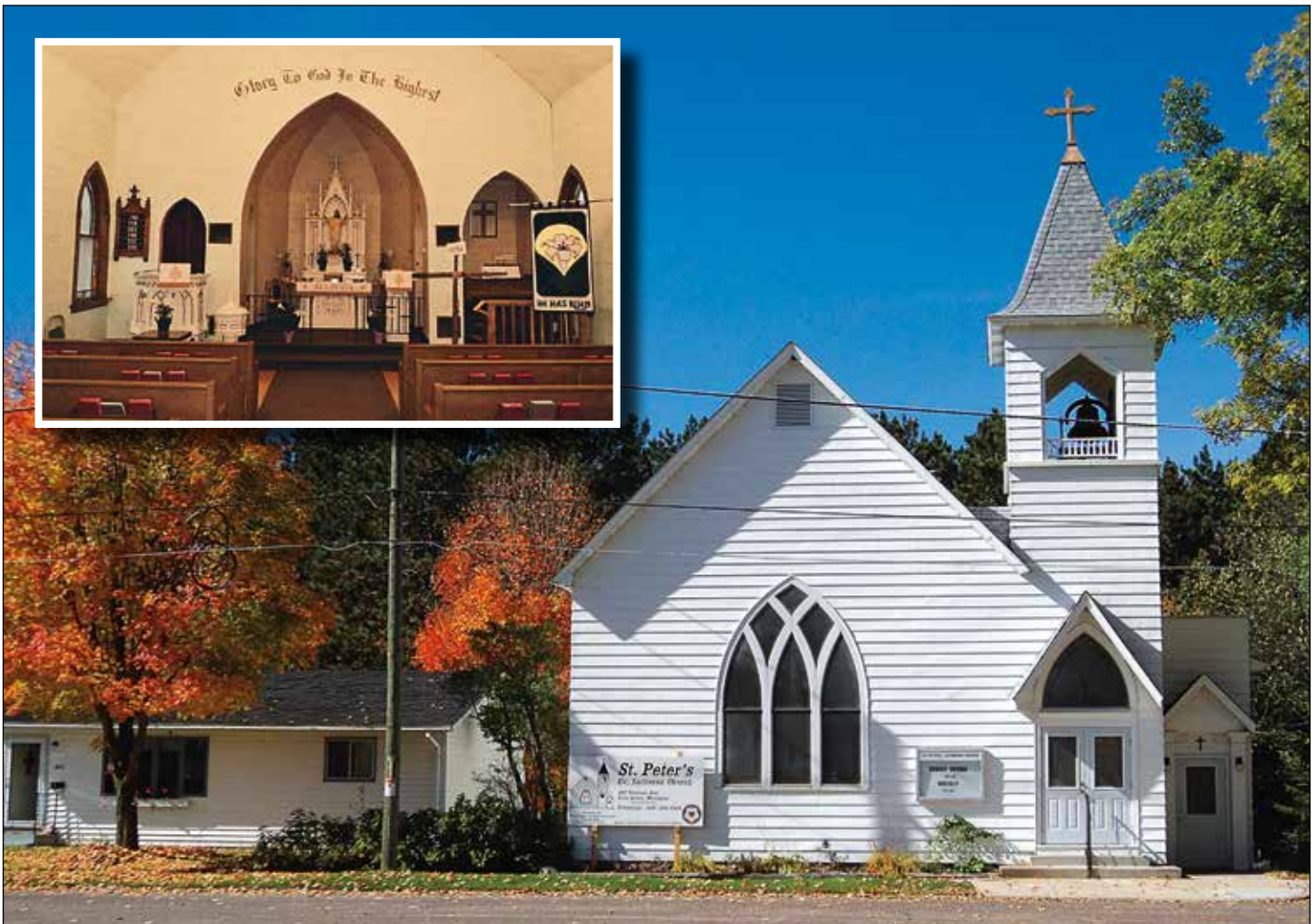
St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church Iron River, Michigan

Stambaugh, Michigan, began as a mining town. Iron was discovered in 1851, but since the region was so remote, exploration did not begin in earnest until the 1870's, and the first mine was opened in 1880. Soon there was a rush of activity, and numerous mines were in operation by 1910. The earliest mines were on the west side of Stambaugh hill, and atop that hill ten nearly identical two-story homes were built for the mine managers. At the end of that row an even statelier brick building was erected. This was the parsonage for St. Peter's congregation. To this day, two open pits from abandoned mines can be seen a short distance down the hill from the parsonage's back yard.

With the mines came people from many places: numerous Italians and Finns, and some Swedes and English and

Germans. And so, in 1889, St. Peter's congregation was formed, to serve especially the German Lutherans in the community. It was rather informal at first—a pastor came from Florence, some 35 miles away, by horse and buggy. Services at first were in homes, then in a rented church building. But the Gospel was desired by the settlers and the Gospel was proclaimed. By 1906, the congregation was large enough to construct the church building which is still in use. In 1915, the first resident pastor was called.

The area was growing (in 1937, there were thirty-seven mines operating in the county), and so did the congregation. Some years there were as many as twenty-one, or even twenty-four, baptisms. But there were also problems. After one pastor committed suicide, the congregation lost many members. The





following pastor resigned under a cloud. Some difficulties developed between the congregation and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) over discipline matters, and the congregation even joined the Iowa Synod for a brief time. But unity was restored in the congregation, they rejoined the Wisconsin Synod, and the congregation again grew. One can see the size of the Sunday School in 1931 from the picture above. The Lord sustained the congregation through some hard times.

In 1937, St. Peter's called George Tiefel. He also served a congregation in Crystal Falls, until it dissolved ten years later. Pastor Tiefel deserves special mention because he served the congregation for thirty-two years, and is still remembered in the community. He also was the pastor who found it necessary to lead the congregation out of their old fellowship and into the newly formed CLC. This action was taken in 1960.



Pastor George Tiefel

When the mines began closing in the 1960's, the region's communities suffered population decreases, and so naturally did the congregations. The last of the mines closed in 1975. Stambaugh shrank, and so did neighboring Iron River, until it was thought wise to consolidate into one city, and call it Iron River. St. Peter's congregation now is smaller, only about forty souls, but it continues to be active.

The Ladies of St. Peter's group meets monthly and does the usual things of planning, assisting in, and funding special projects. One special activity is the Christmas party in December. Each lady makes a point of inviting someone from the community to come as her guest, and the numbers swell. We sing carols and exchange small gifts, and guests always seem to enjoy themselves.

We have only a small Sunday school, but we have always had a VBS in the summer, which draws others from the community.



We have benefited greatly from the Traveling Vacation Bible School (TVBS) program which, for several years, has helped us to spread fliers throughout the town. Last year we passed out fliers at the big parade in connection with the rodeo (the only professional rodeo in the Upper Peninsula!) The results are modest, but the effort worthwhile.

One ministry the congregation has supported is a regular service in the Iron County Medical Care Facility. This began when members of St Peter's were in residence, and has continued into the present, although we currently have no members there. The number of those who attend services is not large, but there are regulars you can expect to see nearly every week. Occasionally it becomes clear that I am the only pastor with whom some of these people have contact. Once when I was asked what church I served, the conversation turned to people all naming the churches they are members of, and one woman looked at me and said, "You're my pastor."



While that wasn't true and is not likely ever to be true, it nevertheless shows the value of serving them, to the extent we are able.

Norman Greve is pastor of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iron River, Michigan.

For God or Mammon?

Mission Work in East Africa

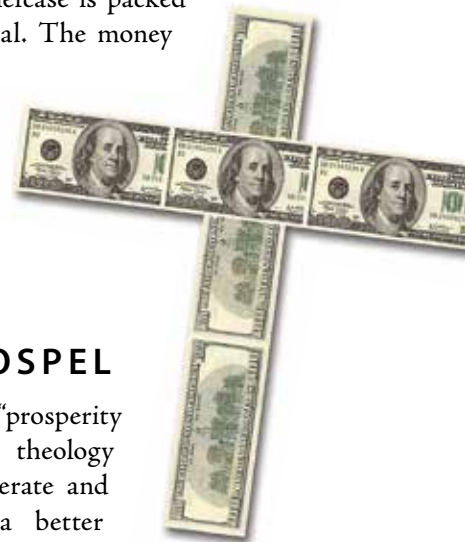
Doing mission work in East Africa can be an uphill battle. Corruption is the default mode of operation for society at large, and corruption naturally finds its way into every institution—including the church. Jesus is presented by many as a second Lawgiver, whose sole function is to police bad behavior. This legalistic emphasis is especially true in regard to giving.

BRIEFCASE CHURCHES



One example is the phenomenon known as “briefcase churches.” These “churches” are founded by one person who has been able to procure financial support, usually from overseas, in order to sustain his work. When a representative of the donor organization visits in order to lay eyes upon the

activities that his group has been supporting with its hard-earned money, he is shown what appears to be a vibrant ministry with many people benefiting from the contributions. What he is unaware of, however, is that someone has organized all of this from his “briefcase.” That is, he arranged for the use of a building, paid people from the area to show up and pretend to be church members, teachers, or school children, and made any other necessary arrangements to give the appearance of a legitimate operation. All of this is done for a fraction of the monetary support the person has been receiving. Once the satisfied donor departs, the people disperse, the briefcase is packed up and life goes on as usual. The money continues to flow in and the supporters are none the wiser. This is one of the many challenges which dot the minefield of mission work in East Africa.



PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Another challenge is the “prosperity gospel.” This brand of theology preys upon the most desperate and vulnerable. It promises a better life here and now if you truly and sincerely believe and put certain Words of God into practice. If your life hasn’t improved, then it is a result of your weakness, faithlessness, or disobedience. Contributions always help. If you donate \$10,000, surely you will receive back \$100,000, as long as you don’t do anything to upset God between the time you donated and the moment you expect to receive your reward. For someone who has few options left, this can seem like a plausible last resort.

EXORBITANT FEES FOR WEDDINGS

There are many people who wish to get married, but find the cost of an official church wedding extremely prohibitive. Fees to the church or pastor can approach a full year's salary, and there are few exceptions. On top of that is the societal pressure to invite the entire family, clan, tribe, and friends as well. Feeding over five hundred people is a financial impossibility for most. As a result, many couples go against their consciences and live together without having the formal marriage ceremony or getting the appropriate paperwork from the government. Pastors even use this dilemma against people, extracting a form of monetary penance from them. Some go as far as to ban them from participating in the Lord's Supper for living in a way that they, the clergy, essentially caused by requiring exorbitant fees for weddings.



FEES FOR BAPTISMS

Another lie that is exposed by the truth of God's Word is the idea that a Baptism needs to cost an inordinate amount of money (or any money at all!) A fee is charged for a certificate, for the pastor's time, for the use of the church, for acolytes or assistants to help prepare for the Baptism, and of course, there has to be a meal provided for the many people in attendance.



With all of these frustrating obstacles standing in the way, especially under the guise of Christianity, those of us who wish to do genuine mission work can be tempted to withdraw, become jaded, or lose hope. Yet we do have an advantage. For the simple and wonderful truths of Scripture that we proclaim are a cause for special celebration by these people, living as they do

under the shadow of so many deceptive false teachings. The biblical teaching that salvation, Baptism, marriage, and the Lord's Supper are given by God, and they all come as a free gift of God's grace, is music to their ears.

“IF IT’S NOT IN THE BIBLE, THESE DAYS I DON’T WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT.”



Above: Pastor Absalom (second from left) can't help dancing during a hymn, even when everyone else is standing still.

One of the most recent contacts the CLC has had lives in Busia, Uganda. His name is Absalom. He's an evangelist who never stops moving, can't keep from dancing when he's singing hymns, and meanders throughout the congregation while he's preaching. His story is a prime example of someone enjoying newfound freedom abiding in the truth of God's Word. He had been taught a form of Christianity that was overburdened by many of the abuses previously mentioned. What Absalom has realized and has shared very openly is that "If it's not in the Bible, these days I don't want anything to do with it." Now there's a reason to dance! To God alone be the glory!



Michael Gurath is pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Arizona, and a visiting missionary to Africa.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS AUGUST 2017

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; LSB = Lutheran Service Book, 2006

Date	Verse	Reading	Comments
Aug 1	TLH 154	Dan 6:1-9	Out of envy, Daniel’s enemies plotted against him. Out of envy, Jesus’ enemies did the same (Matthew 27:18).
Aug 2	WS 761	Dan 6:10-16	We can stand firm when our faith is tested, too, knowing that God is at our side.
Aug 3	TLH 25	Dan 6:17-28	God not only saved Daniel from the lions, but also used the event to glorify His name (vv. 25-28).
Aug 4	WS 760	1 John 4:1-5	Beware of those around you who speak from the viewpoint of the world. It really is different from the viewpoint of Christ.
Aug 5	TLH 349:1-4	1 John 4:6-14	God shows us His love in connection with His Son, and He works in us that we might love one another.
Aug 7	TLH 349:5-7	1 John 4:15-21	God’s love in Christ gives us confidence on the day of judgment!
Aug 8	WS 769	Acts 13:1-3	The Holy Spirit selects His ministers so that the Gospel goes out.
Aug 9	TLH 500	Acts 13:4-12	The Word of God was confirmed by the miraculous sign, but what truly amazed the proconsul was the teaching about the Lord.
Aug 10	TLH 496	Acts 13:13-41	Don’t know what to say to someone who asks you about Christ? Paul gives you an outline here.
Aug 11	TLH 504	Acts 13:42-52	Paul and Barnabas boldly answered those who rejected Christ, and they moved on. Not everyone will receive the Gospel you bring them.
Aug 12	TLH 293	1 Sam 3:1-10	Again, it is God Who calls His prophets and ministers, and Samuel listened. May we all listen as he did when the Lord speaks to us in the Scriptures.
Aug 14	TLH 290	1 Sam 3:11-18	Samuel’s first prophetic utterance was a difficult one for Eli to hear, but it was the Word of the Lord and Eli submitted to it.
Aug 15	TLH 5	1 Sam 3:19-21	Leaves fall to the ground and are forgotten, but what God says is never forgotten. The Lord reveals Himself to us through His Word.
Aug 16	TLH 118; LSB 738	Psalms 119:49-56	Our comfort in suffering is not in whether God will end the suffering quickly for us, but in His Word’s promises to care for us no matter what.
Aug 17	TLH 215; LSB 691	Psalms 119:57-64	The Lord’s Gospel promises draw us to Him, and as His children we delight to follow His ways.
Aug 18	WS 787	Psalms 119:65-72	Even though arrogant and godless people surround us, we find refuge in the Word of the Lord Who forgives our sins and does good to us.
Aug 19	TLH 380	Matthew 23:1-12	Our sinful natures want our “good deeds” to be noticed too, but Christ calls us to humility because arrogance and trust in God don’t go well together.
Aug 21	TLH 288	Matthew 23:13-22	By preaching a religion of Law without the forgiveness of Christ, the teachers of the Law were leading souls to unbelief and destruction.
Aug 22	TLH 408	Matthew 23:23-28	It’s not right to pick and choose what constitutes a godly life (v. 23) as we are tempted to do sometimes. God’s Word is a package deal—take the whole thing!
Aug 23	TLH 419	Matthew 23:29-39	In the midst of dire warnings, see the love of Jesus. His enemies were a “brood of vipers,” yet He would send them teachers (v. 34) and He longed to gather them.
Aug 24	TLH 400; WS 786	1 Corinthians 11:2-16	Hats or no hats? God isn’t giving us a specific rule about that, but rather to be aware of our own practices, what they mean, and the impression they give to others.
Aug 25	WS 754; LSB 640	1 Corinthians 11:17-26	Even if we do not misuse the Supper in “love feasts” as Corinth did, we may at times take it thoughtlessly. Remember you are proclaiming the Lord’s death!
Aug 26	TLH 307	1 Corinthians 11:27-34	So as not to take the Lord’s Supper carelessly, we review for ourselves what it means and why we do it—with our focus on the forgiveness of sins.
Aug 28	TLH 431	Jeremiah 23:1-8	False shepherds were misleading God’s people, but in His grace He would send them a Good Shepherd to rescue them, Jesus Christ, our Righteousness.
Aug 29	TLH 248	Jeremiah 23:9-15	If God’s condemnation of false prophets sounds harsh to you, remember that it is a way of guarding others from unbelief and destruction in hell.
Aug 30	TLH 2	Jeremiah 23:16-24	The world today still likes to say, “Everything is okay! No harm will come to you!” But turning away from the Lord’s word is never okay. Don’t fall for it!
Aug 31	WS 780; TLH 482	Jeremiah 23:25-32	God’s Word is not ours to change, but rather to speak faithfully. Why would you want to change such words of Gospel mercy and blessing?

CLC Project KINSHIP Update

For thirty years, the Lord of the Church has opened many doors and given numerous opportunities to our church body to serve Him in foreign fields that are ripe for harvest. Project KINSHIP is the means by which the CLC supports orphans, widows, and students, as well as addressing other humanitarian needs among our overseas brethren. Here are some of the ways that Project KINSHIP has aided our fellow believers in foreign countries during the past year.

Nigeria: The Nigerian government has temporarily closed the NCLC Children’s Home due to building code violations. Without repairs, the government could permanently close the orphanage and move ten orphans to other orphanages. Some repairs have been completed and an additional \$2,000 of KINSHIP general funds has been approved to finish the necessary repairs. It is our prayer that the Children’s Home can be quickly reopened.

Gifts: KINSHIP provides a modest monetary Christmas gift to each of the orphans, young students, and teachers under our care. Recently \$500 was distributed to children in Liberia during a recent mission visitation to that country. KINSHIP also sent \$50 to each graduate of the BELC and the CLCI seminaries in India. These gifts help the graduates as they begin their lives as trained ambassadors for Christ.

Disaster Relief: In December a cyclone caused major destruction and loss of property among our brethren in India. The Board of Missions sent \$6,000 of KINSHIP funds to India to quickly provide disaster aid for this need.

Opportunities: The Lord of the Church has given us many opportunities to share the love of the Savior with children and students within our foreign mission fields. The Lord has provided opportunities for almost thirty new sponsorships, seven of which are for orphans. He has also



Individuals interested in sponsoring an orphan or seminary student are asked to contact

Pastor Dave Fuerstenau, 426 Buren Road, Ketchikan, Alaska 99901
(907) 225-2842 • email: djfuerstenau@kpunet.net

provided men willing to sit at the feet of Jesus and train to be His Gospel ambassadors among their own people.

Sponsorships are currently needed in the following areas:

- Four BELC and CLCI students training to be pastors in India
- Ten students training to be pastors in Congo
- Six students training to be pastors in Togo
- Six orphans in Togo

The KINSHIP Committee expresses their sincere gratitude to all those who are supporting our efforts overseas. If you cannot support us financially, please remember that *“the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”* (James 5:16) What joy there is in serving in the Lord’s Kingdom, to the glory of His name, always bearing in mind that *“pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.”* (James 1:27)

—Project KINSHIP Committee

Top: St. David’s School, Etago, Kenya; above left: entering the Nigerian orphanage compound; above right: new rooms added to the Nigerian orphanage.

SEEN IN PASSING

Items of interest from various sources of religious news and opinion, in print and on the web.

Pro-Life? There's No Place For You in Democratic Party, Says DNC Chair.

In an official statement in April, the recently-elected head of the Democratic National Committee, Tom Perez, said that there is no longer any room in the party for those who oppose abortion on demand. “Every Democrat, like every American, should support a woman’s right to make her own choices about her body and her health,” Perez said, using the familiar phraseology that has long been code for abortion on demand, for any reason. This follows the action of the “Women’s March on Washington” organizers, who specifically excluded pro-life feminist groups from participating in its events on the weekend following the presidential inauguration. It reflects a trend among Democrat Party leaders, who are increasingly making support of abortion a litmus test for inclusion in the party. Ironically, this trend may have cost them the 2016 election: “Abortion was likely THE issue to tip scales for evangelical women to vote Trump,” said Hannah Anderson, who writes for *Christ and Pop Culture*. “If Dems could have entertained the possibility of a pro-life women’s vote, they’d have won.” Bassett, Laura. “Democratic Party Draws A Line In The Sand On Abortion Rights.” *Politics*. HuffingtonPost.com, 21 Apr. 2017. Web. 9 Jun. 2017.

After Thousands of Years, Christians Disappearing From Middle East.

When even the *New Yorker* acknowledges that Christians are being persecuted, you know it’s serious. In an article following the Egyptian church bombing in April that claimed the lives of forty-five Coptic Christians, columnist Robin Wright acknowledged that not only are believers in the Middle East suffering persecution, it now appears possible that Christianity will, for all intents, cease to exist in the region of its origin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

In accord with our usage and order, **Samuel Rodebaugh**, who was called by Immanuel Lutheran Church, Winter Haven, Florida, to be its pastor, was installed on July 2, 2017.

—Pastor V. Fossum

In accord with our usage and order, **Paul D. Nolting**, who was called by the triparish of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Valentine, Nebraska; Peace Lutheran Church, Mission, South Dakota; and St. Paul’s Lutheran Church of White River, South Dakota, to be its pastor was installed on May 28, 2017. Professor Mark Kranz participated in the service.

—Pastor Delwyn Maas

Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church of Mankato, Minnesota, will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its school on Sunday, August 13th. Former Immanuel pastor and high school counselor Doug Libby will perform the liturgy, and son of the congregation Pastor Timothy Wheaton will preach the sermon. A meal and program will follow the service. Please come and help celebrate this wonderful blessing from the Lord with us!

-- Pastor Joseph Naumann

“Today,” says Wright, “Christians are only about four percent of the region’s more than four hundred million people—and probably less. They have been subject to vicious murders at the hands of terrorist groups, forced out of their ancestral lands by civil wars, suffered societal intolerance fomented by Islamist groups, and subjected to institutional discrimination found in the legal codes and official practices of many Middle Eastern countries. . . . Last month, I drove to Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city and home for two millennia to one of the world’s oldest Christian communities. Within days of its conquest of Mosul, ISIS issued an ultimatum to Christians to either convert to Islam, pay an exorbitant and open-ended tax, or face death ‘by the sword.’ Homes of Christians were marked by a large ‘N’ for ‘Nassarah,’ a term in the Koran for Christians. Some thirty-five thousand Christians fled.” Wright, Robin. “War, Terrorism, and the Christian Exodus From the Middle East.” *News Desk*. NewYorker.com, 14 Apr. 2017. Web. 9 Jun. 2017.

Kentucky T-Shirt Shop Owner Scores Rare Win in Religious Freedom Case.

In 2012, Kentuckian and Christian business owner Blaine Adamson of Hands On Originals declined, on religious grounds, to print T-shirts for the Lexington Pride Festival. The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission found Blaine guilty of violating a local ordinance against sexual-orientation discrimination and ordered him to print the pro-homosexual T-shirts and attend “diversity” classes. He refused, and took the commission to court. After a lengthy five-year battle, a Kentucky appellate court recognized Blaine’s constitutional rights and affirmed that Blaine is free to decide for himself the ideas and messages he wants to express. N.a. “Christian fights back...and wins!” *The Stand*. Afa.net. 15 May 2017. Web. 9 Jun. 2017.