

February 2018 VOL 60 NO. 8

# LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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

"THIS IS MY  
BELOVED  
SON, IN  
WHOM I  
AM WELL  
PLEASED."

*Matthew 17:5b*



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# More Than a Feeling

Life on earth has been described as peaks and valleys. Even within a single day, we can feel euphoric one moment and despondent the next. While experiencing a joyful moment, we often long to extend it and make that time last just a little longer. Peter, upon witnessing Jesus' transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah, wanted to act on that feeling. *"Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'" (Matthew 17:4)* In that moment, life was good. Understandably, Peter wanted it to last as long as possible. His comprehension of Jesus' mission on earth was incomplete, but he immediately recognized this as a special moment.

A few days earlier, Jesus had been teaching about his upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection, which Peter found objectionable for the Son of God. *"Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.'" (Matthew 16:22-23)*

In both instances, Peter missed the point. Jesus' purpose on earth wasn't to heap blessings upon His followers. He became man to live a perfect life and die a gruesome death for the sins of the whole world. Until then, He spent much of His time preparing His disciples for the time when they would no longer be able to see and hear Him.

In that glimpse of heavenly glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John, no doubt, felt the joy of being in the presence of God. At news of the crucifixion,

Emotions are fickle. We are no closer or farther from God no matter how we feel.

they would have felt intense grief at the loss of a teacher and friend. Emotions are fickle. We are no closer or farther from God no matter how we feel. God's love is much stronger than a feeling.

God cares about every joy and problem we experience. But as Paul teaches in Romans 8:37-39, height and depth, joy and sadness, do not move us closer to or farther from God's love. *"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, . . . height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Yet, Jesus gave three of his disciples a glimpse of heavenly glory. Stephen also received a view of heaven itself shortly before he was martyred (Acts 7). Elisha witnessed his mentor, Elijah, ascend into heaven (2 Kings 2). While we don't receive a personal view of heaven, we have all

these things recorded for us by eyewitnesses of God's glory. God also blesses us with joy and happiness in our lives. These aren't things that sinners deserve, but rather blessings that flow from God's love. These feelings are not the basis of our faith, but they are blessings from God.

We truly live in the valley of the shadow of death. Our sorrows often outnumber our joys. But as followers of Christ, we enjoy God's ever-present undeserved love all of our lives.

Just as Moses and Elijah joined Christ in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, we will also experience the perfect joy of eternal life in the presence of our Savior.

**Ross Kok** is a teacher at Holy Cross Lutheran School in Phoenix, Arizona.



# That's the Way I Heard It

Most people have heard of, if not played, the telephone game. In this party pastime a leader whispers a tricky word or phrase to the next person in line. This message is then passed along until the last individual in line reveals what he believes he has heard. Hilarity may ensue as the garbled phrases are compared to the original. Whether the mix-ups were from poor diction, inadequate listening skills, or intentional misdirection doesn't really matter. The goal of the game has been reached—message mangled.

Isn't our world much like the telephone game? Oral histories passed down through the ages often bear little resemblance to the events that inspired them. Some important bits of history are forgotten, overlooked, or intentionally left out of textbooks because they may not fit with the agenda of the publisher. And, let's face it, we often aren't totally honest when we review our own pasts either.

The Lord God had a very important message for mankind. Mankind could not afford to have this life-giving message garbled or misunderstood. The Law and the Gospel are both needed in their unvarnished and unadulterated forms—just as God intended.

What a blessing that our God didn't leave this important matter of our salvation to such chancy methods as oral history or human memory! *"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book.'" (Exodus 17:14)* For about 1600 years God the Holy Spirit breathed His thoughts and words into various chosen individuals, causing them to put down in writing that blessed message of salvation. *"No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:20-21) We aren't told of the actual method employed by the Holy Spirit, but in the last passage cited, the word used in Greek for "moved" suggests the movement of a boat on the water by the wind. As the wind

carries and directs a vessel, so also the Holy Spirit carried and directed the writers of Scripture to set down in writing His holy Word.

Imagine! The very eternal thoughts, words, mysteries, blessings, and promises of our loving Father in heaven, written down and placed in our care! Isn't it shameful how casually and callously we often treat this wondrous blessing of God?

In this sinful world of misinformation and misdirection, it is important to set the record straight, especially when it comes to matters that really count.

Since the Bible is God's Word, inspired and inerrant, it is also the highest authority in all matters. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16) We hear many today disparaging established churches with the mantra of "Deeds, not creeds!" Yet, unless one has a universal standard that applies to all people of all time, how can one determine which deeds are appropriate to pursue? The Bible gives us just such a standard.

When we are assailed by others as being too narrow-minded about the way of salvation, we can reference Jesus' declaration, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6) If we are accused of clinging to old-fashioned ideas from an ancient text, we should be quick to point out, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."* (Matthew 24:35)

In this sinful world of misinformation and misdirection, it is important to set the record straight, especially when it comes to matters that really count. Since our Savior Jesus has called us to be witnesses to the world of His plan of salvation, we should be diligent in studying the Word of God. May the Holy Spirit bless our hearing and learning of His Word so we may speak it faithfully to God's glory.



**David W. Bernthal** is the principal of Luther Memorial School in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

LSB HYMN 622, TLH HYMN 306

# “Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared”

## Why “-y”?

In some cases converting an English noun into an adjective is as easy as adding a “y.” Sleep becomes sleepy. Dream dreamy. Silk silky. And yet, the addition of “y” in certain instances can actually reverse a meaning. Consider the word “rock.”

All by itself, “rock” conveys strength and stability. Add “y,” however, and everything changes. Things become rocky, unstable. Not all additions, it turns out, are pluses.

## So also with God’s Word.

His Word is the solid rock, graciously given so that all can find the spiritual stability so desperately needed. In both of the epistles written by the Apostle Peter, the reliability of God’s Word is affirmed. Echoing Isaiah, he declared, “*The word of the Lord endures forever.*” (1 Peter 1:25a) And in his second epistle he wrote, “*We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable.*” (2 Peter 1:19 NIV)

Since its source is the Spirit of God, the Word of God is rock solid. “*Heaven and earth will pass away,*” Jesus said, “*but My words will by no means pass away.*” (Mt. 24:35) Scripture can never be destroyed—a fact that reassures Christians and frustrates the devil.

Satan knows he cannot demolish God’s Word. But that doesn’t keep him from trying to deprive people of its blessings. In that pursuit he frequently contradicts the Word outright. At other times, however, his subtler tactic is to add unbiblical thought to biblical principle. For when God’s Word is supplemented, it is supplanted. The rock-solid messages given by the Spirit become dangerously rocky hybrids.

The Judaizers in Galatia serve as an example. The young Galatian congregation had heard from Paul the pure Gospel of salvation through faith alone. But the Judaizers proclaimed that man is saved through faith *plus* the keeping of the Mosaic code. And in doing so they changed the Good News into “*a different gospel*” (Galatians 1:6), a deadly “gospel.”

So also at the time of the Reformation. The church of Rome believed that man-made ideas not only *could* but also *should* be added to what the Bible says, with devastating results.

Elsewhere it is human reason that has been given a perilously prominent place in the teachings of some churches. The dictates of human intellect are added to the Spirit’s revelation, with truly harmful consequences.

When teachings are based solely on God’s Word they are rock-solid. When they are the result of human additions to God’s Word they become rocky, unstable and unable to provide a solid foundation. The very bedrock of the Reformation, therefore, was *Scripture Alone*. And many have faithfully continued to advance that cry, both in sermon and in song.

One such individual was Samuel Kinner (1603-1668), who wrote the communion hymn “Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared” (TLH 306; LSB 622) Trained to be a medical doctor and serving in that capacity, Kinner was undoubtedly someone who made great professional use of his intellect and reason. Yet, the hymn verses which flowed from his pen reveal that he recognized the importance of leaving the Word of God untouched by human additions and unchallenged by human reason. The principle of *Scripture Alone* comes shining through in several of his stanzas.

When speaking of God’s presence among His people, he wrote, “Firm as a rock this truth shall stand, unmoved by any daring hand.” When speaking of the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament he declared, “Though reason cannot understand, yet faith this truth embraces; Thy body, Lord, is everywhere at once in many places. How this can be I leave to Thee, Thy word alone suffices me. I trust its truth unailing.”

Altering or adding to God’s Word is one of the devil’s tricks for replacing the firm with the flimsy, the rock with the rocky. Since Scripture is perfect and pure as given, it is to be left as is. For Scripture alone is the means through which God does

His great and gracious work. It is the rock from which great blessings flow.

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# The Gospel of Jesus Christ Gives Real Meaning to Our Lives

(Please read Ecclesiastes 2.)

Many find Ecclesiastes rather gloomy. They think it says that life and everything in it are meaningless. What it actually says is that life is meaningless *“under the sun.”* (verse 11) That expression limits the view to that of a life on earth without regard to eternity or God.

The secular mindset seeks comfort, happiness, and meaning here and now *under the sun*. “I’m going to live for what I can have and experience right now.” On those terms, is life satisfying?

Ecclesiastes 2 begins with a search for lasting meaning in pleasure. *“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure.”* (verse 10) This approach seems to dominate our culture, even though it’s always like *“grasping for the wind.”* (verse 11) The wind is real, but try to grab it. When people live for pleasure, it often feels good in the moment but then fades quickly. They think pleasure will make life bearable; but, without fail, it disappoints. That makes them more miserable and desperate to pursue the next pleasure—which will also disappoint. The sense of emptiness increases.

How about the pursuit of wisdom and intellect? It is observed *“that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.”* (verse 13) Great philosophers and universities in our land strive to discover the meaning of life and how we should live, but yesterday’s cerebral celebrity is today’s fool. Both intellectuals and simpletons occupy the cemeteries. If we’re all going to die and rot, who cares? If the sun eventually burns out and all life with it, what’s the point? It won’t matter whether we’re nice or nasty, rich or poor, clever or dull.

What about all for which we’ve worked so hard—our achievements? *“Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all its vanity and grasping for the wind.”* (verse 17) Our worldly

accomplishments and all the things that kept us awake at night will mean nothing in the not-too-distant future.

It’s inescapable. Everything that is *under the sun* is *meaningless*, so beware of how engrossed you become in earning money, making a name for yourself, or your team winning the Super Bowl. If the things you treasure most in life are things that can be taken away, then you will be

devastated because you will ultimately lose them all. Death will make sure of that. The One who is not *under the sun*, however, declares, *“Death is swallowed up in victory.”* (1 Corinthians 15:54)

We do have responsibilities here and now in this world. Jesus points out an important one in John 20:21, *“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”*

Our mission is to share and live the Gospel, because our final destination is not *under the sun* but in eternity. We embrace God’s promises and confess with the patriarchs that we are *“strangers and pilgrims on earth.”* (Hebrews 11:13) We are looking *“for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”* (2 Peter 3:13)

Baptizing our children, confessing Christ, and supporting mission work are examples of investments that pay eternal benefits!

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”* (1 Peter 1:3, 4)

Rather than living *“under the sun,”* we live *“under grace.”* (Romans 6:14) Thanks be to God for giving *real* meaning to our lives!

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



# The Power of Faith

*“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.”*

(Hebrews 11:30-31)

Hebrews 11 has been called “The Honor Roll of the Faithful.” Sometimes, however, it is worth noting not only who is on such a list, but also who is not. Hebrews 11:29 includes on this list the Israelites crossing the Red Sea after their Exodus from Egypt. However, the next mention of the faithful (verse 30) is forty years later, at the Battle of Jericho. Who is left off the list? It is the complaining “wilderness generation” of Israelites who could not enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief—the very opposite of faith (see Hebrews 3:16-19). In this Honor Roll of the Faithful, the Holy Spirit skips over them and goes directly to the later-generation Israelites who faithfully did what God commanded them.

Regarding those faithful Israelites, verse 30 of our text notes the amazing manner in which they were able to defeat the fortified city of Jericho: the walls of the city were toppled *by the power of God*. God told Joshua to have the Hebrew men of war march around the city once a day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day, followed by the blast of a ram’s horn and trumpets. If I had been one of those soldiers, I think my faith would have been sorely tried. “But Joshua,” I might have said, “why don’t we just use a battering ram? How will merely marching around the city and raising a ruckus get us inside?” It must have taken very strong faith, demonstrated by obedience, for the Hebrew soldiers to simply follow this command of God. Nonetheless, as Chrysostom<sup>1</sup> said, “The sounding of trumpets, though one were to sound for ten thousand years, cannot throw down walls, but faith can do all things.”

The next entry on the Honor Roll of the Faithful is not even an Israelite; it is a heathen prostitute, Rahab. We know

from Joshua 2:11 that by the time the Hebrew spies entered Jericho, Rahab had come to faith in the one true God. Rahab tells the two Israelite spies that “. . . [T]he LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” Interestingly, the Hebrew word used here for God in what Rahab says is *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*, the “proper name” of the God of Israel. Unlike the rest of Jericho, Rahab knew the God of Israel as the one true God, and that faith showed itself in her actions toward the Hebrew spies.

Rahab’s *faith* is contrasted to the *unbelief* of the other inhabitants of Jericho. The Greek word used to describe the unbelief of the “wilderness generation” mentioned in the first paragraph above has the same root as the word translated as “did not believe” in connection with Rahab’s fellow residents.

However, the literal meaning of the root word is not “unbelieving,” but actually “to disobey”; and that realization gives even greater depth to our understanding of this passage. R. C. H. Lenski comments, “Unbelief is at times called disobedience because it is nothing less and is also the source of disobedient conduct.” Here we are given some insight into the relationship of faith to works—the product of faith.

Rahab, a heathen prostitute, then a believer, is on the Honor Roll of the Faithful. An additional honor is found in Matthew 1:5. She was an ancestor of Jesus, the Savior of the world. She is well placed on the Honor Roll of the Faithful.

**Craig Owings** is a retired teacher and serves as assistant editor of the Lutheran Spokesman. He lives in Cape Coral, Florida.



<sup>1</sup> Archbishop of Constantinople, (b. 349, d. 407)

## READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER (GOSSIP)

PASSAGES THAT WILL HELP YOU RESPOND WHEN PEOPLE SAY...

# “Gossiping is no big deal.”

As I write these words, I am seated at my desk, fully armed. I'm not expecting any trouble, it's just that my weapon is with me at all times, even when I go to church. It's so much a part of me that I never even think about putting it on. The only effort involved is in putting it away. The weapon has nothing to do with a license to carry. It has everything to do with the kind of heat we sinners pack each day.

The tongue, which was created for blessing and good, has become “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” You can read about this in James Chapter 3. Relative to the rest of the body, the tongue is a very small member, just as a rudder is a small part of a ship. But that small piece wields a disproportionate amount of power and control.

The tongue is “a fire, a world of iniquity.” (verse 6) South Dakotans may remember the Jasper Fire of 2001. An arsonist had dropped a single match on some dry grass in the Black Hills. Flames multiplied so quickly that the fire consumed as many as one hundred acres per minute. When the last ember was extinguished, 130 square miles of scorched earth were left behind. And the tongue? It “defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire by hell.” (verse 6) One way it does that is through gossiping.

Our neighbor's reputation is tilted by what we hear and see about him, good or bad, true or untrue. The Information Age has taken this to new levels. Today we hear and see more than ever. A simple email, text, or post can broadcast this information with almost no effort at all. Once the *Send* button is pushed or the *Submit* button is clicked, the arrow leaves the bowstring. You can watch it travel, but you can't reroute or stop it. Likewise, gossip shared cannot be retracted.



Even Shakespeare understood the impact of gossiping. “Who steals my purse steals trash. . . but he that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed.”

The Bible tells us, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29)

Because you are a Christian, your tongue can work for good or evil. It can edify and encourage, or tear down and destroy. The latter comes

naturally. Juicy gossip begs to be shared. Dirt that harms another's reputation is eagerly consumed. The fact that we could delight in harming our neighbor's good name speaks to the depravity we have by nature.

By contrast, Christian love “thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:5-7) Flip those around: “thinks no good; rejoices in iniquity. . .” and see what gossip does. Read Romans 1:29-30, where “whisperers” and “backbiters” are used in the same sentence with “haters of God.” Gossiping is a very big deal.

How do we overcome our sins of the tongue? By kneeling at the cross and confessing our wickedness. There we see the only One Who has ever lived and died without a single evil word crossing His lips. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of all sins. By faith, His perfect life became ours. This amazing fact empowers us to stop gossip in its tracks, put our weapon down, and protect our neighbor's good name.

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





## THE ROAD TO REFORMATION

*In observation of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are presenting a brief survey of the life of Martin Luther. The series continues with major events in the life of the Reformer that took place after 1517.*

# Unrest in Church and State 1524-1525

## CARLSTADT

**L**uther often had reason to be disappointed with those who were his friends. He was surprised when Dr. Eck first attacked his Ninety-Five Theses and stated that “We had recently formed a great friendship.” But Eck and Luther became determined opponents. Professor Agricola, a frequent house guest and colleague, later lost Luther’s trust when he insisted that the Law had no place in the life of the Christian. But perhaps the greatest disappointment was Dr. Carlstadt.

Carlstadt had been a professor at Wittenberg before Luther arrived, and was somewhat his elder. When Luther began teaching his new-found understanding of faith in Christ and the Gospel of free forgiveness, he found a willing ear in Carlstadt and an eager partner in spreading this message. Carlstadt was convinced by Luther that the outward trappings of worship were of little worth. He thought that many of the religious practices common at that time were vain attempts to instill piety and were actually distractions from the true merits of Christ and harmful to the faith of the simple Christian.

While Luther was hidden away in the Wartburg, Carlstadt took the lead and instituted drastic changes at Wittenberg. Priestly vestments—gone. Church organs—eliminated. Statuary and painted images—smashed and burned. The laity—allowed to take the bread and wine of communion for themselves directly from the altar. And it got even worse when radical outsiders came to Wittenberg from Zwickau proclaiming themselves prophets in direct communication with God. These were able to confuse Melancthon and convince Carlstadt.

Luther felt compelled to return to Wittenberg, against the advice of the Elector. He immediately preached a remarkable series of eight sermons in eight days. Some things are essential, he reminded them; faith and love belong here. Other things can be freely chosen; vestments and images belong there. He



exhorted patience, consideration for the weak brother lest he be confused by rapid changes, and reliance upon the Word to work real change in the heart. Peace was restored, but Carlstadt, unconvinced, left Wittenberg.

## THE PEASANT WAR

Unrest on a much larger scale lay just under the surface of German society. The peasants’ lives were not easy. They were compelled to work hard and for little return. They were burdened with excessive taxes and compulsory labor, often forced to comply with the whims of their lord. The final straw came when a countess forced her peasants to interrupt their harvest to pick her strawberries! A statement was drawn up: the Twelve Articles, which asked for protections against unfair dealings, and for certain rights—for example, the right to fish and hunt in the common forest. These were reasonable, and Luther at first sided with the peasants. He certainly had harsh words to say about the greed and injustice of many of the princes of the land.

But then violence broke out in many places and spread across the Empire. Though the uprising had no central leadership, it met with growing success. Many castles and monasteries were captured and destroyed, and news of atrocities reached Luther. Wittenberg itself was under some threat. It was at this point that Luther wrote a severe pamphlet, indicting the peasants for committing murder and lawlessness while claiming to be a Christian movement. He exhorted the princes to use the sword to be “both judge and executioner” of “the murderous and plundering bands of peasants.” Before this could be published, imperial forces met the peasant army at Frankenhausen and crushed it. Afterwards, when his tract became available for reading, Luther was widely blamed for the bloodbath and lost some of his popular support. But being popular was never his goal; faithfulness to the Word, both in condemning sin and proclaiming the Gospel truth, was.

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



# Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Watertown, South Dakota

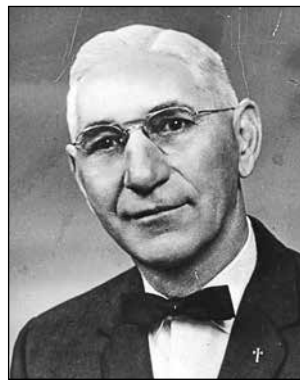


As I am writing this, Watertown is expecting a major weather system to be coming through in the near future. Unfortunately, this will bring an end to the unseasonably warm weather we have been enjoying and give us several inches of snow and ice-cold winds.

Change. If there is anything constant in this life, it would have to be change!

That has certainly been true for Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of Watertown, South Dakota. The first change came in the late 1950's as former WELS members (most coming from congregations in Grover and rural Mazepa Township) met, calling Christian Albrecht to serve them as their pastor. The church they dedicated on July 31, 1960, served as the location for the organizing convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

Many changes have taken place around the church property itself. The once-open fields have given place to housing as the



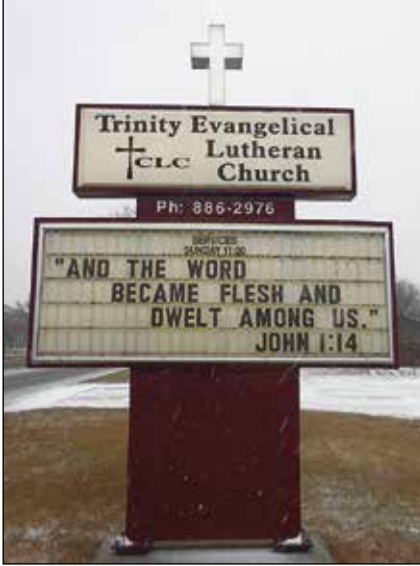
Christian Albrecht,  
first pastor of Trinity.

city has grown. The north/south street that runs past the church now serves as one of Watertown's main business arteries.

As for the church and school campus, the years have seen many changes. The church itself has seen various renovations. Recently a big screen TV was added to the fellowship room; it is connected to the new sound and video system, and allows our services to be broadcast on the internet for our members at a distance. We installed new carpeting, as well as shingles (after last summer's hail storms).

One thing that has not changed over the years is Trinity's commitment to Christian education.

School was first held in the church basement. Later, the house next door to the parsonage was purchased as a teacherage, and was expanded to include a classroom. In 2008, a fellowship hall/school/office addition was built onto the church, and the former classroom/teacherage building was converted to expanded living quarters.



Vacation Bible School children at Trinity, summer of 2017.

Over the years, the congregation has gone to great lengths to keep its school open, whether the student body numbered in the dozens, or just one! That commitment has continued in the last three years, and has resulted in Trinity willingly altering its format to best serve those we have. When the school's only two students moved out of state with their family in 2016, Trinity shifted its efforts to providing a preschool for the following year. Currently there are three students enrolled. Efforts have been made via flyers, word of mouth, and radio to inform the community of the excellent Christian education offered here.



to the biennial CLC Conventions in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Several of our members have attended our synod's Immanuel Lutheran High School and College; currently we have two high schoolers attending. The Women of Trinity meet once a month at the care facility where one of our women resides; this group has sponsored a number of foreign seminary students over the years. The congregation also generously supported one of our youth recently when she went on a CLC Mission Helper Trip; and we are anticipating another one traveling this coming summer.

Watertown is currently the fifth-largest city in our state. No doubt this is due in large part to our location at the crossroads of Interstate 29 and US Highway 212, putting us between the more major cities of Fargo, North Dakota (145 miles north); Sioux Falls, South Dakota (100 miles south); and the Twin Cities, Minnesota (200 miles east). In March of 2017, the city's technical school, Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI), achieved national prominence as the winner of the 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. South Dakota State University (SDSU), located in Brookings, South Dakota (50 miles south), brings in thousands of students from our state and others, and has served as an avenue of outreach for Trinity's sister congregation, Zion Lutheran, located in rural Hidewood Township along I-29 between Watertown and Brookings.

Yes, we have seen many things change related to our congregational life at Trinity. But no matter what change occurs, our trust is in the Lord Who does not ever change! With His blessing and forgiveness, guidance, and strength, we will move forward with the work He has put before us here in the Watertown, South Dakota, area.

Another factor that has not changed at Trinity is the people's dedication to the Word of God. As the membership (numbering just over one hundred souls, Sunday attendance around fifty) appreciates their God-given forgiveness in the Gospel, forgiveness which the Law has revealed they desperately need, they continue to look for ways to pass God's Word forward. Vacation Bible School has become a yearly calendar item, seeing a goodly assortment of neighborhood children participating. Sunday school has also continued to be conducted regularly for our children, especially those who are not able, for various reasons, to be involved in our Christian grade school. Last school year saw the beginnings of our nursery Sunday School (ages birth to 3), with a couple of our members helping parents to get their little ones off to a good start with their Savior. (For more on this, see one of the feature articles in the July 2017 issue of the *Branches* magazine, pages 12-13.)

The seeds of involvement with church work outside our congregation were planted already with the 1960 convention. Trinity has been blessed to have members to serve as delegates to our West Central Delegate Conferences and also



**Paul Krause** is pastor of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Watertown, South Dakota, and Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hidewood Township, South Dakota.



# Update on the Work in Togo

The CLC's involvement in Togo began in September of 2001 when Missionary David Koenig began correspondence courses with Kossi Blewu. Kossi was a school teacher and a member of a Baptist church. Missionary Koenig visited with Kossi in March of 2002, and it was clear at that point that Kossi had come to a proper, Biblical understanding of the sacraments. Kossi continued training with Missionary Koenig during Koenig's annual visits to Togo. Kossi also visited and attended classes at the Bible school in Nigeria while Missionary Koenig was living and teaching there. In December of 2008, Missionary Matthew Ude publicly ordained Kossi.



Following his ordination, Pastor Kossi began establishing preaching stations in and around Lome, Togo, as the Lord provided him opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. He was also working full-time as a teacher and school headmaster. In 2013, Pastor Kossi concluded that he could no longer continue with his secular employment due to the demands of the ministry. He quit his teaching job and began training men to serve as pastors of the preaching stations that were growing



under his care. There are currently three congregations and six preaching stations in the Mission Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne au Togo (MELC).

In February/March of 2017, Missionary Todd Ohlmann spent two weeks in Togo working with Pastor Kossi. During his visit, Missionary Ohlmann spent several days teaching and reviewing with four men who had been training in the newly

Top: exterior of Pastor Kossi's church in Togo. Above right: current students of the Mt. Horeb Lutheran Bible Institute (Pastor Kossi on the far left).



established Mt. Horeb Lutheran Bible Institute. Missionary Ohlmann reports: "During our four-day review of the CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose, it was clear that they had a good understanding of our Biblical positions on some of the doctrines that separate us from others—such as Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Election, End Times, and Fellowship." Missionary Ohlmann was then able to participate in the graduation service of these four men who are now serving as pastors, and one woman who is serving in women's and children's ministry. (You can read about the graduation ceremony in the September 2017 issue of the *Spokesman*).

Pastor Kossi has now begun training the next class of students. The new class includes six men ranging in age from 30-56. Kossi and Missionary Ohlmann talked at length about curriculum ideas and they are working on developing a more systematic approach to training. This is a positive step forward in the overall training program to prepare men for the pastoral ministry.

Pastor Kossi has also been taking care of thirty-nine children near his congregation in Lome. These are not orphans, but children who have lost their fathers and are living with their mothers with no additional financial assistance from other family members. The MELC is providing help with a weekly



nutrition program, clothing, school supplies, and a weekly Bible school. The MELC has also just recently been approved by the Togo government to begin caring for orphans. Through KINSHIP sponsorship, they are now caring for six orphans.

Pastor Kossi has also established a charitable, humanitarian, agricultural organization (NGO) that has been officially recognized by the Togo government. This will allow him to receive aid money from foreign entities to purchase land, equipment, seed and livestock for the purpose of humanitarian and social causes. He may also qualify for some government grants for the project after he has acquired the land and can demonstrate that he has financial backing from donors. This may help the MELC meet some of their long-term financial needs.

Pastor Kossi has many plans and prayers for the church in Togo. He is constantly looking for new ways to do evangelism and has made training men for the pastoral ministry a top priority. Please pray that the Lord will continue to bless Pastor Kossi and the MELC.



**Robert Sauers** is pastor of Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Morris, Minnesota, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions

Top: interior of Pastor Kossi's church. Above: some of the members of the church, including children cared for by the congregation and supported by Project KINSHIP.

# “BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS FEBRUARY 2018

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

Date	Verse	Reading	Comments
Feb 1	TLH 603	Isaiah 25:1-9	The “shroud” that covers all people (death) is taken away by the Lord. He is our refuge.
Feb 2	TLH 277	Matthew 11:25-30	We are Christians because God has made it so, not by our own works or effort.
Feb 3	TLH 353; LSB 690	Romans 9:6-16	Our salvation depends on God’s great mercy.
Feb 5	TLH 379	Genesis 22:1-18	The Lord provided a substitute (a ram) so that Isaac would not be slain. Jesus is our substitute, also provided by God, so we need not face eternal death.
Feb 6	WS 746	Judges 2:11-18	God’s patience is on display here. He helped Israel in their distress even though they turned away from Him repeatedly.
Feb 7	TLH 426; LSB 754	Psalms 17:1-15	The believer appeals to the Lord for protection from the enemy.
Feb 8	TLH 311	Job 11:7-20	Job’s friends believed his misfortune was a punishment for his evil. Not so, but we could be reminded that the repentant who trust the Lord are secure in Him.
Feb 9	TLH 534	Isaiah 30:15-26	The Lord is a God of justice, so He cannot and will not leave you, His dear children, without hope and help. That would not be right!
Feb 10	TLH 515	Matthew 15:22-31	Those who trust in Jesus will never be ashamed!
Feb 12	TLH 399; LSB 845	Romans 12:9-21	Faith in Christ expresses itself in acts of love.
Feb 13	TLH 91	Genesis 26:1-5	The promise of a Savior that was made to Abraham is repeated to his son Isaac. God hadn’t forgotten.
Feb 14	TLH 145	Psalms 19:7-14	On this Ash Wednesday we ask the Lord to forgive our faults and keep us from unrepentant sin.
Feb 15	TLH 345; WS 756	Job 14:1-17	Job struggles under the burdens that have been placed on him, yet he waits for the Lord and prays that his sins would be forgotten.
Feb 16	WS 761; LSB 849	Isaiah 35:1-10	Jesus comes and brings pleasure eternal!
Feb 17	TLH 329	Matthew 17:1-13	Jesus, the Son of God, predicts His suffering at the hands of His enemies—suffering that He endured to save us from our sins.
Feb 19	TLH 60; LSB 411	Romans 13:8-14	Good news! Your salvation is near! Therefore put away the deeds of darkness and live like children of the day.
Feb 20	WS 778; TLH 374	Genesis 28:10-16	Our ladder (way) to heaven is none other than Jesus Christ.
Feb 21	TLH 140	Psalms 22:1-22	This psalm of David foretells the suffering and death of Christ. See how God loved you and planned the details of your salvation so carefully in advance.
Feb 22	TLH 360; LSB 430	Psalms 22:23-31	Let Christ be praised for the great salvation He won for us on the cross! Proclaim the Good News to all generations!
Feb 23	TLH 61	Isaiah 40:1-11	The glory of the Lord is revealed in Christ, who comforts us, shepherds us, and lifts us up forever.
Feb 24	TLH 168	Matthew 21:1-16	At His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is shown to be our King and Savior.
Feb 26	TLH 198	Romans 16:17-27	Satan is crushed underfoot by our Lord Jesus Christ!
Feb 27	TLH 437	Genesis 32:9-32	Jacob’s faith is evident during both the prayer and wrestling match wherein He holds God to His promises. Our faith, too, holds God to what He has said.
Feb 28	TLH 382	Psalms 25:1-22	We rely on the Lord not to remember the sins of our past, and He doesn’t.

# The Day a Whole Congregation was Confirmed

From the Missionary's Blog, December 11, 2011: "Today the entire congregation at Moi's Bridge, Kenya, was confirmed, and adult confirmands received the Lord's Supper together as a KCLC church for the first time.

"Great day! It couldn't get more eventful if it tried today. I was pleasantly surprised to see one of our church members rejoin us who comes from very far away. Aggry makes the longest journey of anybody, even by bicycle. He had been unable to make it for these last two months because of a motorbike accident, but he has fully recovered and was very happy to be with us today.

"I shared a sermon based on the words of Moses in Deuteronomy as the children of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land. It will only be the Word of God, bound closely to the people's hearts, that will sustain and bless them in the days ahead. Four young girls, one boy, and an older man (Mzee) were baptized in the same service. After this we celebrated the confirmation of eighteen people, ranging in age from twelve up to eighty and beyond, and consequently shared together in the Lord's Table. There are a number of others who were not able to make it to church today due to circumstances beyond their control. Everyone was very grateful and humbled by all of the greetings, prayers, and congratulations from their brothers and sisters back in the U.S. 'Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love,' no matter how many miles, continents, or oceans may get in the way. There was no room for sad farewells today, only reason to celebrate.



Members of the Lutheran church at Moi's Bridge.

"For now, I am simply astounded at what God can do and has done in the hearts of His people. To be called to be a part of that work, even though there is much responsibility, heartache, and trouble that comes along with it, is a privilege and an honor.

"Am I looking forward to coming home? Of course. Will I miss this place? Sure. But I know that wherever the Lord may lead us, we will have a fine time, later on, catching up in our permanent home, which has been prepared long ago.

"So for now, it's time to pack it all up once again and hit the road. Time to prepare for the transition back to life in the states, which I've found isn't always so quick and easy. Meantime, pray that the work of God would carry on mightily here, and that the many children in our church and school would grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

[Author's update: The congregation at Moi's Bridge still enjoys the fellowship that they publicly confessed six years ago. While some members have come and gone, the core group of believers remains faithful in ministering to each other and the surrounding community. They have the opportunity to share the truth of God's Word with the 280-300 students who attend the elementary school at Moi's Bridge each year.]



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



New sign going up at Moi's Bridge church.

## SEEN IN PASSING

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

### **Atheists Attack Clergy Housing Allowance.**

A Wisconsin district court judge has ruled – for the second time – that the right traditionally enjoyed by pastors to exclude their housing allowance from taxable income is unconstitutional. Judge Barbara Crabb of the District Court for Western Wisconsin, in a ruling issued in October, said that such an exclusion constitutes a government “establishment of religion.” A similar ruling issued by the same judge in 2013 was subsequently overturned by the Seventh Circuit Court. The atheist organization “Freedom From Religion Foundation” was behind both efforts. Reilly, Peter. “Clergy Housing Tax Break Ruled Unconstitutional – Again.” *Taxes*. Forbes.com, 7 Oct. 2017. Web. 13 Dec. 2017.

### **Missouri Synod Publishes New Dogmatics.**

Almost one hundred years after Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod has produced a new dogmatics text. Entitled *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, the two-volume work comprising fifteen chapters and over 1300 pages was released in December, 2017. The work was edited by Dr. Samuel Nafzger, with over sixty contributors from across the LC-MS. The new textbook will certainly come under intense scrutiny from confessional Lutheran seminaries, many of which have relied upon Pieper’s *Dogmatics* for generations. *Reporter*. LCMS.org, 11 Dec. 2017. Web. 13 Dec. 2017.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**NOMINATIONS FOR ILC PRESIDENT:** The Board of Regents announces the following nominations for the office of President of Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary: Paul Naumann and Steven Sippert. The term of this call is for two years, extending to the end of Academic Year 2020. All comments from members of CLC congregations regarding these candidates are to be received by March 15, 2018 (postmarked by March 1), to Dr. Daniel Schierenbeck, 23 SE 240 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093; email: danschierenbeck@gmail.com.

### **“A Secular Tsunami.”**

In an article for *Real Clear Religion*, Cardinal Donald Wuerl said that he and other American Christians are increasingly being asked a question that no one would have thought to ask even a decade ago: “What do you people of faith think you bring to our society?” The question reflects the increasing marginalization of Christians in America, and a new skepticism on the part of unbelievers toward the value of Christian faith and morality in society. “Cultural and societal changes have gone through a quantum leap in the past 15 to 20 years,” said Wuerl. “As an example, look at the secular tsunami that washes away cultural landmarks such as marriage, family, common good, and objective right and wrong. To sense just how far we have stumbled, one need only consider what passes for ‘breaking news’ nowadays: a lack of fundamental respect for the dignity of life; a seemingly relentless campaign to redefine constitutional religious liberty to mean nothing more than freedom to worship in the sanctuary of your choice; the codification of politically correct redefinitions of marriage, family, abortion, and religious freedom into law; and criticism of those who fail to support these re-definitions as purveyors of ‘hate speech.’” The cardinal lamented that, even on Catholic campuses, groups advocating for traditional marriage between a man and a woman were

coming under fire from LGBT groups. Wuerl, Donald. “Silencing the Voices of Faith.” *News*. RealClearReligion.org, 20 Nov. 2017. Web. 13 Dec. 2017.

### **Church-Supported Coffee Shop Denied Tax-Exempt Status.**

In another skirmish of the culture wars, the IRS recently ruled against a church’s claim that its church-supported coffee shop was a means of local outreach. The coffee shop is located in the community, not on the church premises, and is operated independently of the church. The government issued a heavily-redacted “private letter ruling” that did not reveal the name or location of the church. The IRS, in its ruling, stated that the coffee shop was not different enough from purely commercial ventures to warrant “church” status. This was in spite of the fact that the church had pledged 100% of its profits “to community ministries, other local, national or international non-profits or organizations, or those in financial need.” Smith, Samuel. “IRS Denies Christian Coffee Shop Charity Tax-Exempt Status.” *Politics*. ChristianPost.com, 29 Nov. 2017. Web. 11 Dec. 2017.