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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



*“He is not here;
for He is risen, as He said.”*

--Matthew 28:6



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Easter Images

Do you ever get tired of looking at pictures of bygone days? Perhaps. It all depends on whose pictures they are. If they are someone else's pictures of people you don't know very well or people who have had no impact on your life, then one look is enough. However, if they are your pictures and contain images of people who have been involved in your life, then you might like to look at them over and over again.

Here's a picture: the sun rising upon Calvary, its rays lighting three empty crosses. In the distance, we see a group of women making their way to a cemetery. Are you tired of that picture?

Here's another: soldiers lying trembling on the ground, and before them is an empty tomb with the stone rolled away. Are you tired of that picture?

And another: a woman stands near the grave, weeping, while a man stands near her and says, "Mary." Are you tired of that picture?

One more: people are gathered together in a room with locked doors; a man is standing in their midst, showing them His hands and feet and saying, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself." (Luke 24:39)

We never get tired of the images that Scripture presents to our minds: images of a triumphant, living Savior; images of people whose lives were wondrously changed by this truth. Men, women, and children are never the same after the risen Lord is revealed to their hearts. As it says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

We do not tire of such images because of their deep impact on our lives. Our whole life—our thoughts, our behavior, our hope, our death—everything rests upon

the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. What sad creatures we would be if this were not true. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:19-20) Therefore, we are not to be pitied.

In fact, we pity those who do not believe. Who among us knows what our lives would be like, if we did not believe that Jesus has risen? How miserable we would be, if there were no real images of the living Savior in our minds and hearts. Like the world, we would be living in "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies." (Galatians 5:19-20) This wretchedness would plague our consciences, leaving us in constant fear of death. All thanks and praise to God, Who has rescued us from our old life of wickedness and has achieved a spiritual metamorphosis within us!

God grant unto us that we never get tired of hearing the Easter message. May the mental images of the Easter story fill our minds and hearts, so that we rejoice in the truth that He "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 4:25-5:2 ESV)



John Pfeiffer is retired from the pastoral and teaching ministry. He is a former president of Immanuel Lutheran College.

Confirmation Crossroads

In the closing scene of the movie *Cast Away*, Tom Hanks's character is standing at a crossroads in Texas. After being stranded alone on an island for four years, he has returned to civilization to find that he has been declared dead and his girlfriend has moved on and gotten married to another man. As the movie ends, Hanks's character is at a crossroads (both literally and figuratively) and needs to decide what direction he is going to take in his life.

We too face "crossroads" moments throughout our lives. After high school, graduates need to begin making decisions about careers and/or college. After dating someone for many months, you reach that crossroads in your relationship and begin to wonder, "Is this the one?"

This spring, many young teenagers in our congregations will be faced with a crossroads moment in their lives. As infants and children, their Christian parents had them baptized into Christ and raised in the Christian faith. Their pastor used Luther's *Small Catechism* to teach them about the Christian faith and Jesus as their Savior. Now they are asked to "confirm" whether they believe what they have been taught is true and whether they intend, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to remain faithful to these teachings throughout their lives.

This "confirmation crossroads" is not intended to be a one-time event for our fourteen-year-old members. In Jeremiah, the Lord urges us all to regularly examine the path we are on: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16) As exciting as "new" things can be, as Bible-believing Christians we are to stand in the crossroads and ask for the "old paths." The Lord says the "old path" is the "good way" in which you will find "rest for your souls."

Standing at the crossroads with our confirmands, we can follow the "old paths" of our Christian faith and confession back to Martin Luther. Luther followed the "old paths" in

Scripture back to the Apostle Paul who taught that we are made right with God not by our works, but through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22). The Apostle Paul was at a crossroads with the popular teachings of Judaism of his day, but he followed the "old paths" back to Abraham, whose faith in the promises of God was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3,5). And wherein lay Abraham's faith? In the "old paths" that went back to the Garden of Eden and God's very first promise of a Savior from the Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).

As our confirmands are being examined and give their confirmation vows, imagine them standing at a crossroads with a long, well-worn path before them. As you hear them confessing publicly the same Christian faith to which you hold, imagine yourself further on down that same old path. Further down the "old path" you see Christian parents and grandparents, Martin Luther, the Apostle Paul, Abraham, and Eve.

Where is this "old path" leading? You know, because as you have walked this old path, you have heard Jesus tell you that He is the only Way to the Father. This old path is leading to heaven. Like a trailblazer, Jesus has cleared out all the obstacles of your sin and is leading you by His Word on this path to Paradise. Through His Word and Lord's Supper, Jesus Himself is feeding you, giving you the strength to continue on this "good way." On this "old path" you find "rest for your souls," because Jesus is forgiving your sins and giving you the gift of eternal life.

As our confirmands stand at this important crossroads in their faith, pray for them by name. Pray that, together with you, they may remain on this "old path" all the days of their lives as Jesus leads all His believers to eternal life in heaven. May God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.



Nathan Pfeiffer is pastor of Berea Lutheran Church in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota.

This series offers an overview of the chief teachings of the Christian church.

The Knowledge of God

It takes hard work to become an atheist. Truly denying the existence of any god takes work because it is not what comes naturally.

God has placed many witnesses into the world to testify that He exists. Look to the heavens and see the wonder of galaxy upon galaxy. It takes work to deny that some higher being has created the universe.

Study the mechanical design of skeleton, tendons, and muscles in your body, or the self-focusing eye. It takes work to deny that there is a powerful and wise being who designed and made all of these things—things we can only mimic with our inventions while never matching the original.

The witness of the creation around us works in tandem with each person's conscience to say, "There is someone wiser and more powerful than you who is the source of all this wonder." This is the *natural* knowledge of God.

In contrast to the atheist, it does not take much work to be an agnostic. An agnostic does not deny what the natural knowledge of God teaches—he acknowledges a god but believes him to be unknowable and unattainable.

The agnostic cannot see a way to identify and know God because he doesn't get past the natural knowledge of God, which is limited and incomplete. To know who the one and only true God is requires the *revealed* knowledge of God, namely, all that He tells us about Himself in Scripture.

Every truth that can be learned from the natural knowledge of God is also revealed in God's Word. We see God's creative wonder and then God tells us, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.*" (Psalm 19:1) We see God's attributes appearing in His creation and God affirms, "*Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.*" (Romans 1:20)

Only the revealed knowledge teaches the full extent of sin, "*I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'*" (Romans 7:7) Only the revealed knowledge of God teaches us about His undeserved love, salvation through Jesus, and the faith which the Holy Spirit creates. "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.*" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

The natural knowledge of God is a good starting point for a conversation that can progress toward the revealed knowledge of God. For example, when Paul spoke to the Athenians, he began with their multitude of gods—evidence of a natural knowledge of God—and preached his way to Christ and the resurrection. (Acts 17:22-34).

Standing under the conviction of God's revealed Law, the sinner knows he needs help, but the natural knowledge of God provides none. The Good News about Jesus is the power of God for salvation—only the Gospel saves, and that comes only through the revealed knowledge.

We may spend time in God's creation, marvel at the beauty He created, and revel in the solitude of sitting by a gurgling mountain stream. Time spent in the midst of God's creation may encourage reflection and meditation, but time spent in God's creation cannot, of itself, strengthen our faith, edify our hearts, or build the bond of Christ. Only the revealed knowledge of God in His Word can do this.

Appreciate what creation and conscience teach you and then dive into the revealed knowledge of God in Scripture to find your Savior, Who alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).



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The Crimson Worm

“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men and despised by the people.”
(Psalm 22:6)

Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm, that is, a psalm which speaks prophetically of the Messiah. Written nearly a thousand years before the birth of Christ, this psalm vividly describes His death on the cross: the ridicule He endured, verses 7-8; His dislocated bones, verses 14-15; His pierced hands and feet, verse 16; and His garments divided by lot, verse 18. Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 while dying on the cross, saying, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

In Psalm 22:6 the Messiah also says, “But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people.” These words clearly describe the Savior’s abject humility; His willingness to endure the shame of crucifixion, a form of execution reserved for only the vilest criminals and lowest slaves. And Jesus was a reproach to many, treated as if He were nothing more than a lowly worm or repulsive maggot.

Yet, more may be intended by “I am a worm” than lowliness or loathsomeness. The Hebrew word for “worm” in Psalm 22:6 refers to a specific kind of worm: the *Coccus ilicis*, more commonly called the Crimson Worm.

The Crimson Worm is a remarkable insect. The female gives birth only once. When preparing to do so, she attaches herself firmly to a tree, then spins a crimson-colored cocoon. Once her young are born, they begin to feed on her body. Shortly afterwards, she dies. At the moment of her death, the mother releases a crimson dye that stains the tree and her offspring. Incredibly, three days later, her body turns white and falls from the tree.

Some have referred to the Crimson Worm as “the Gospel in a Bug.” And it is easy to understand why. Consider the parallels. First, as the Crimson Worm attaches herself to a tree; so, in the truest sense, Jesus Christ attached Himself to the cross. No one forced Him there; not the clamor of

the crowd nor the schemes of the religious leaders nor the injustice of Pilate. He went to that tree willingly—fastened by love, not nails.

Second, as the Crimson Worm reproduces or gives life only once; so also, Jesus Christ died once-for-all to give life to the world. As stated in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”



Third, at death, the Crimson Worm stains her young with crimson dye. So also, when Jesus died on the cross, His blood atoned for the sins of the world. His bloodstains washed away our sin-stains—in the words of the hymnist: “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.” (TLH 157:1)

Fourth, as the offspring of the Crimson Worm feed on her body for nourishment; so also, in a spiritual sense, through faith, we “Seed” on the Lord’s body and blood in His Holy Supper—receiving along with the bread and wine the very body and blood, given and shed, for the forgiveness of our sins.

Fifth, after three days, the dead body of the Crimson Worm turns white and falls from the tree. So also, according to the unanimous testimony of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ rose triumphantly from the dead three days after His crucifixion.

Here truly lies an Old Testament Gem—to realize that in the Hebrew of Psalm 22:6 the Messiah is not only saying “I am a worm,” but “I am like the Crimson Worm.”



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Christian Prayer Works

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” (James 5:16-18)

“Prayer works.” As prevalent as this expression has become in our society today, discernment requires one to ask, “What do you mean by ‘prayer’? What do you mean by ‘works’?” For many, prayer is nothing more than the practice of positive thinking, with a little divine help thrown in for good measure. Some say, “Think positive thoughts, experience positive feelings, and you can expect positive results in your life.” The claim is that it doesn’t even matter what “divine power” or “higher being” one prays to, as long as it’s sincere. Many also believe that prayer works simply because of the activity itself. It’s seen merely as an activity to better one’s physical and mental health by lowering stress levels and improving mood. What does God’s Word have to say about the working of prayer?

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (vs. 16) Immediately we recognize that not all prayer works. James says that it’s the prayer of a “righteous man” that avails much. But what is a “righteous man”? James is certainly not saying that a person must be sinless for his prayers to be effective. How do we know? Because at the opening, James connects prayer to the confession of sins. What does God’s Word have to say about those who freely confess their sins? *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) Therefore, the “righteous man” whose prayer avails much is the Christian.

At the same time, James is also careful to point out that it’s not anything special in the Christian himself that avails in prayer. Using the case of Elijah’s effective prayers, James says, *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.”* (vs. 17) What

are we to take from this? Namely that it’s not in the activity of the praying one, but in the One Who acts on the prayer that makes it effective. It’s not in the one who speaks the prayer, but in the One Who hears and answers it. And prayer’s effectiveness is not in the one who confesses his sin, but in the One Who takes away those confessed sins through Jesus’ blood and righteousness. And therein lies

For many, prayer is nothing more than the practice of positive thinking, with a little divine help thrown in for good measure.

the reason why only Christian prayer works. *“For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens.”* (Psalm 96:5) *“It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”* (Romans 8:34)

Some time ago a CLC pastor shared a statement from a lay member whose child was in the path of a hurricane: “I am praying for a weakening and a turning away from the coast.” The pastor then shared the following thoughts: “Pretty audacious to think that one man’s prayer can literally alter the course of a hurricane. Of course it’s true, when that prayer is offered to the Lord of heaven and earth. But we don’t think in those terms as much or as often as we should.”

What a blessing it is for the Christian to have the confidence we confess at Sunday worship: *“Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.”* (Psalm 124:8) And what a treasure it is for the Christian to have that effective help always available through prayer!



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OUR LITURGICAL LEGACY

*Ever wonder why we Lutherans use the form of worship we do?
In this series we examine the depth and meaning of the various elements of
our worship service, beginning with the history of Christian worship itself.*

Liturgy between Reformation and Now

Liturgical changes between the Reformation and today were often due to national differences and historical influences. In Sweden, for instance, Gustav Vasa led the revolt against King Christian II of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. This insurrection ended with the 1523 election of Vasa as the Swedish king when Sweden seceded from the Kalmar Union and the modern country of Sweden was established as separate from and independent of the other Scandinavian countries.

King Gustav I implemented a break with the Roman Catholic Church by exiling the Catholic Archbishop, Gustav Trolle. That, along with additional clashes with Pope Clement VII, led not only to a break with the Roman Catholic Church, but also to the introduction of Lutheranism and the removal of Catholic errors in the liturgy in Swedish churches. In 1531, Olavus Petri published the Swedish Mass, which was similar to Luther's German Mass but using the Swedish language. Additional modifications and additions to the Swedish Mass were made in the following years, including the addition of the sermon as a regular part of the liturgy.

The 1530's were not a good decade for the Roman Catholic Church. Not only King Gustav I of Sweden, but also King Henry VIII of England ended their countries' submission to the pope. The English Reformation produced an English-language liturgy called the *Book of Common Prayer*. The content and arrangement of that liturgy were influenced by and similar to that of the Lutheran liturgy.

English church liturgy, however, was subsequently tossed about by tumultuous political events in England. After the death of Henry VIII, a second *Book of Common Prayer*, which reflected the influence of Calvinism (including the statement that the "presence of Christ is not in the sacrament, but only in the heart of the believer") was introduced. Following the 1547 death of King Edward VI (the son of Henry VIII) and the nine-day reign of Lady Jane Grey, Edward's half-sister Mary Tudor became queen. She was staunchly Catholic.

"Bloody Mary" persecuted, executed, and imprisoned Protestant leaders and returned the Church of England to Roman Catholic jurisdiction and liturgy. However, in 1604, under James I, the fourth *Book of Common Prayer* became the official liturgy of the Church of England. It largely replaced Catholic elements of the liturgy with Protestant ones. However, the theology of the Protestant liturgies was more Puritan (mostly Calvinistic) than Lutheran.

The political and religious chaos of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) resulted in the functional disintegration of church life in western European countries. Luther D. Reed (*The Lutheran Liturgy*) says, "Ordered church life was disrupted, churches were closed, wrecked, or defiled. Liturgical books, music, and sacred vessels were destroyed, together with vernacular translations of the Scriptures."

Subsequently, the efforts to restore orderly church life led to what some have characterized as "dead orthodoxy" and legalistic rules for church attendance. Non-attendance at regular services resulted in fines, and state churches became more or less an arm of the civil government. Church attendance was largely a civil duty like following the speed limit laws in our day, and tended to have little to do with actual spiritual involvement in everyday life. Sermons tended to be long, academic, and lacking in edification. Pastors considered their duties to have been fulfilled when they had "gone through the motions" of liturgy and preaching, without any consideration of the spiritual effect on the congregation. It was comparable to a teacher falsely thinking he had successfully taught merely by talking about his subject, in spite of the fact that no actual learning occurred among the pupils.

There was, understandably, a reaction to this "dead orthodoxy." Unfortunately, the reaction to an error is very often just an opposite error. For example, the opposite of the error of legalism is the error of antinomianism. The erroneous reaction to "dead orthodoxy" was Pietism.

Reacting to the sterile, largely perfunctory aspect of church

life after the Thirty Years' War, the pietistic movement appealed to many Christians. Pietism emphasized personal and subjective religious experience, but it did so at the cost of eliminating formal worship and doctrinal instruction. It focused on subjective experience (emotion) rather than intellectual recognition and acceptance of objective Biblical truth. As Fred L. Precht says in *Lutheran Worship—History and Practice*, “Reflective of the mystical spiritualism of John Tauler (1300-61) and others, regeneration (a biological image) became the central subject instead of the Word of God and justification (a forensic image), so highly stressed by the reformers and orthodox theologians.” Pietism espoused many slogans emphasizing subjective and emotional worship and eschewing formal worship. They spouted such things as “life versus doctrine” and “Holy Spirit versus the office of the ministry.”

The effect of Pietism on liturgy was predictable: the means of grace (Word and Sacrament) were undervalued or neglected, preaching focused on personal experience rather than revealed truth, and it tended to be little more than admonitions to sanctified living. The pastor was viewed not as a holder of the Office of the Ministry, but merely as a witness to and an example of a godly life. In its more extreme manifestations, Pietism rejected formal liturgy altogether. Formal prayers were replaced by impromptu extemporaneous prayers. Hymns focused on human religious experience rather than the objective facts of redemption through Christ. That dichotomy is still with us today, differentiating Lutheran hymns from “worship songs.” Pietism overlooked divinely revealed doctrine and focused instead on subjective emotional religious experience, and this misplaced focus led to religious unionism based on fellowship with those who felt the same rather than those who believed the same.

The intellectual vacuum created by Pietism allowed the philosophical movement of the Enlightenment (17th and 18th century European movement) to invade the church in the form of Rationalism. The effect of Rationalism in the church was to establish man's reason, rather than God's revelation, as the means of determining truth. Rationalists rejected Biblical revelation, and some even charged the human authors of Scripture with deliberate falsehood. Pietism had rejected the forms of liturgical worship; Rationalism rejected also the content. It sought novelty instead of the fixed forms of liturgy, and rejected the idea of man's sinfulness along with pretty much anything supernatural because such things were not discernable by man's reason. Man's seeking of moral perfection was enjoined rather than proclaiming God's

grace in the reconciliation to God that we have in Christ. The church became more like a lecture hall where decidedly non-religious content was proclaimed. For example, one sermon on Luke 2 (the birth of Christ) espoused the virtues of modern agricultural practices and methods of animal husbandry. The redemption accomplished by Christ was largely ignored in favor of lectures about how to achieve a “happy” life. Biblical miracles were “explained” by natural scientific processes, or else rejected as altogether false. The bodily resurrection of Christ was denied. Original sin was disavowed, and objectionable behavior was viewed as merely the result of natural external influences on the individual.

Even in churches where Rationalism ruled, some form of liturgy still existed. However, it was corrupted by Rationalistic philosophy. For example, an 1808 agenda of the time had the following as the form of distribution: “Eat this bread; may the spirit of devotion rest upon you with all its blessings. Drink a little wine; moral power does not reside in this wine, but in you, in the teachings of God, and in God.” One form of Baptism stated, “Water, the best means for cleansing the body, is the most fitting emblem of soul-purity. May thy heart remain pure and thy life unspotted, thou still innocent angel!”

In time, God graciously restored to the German Church and church liturgy the sound theology of Luther and biblical Lutheran liturgy. It was also at this time that many confessional Lutherans migrated to America. This period is known as the confessional revival of the 19th century. Claus Harms (1778-1855) warned German Lutherans about the dangers of the “papacy of reason.” Liturgies were revised to restore the best forms of truly biblical worship.

By the grace of God, we today have such biblical and edifying liturgies in sources such as those derived from Wilhelm Loehe's *Agenda for Christian Parishes*. Loehe looked through two hundred old agendas to compile the best possible usage, and it is that agenda that most confessional Lutheran churches in America use today. Our *The Lutheran Hymnal*, for example, uses these forms.

May God graciously grant that we recognize, are edified by, and continue to use the gift of biblical Lutheran liturgy which He has given us.



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Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church Okabena, Minnesota

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

In one sense, there's nothing new in Okabena. The same Lord Who was faithful in the days of Psalm 127 is still faithful year after year and month after month. What is new are the myriad ways God carries this out in His Church today.

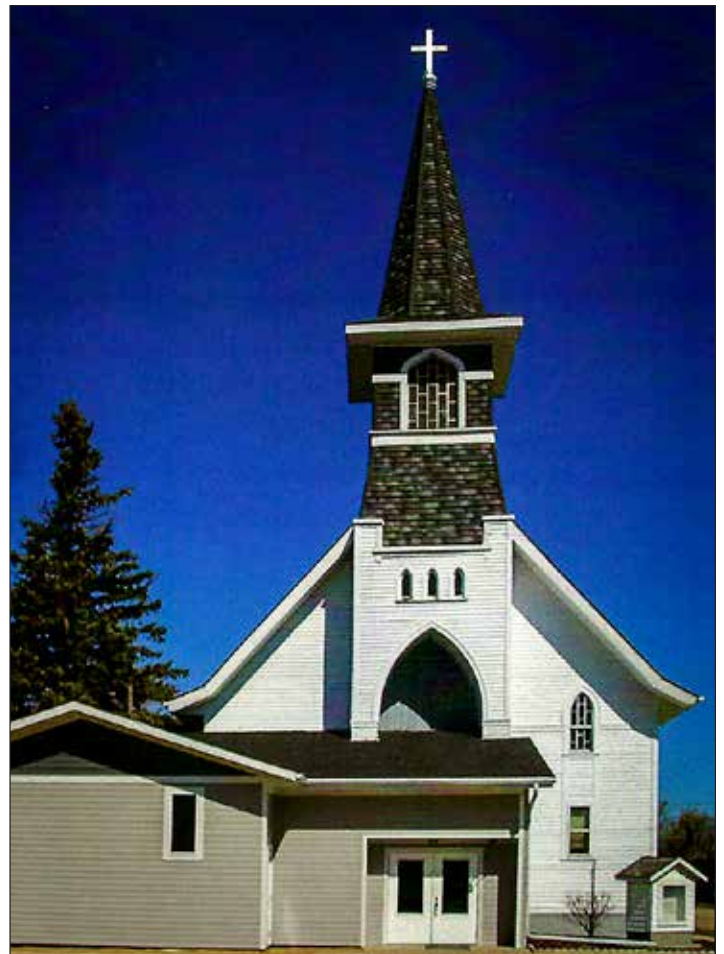
THE KINGDOM

In a time when less than half of Americans identify as Christian, and in a rural area where the population is relatively sparse and generally static, the Lord has blessed us with new contacts and members through our Christian day school. This year's K-8 enrollment stands at sixteen. Of those, one half are non-members. Other schools in our fellowship have much larger enrollments and a greater percentage of non-members, but for a small town (population less than two hundred), this is obviously the Lord's doing. The Lord Who builds the house also supplies the resources, including three fulltime teachers, Ruth Eigenberg, Ben Hansen, and Lana Strike.

The trend in communities like ours is for churches to consolidate or close for lack of people. This is especially true the further our nation veers away from Christianity. The spiritual decline in America is both sad and a great opportunity at the same time. The mission field is everywhere, from the people who live next door to the souls in darkness overseas. Only eternity will fully reveal how the Lord built His house.

Some of the Christian day school contacts were the result of outreach efforts, such as vacation Bible school, handing out materials in area parades, and a free ice cream social on July 4. Others came via members who shared their faith. In the end, it is God's doing, not ours.

Churches have groaned under the weight of COVID-19



restrictions and regulations. Yet, even in the midst of the pandemic, the Lord builds His house. He provided the technology and the resources for us to livestream our worship services. This became an important way to nurture and preserve faith at a time when nursing homes were in lockdown and social contact was forbidden. The live stream has become an outreach vehicle to non-members in the area and across the world. The Lord builds the house.



Top: Christian day school students and teachers. Left: St. John's parade float. Center: some of the past day school teachers at St. John's. Right: VBS children at recess.

God builds faith and love through the Gospel. In addition to worship services, Sunday school, and Bible class, our ladies have done a variety of book studies. An informal, lay-led Bible class is held weekly on Tuesday afternoons.

THE PROPERTY

For years, we've discussed installing an elevator that would make our multi-level building more accessible. As with other churches of this vintage, it seemed like a good idea at the time to build the sanctuary high enough above ground that worshipers would go "up" to the Lord's house, just as believers in Bible times went "up" to Jerusalem. Stairs were less of a problem in 1914 than they are today, because people with disabilities were usually homebound. Thankfully, that has changed. The effort to overcome the difficulty of church and basement steps remained until the Lord provided a place for the elevator to be installed as well as the resources to make it happen. Finished in 2020, the lift receives even more use than anticipated.

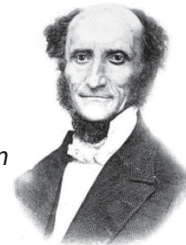
THE PAST

Thanks to COVID, the celebration of our church's 125th anniversary and the 25th anniversary of the Christian day school wasn't possible until last summer. Looking back on 126 years, it's hard to imagine a time in history that witnessed a greater shift in technology, standard of living, methods of farming, transportation, communication, and so forth. But the main thing never changes. The same Savior Who came to bless His people as they gathered at the end of the 19th century comes through Word and Sacrament with every spiritual blessing today. As the Lord quietly transfers His people from the church on earth to the church in heaven, He continues to build His House.



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

One of the hallmarks of the Lutheran Church is its proper understanding and application of the Bible's two main teachings—Law and Gospel. Dr. C.F.W. Walther's seminal work, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, is the basis for this two-year series. Note: page numbers given are accurate for the 1929 and 1986 editions of the book.



Breaking Bad Habits Doesn't Make You a Christian

“*T*hesis XVI—In twelfth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the preacher tries to make people believe that they are truly converted as soon as they have become rid of certain vices and engage in certain works of piety and virtuous practices.”

I once met a woman who had been baptized seven times. She asked me to baptize her an eighth time, because in her estimation the first seven “hadn’t took.”

Over the years, she had attended various churches which confused the word *repentance* with outward piety, as if the Law were the standard by which one knew whether one was truly converted. She struggled with a variety of worldly addictions. After each personal relapse, she was re-baptized with the guilt-trip blessing: “This time should work.”

The Law is a tempting yardstick of conversion, because the Law produces results you can see. A visit from the pastor can get a delinquent member to show up . . . for a Sunday or two. A bleak financial report can turn the church budget around . . . until the next quarter.

We sinners like to dredge up old hurts to gain the upper hand in an argument or go through mere motions of obedience to maintain an outward peace. But Walther clarifies that none of these are ways to produce God-pleasing fruit: “What He requires is a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit; not quitting vice and doing good works.” (p. 300)

When Nicodemus attempted to engage Jesus with superficial flattery, Jesus effectively rebuked him: “If you are still in your old mind, you cannot enter heaven . . . you will have to be born again.” (p. 300)

True repentance is a spiritual rebirth worked deep within as the Spirit enters the heart through Word and Sacrament: “For what else is repentance but an earnest attack upon the old man and entering upon a new life? Therefore, if you

live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it.” (*Large Catechism*)

Jesus refused to wait around for any behavior modification on your part: “*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Romans 5:8) As Peter explains Baptism’s saving power, only the cleansing flood of Jesus’ blood can set the heart at peace: “*Not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” (I Peter 3:21)

Thus, through faith in Christ’s merit alone, you receive a right standing with your God which no human effort could achieve, an innocence and blessedness yours by grace alone: “Even when he treats himself to a hearty meal, eats or sleeps, he is doing a good work.” (p. 305)

So, instead of performing an eighth Baptism for a woman who felt she had let her God down once again, I suggested that she change her mind about the matter entirely. I pointed her repentant soul back to her first—and only—Baptism as the divine declaration that her God would never let her down.

For any change of mind you need, count on the Word of God to get to “the root of the tree.” The Law reveals to you your inability to earn God’s favor, and the Gospel calls you to believe in a Savior Who claimed you as His own before you could do anything to come to Him.

Keep in that Word, taught in truth and purity, and have your mind set straight, with eyes of faith ever focused on the kingdom of God.



Timothy Daub is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Hecla, South Dakota.

[To read Walther’s *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* for free online, and to access related Bible class materials, go to www.ilc.edu/Walther]

A New Appreciation for Life

Sometimes life seems routine and lackluster, like watching black and white reruns of an old TV series. Would you like renewed appreciation and enthusiasm for this time of grace? Then realize what a gift it is. A COVID patient walking out of the hospital after months in an ICU bed will likely have a keen appreciation for each pain-free breath. A scan which fails to detect any remaining cancer cells fills every morning with sunshine, no matter what the weather.

A new lease on life is the greatest incentive to make the most of the time that lies ahead. Recovery from a serious illness may move an individual to tirelessly devote countless hours to helping others enduring similar trials. A survivor of a serious car accident might become a fervent advocate for safer vehicles.

How much more do we have reason to appreciate life! We didn't merely have a close brush with death, we were dead in trespasses and sins. There was nothing that we or even a team of world-renowned surgeons could do. But Jesus had compassion on us in our hopeless condition. He came to our rescue. He obeyed the Law in our place. He resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem and was nailed to the cross along with the world's guilt. He suffered the eternal death of hell during three black hours. To save us, He died and was buried. Then came Easter! He promises, *"Because I live, you also will live."* (John 14:19 NIV84) We were buried with Jesus through Baptism into death and raised to new, vibrant life in Him. *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* (John 10:10 NIV84) If not for Jesus, there would be no life, only eternal death. It was that close!

Now the question is what you are going to do with your

new life. It is anything but a dreary black-and-white journey. Each day is filled with the bright rays of forgiveness, the warmth of peace with God, and all the other multi-colored blessings from God's gracious hand. What better way to use our time than by serving Him who made Himself the Servant of all! St. Paul urged the Corinthian Christians, *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all,*

that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NIV84)

Alive in Christ. It's a life that is full of meaning and purpose. Knowing that our Savior conquered the grave and now directs not just our lives but all of history for the wellbeing of His kingdom gives us the enthusiasm and confidence to reflect His light everywhere life takes us. In your relationships

at home, let the living Christ's love compel you to be kind, considerate, and forgiving. Make the most of time spent in class or the workplace by watching for ways to show that life is not about self-centered pursuits, but about following Jesus. Congregational and synodical life is anything but routine when we keep our commission in mind to go and make disciples of all nations, from the neighbors next door to villagers in Nepal. Since we have been raised with Jesus to new life, blessed with eternally important work to do, and can look forward to a crown of glory, what's not to appreciate?



Michael Eichstadt is pastor of Messiah Lutheran church in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, and president of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS APRIL 2022

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
April 1	TLH 339	Psalm 2	Jesus Christ is God's Anointed One, Whom no earthly power can overcome. He is the very Son of God, and King overall. <i>"Blessed are all who take refuge in Him."</i>
April 2	TLH 39	Psalm 8	The glory of the human race was lost through man's fall into sin, but has been regained through Jesus, the God-Man. <i>"How excellent is His Name in all the earth!"</i>
April 4	TLH 388	Psalm 32	Unconfessed sin brings misery to the very depths of one's soul. Confession leads back to the truth that, for Christ's sake, the Lord does not count our sin against us! What sweet relief!
April 5	TLH 142	Psalm 40	David is confident that the Lord will rescue him from the pit of death. His certainty is found in Messiah's burning desire to sacrifice Himself for all sin. <i>"Here I am, I come . . . I desire to do your will, O my God."</i>
April 6	TLH 324	Psalm 51	In His mercy, the Lord cleanses, washes, and blots out all our sin. Our response to such amazing mercy? <i>"O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise."</i>
April 7	WS 799	Psalm 68	This psalm celebrates the faithfulness of the Lord in giving His people victory over all their enemies. <i>"Our God is a God of salvation, and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death."</i>
April 8	TLH 153	Psalm 69	Another prophecy of Christ's suffering. Of special note is v.5, where we learn the astonishing truth that our sin actually became Christ's sin. In exchange for our sin we receive His righteousness!
April 9	TLH 279	Psalm 91	<i>"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD 'He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.'"</i>
April 11	TLH 123	Psalm 102	"The Psalm laments the brevity of life for us sinful human beings. It is only in the Name of the LORD that Zion (God's believing people) finds the confidence that she will live in God's presence forever!"
April 12	TLH 307	Psalm 110	Christ is a priest like Melchizedek. He is not like Levitical priests who constantly needed to make sacrifices for the sins of the people. Christ made a complete and final sacrifice once and for all!
April 13	TLH 176	Psalm 130	<i>"If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared. . . . And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities."</i>
April 14	TLH 171	Psalm 22:1-18	This Psalm prophesies in graphic detail the events of Good Friday. Why did God forsake His Son that day? Because all sin was put on Him. So now we need never fear that God will ever forsake us.
April 15	TLH 341	Psalm 22:19-31	Psalm 22 ends with the confidence that God will rescue His Son from His enemies. As the living Savior, He will rule the nations so that people from every generation will bow before Him in saving faith.
April 16	TLH 188	Psalm 118	Tomorrow we gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter gives us a wonderful, living hope. Tomorrow we shout, <i>"This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it!"</i>
April 18	TLH 190	Luke 24:1-12	<i>"Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"</i>
April 19	TLH 191	Luke 24:13-35	<i>"'Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."</i>
April 20	TLH 193	Luke 24:36-53	<i>"It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations."</i>
April 21	WS 765	Acts 1:1-11	Before ascending into Heaven, Jesus promised to give His disciples the Holy Spirit so that they would be empowered to bring Christ's saving truth to the ends of the earth!
April 22	WS 780	Acts 1:12-26	The Church takes great care in its first ever recorded call meeting. First a list of qualified men is put forth. Then there is prayer. Finally comes the confidence that whoever is called to be an apostle is God's choice.
April 23	WS 780	Acts 2:1-13	Jesus makes good on His promise to send the Holy Spirit to His Church. The Spirit's gift of speaking in different languages ignites God's purpose of bringing the Gospel to every language and tribe.
April 25	WS 739	Acts 2:14-40	On the night of Jesus' arrest, cowardly Peter would not even witness Christ to a servant girl! But now he boldly proclaims God's Law and Gospel to thousands. What a difference the Holy Spirit makes!
April 26	WS 767	Acts 2:41-47	The Church devotes itself 1) to baptizing 2) to teaching the Word 3) to prayer 4) to showing Christ-like love to one another 5) to celebrating the Lord's Supper ("the breaking of bread") and 6) to praising God (spreading the Gospel).
April 27	TLH 276	Acts 3:1-26	Through Peter and John, God works a great miracle, but then gets at something much more important: <i>"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."</i>
April 28	TLH 355	Acts 4:1-22	We hear more bold testimony from the Apostle Peter: <i>"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."</i>
April 29	WS 766	Acts 4:23-37	May the Holy Spirit empower today's church to boldly testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and may He fill us with true love for one another. By God's grace let's preach it and live it!
April 30	TLH 295	Acts 5:1-11	The account of Ananias and Sapphira provides a sobering reminder that God takes sin quite seriously. Let each one examine his heart and life, and turn to Christ for cleansing.

Missionary Travel Opportunities Opening Up

With COVID restrictions slowly being lifted, opportunities for international travel are again opening up. This allowed Missionary Todd Ohlmann to visit Tanzania in December 2021. He accompanied Ted Quade, who serves as the Christian School Instruction Supervisor, on a visit to Kenya in February 2022. By the time you are reading this article, he will, Lord willing, be nearing the end of a one-month visitation to work with our Christian brothers and sisters in the Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission (BLCM) and the Himalayan Church of the Lutheran Confession of Nepal (HCLCN).

During their time in Kenya, Missionary Ohlmann and Mr. Quade spent most their time with the teachers and staff of the Emmaus Millimani School in the Moi's Bridge area and St. David's Kinship School in Etago. The purpose of the trip was to assist these two schools in their efforts to teach the Gospel as an integral part of the program. They also assisted Kenya-CLC with the initial colloquy of Calvin Luvisha, who serves a Lutheran congregation in a city near Moi's Bridge. The KCLC will continue to meet and study with Calvin as they work toward unity of doctrine. Their report to the Board of Missions indicates that the Lord blessed the visit and that progress was made in many areas.

In early March, Missionary Ohlmann will fly to Bangladesh to spend a couple of busy weeks traveling throughout the eight districts of the BLCM with Pastor Monotosh Banarjee.

They are scheduled to conduct outreach seminars in ten congregations and preaching stations. In addition to the outreach seminars, Missionary Ohlmann will also conduct a two-day pastoral training seminar for the fourteen men

of the BLCM who are being trained to assist in ministry and outreach.

After his time in Bangladesh, Missionary Ohlmann will travel to Nepal to spend two weeks working with the leaders of the HCLCN. They are scheduled to conduct six outreach seminars at HCLCN congregations and preaching stations. Toward the end of the visit, the pastors and new students of the Himalayan Bible Institute will gather

in the Chitwan District for a two-day pastoral training seminar and to dedicate the new Bible Institute building that was recently completed.

Praise the Lord for the opportunities He has granted us in the CLC, graciously allowing us to be involved in training faithful preachers and teachers of His saving Word in so many places around the world!



Top Left: Marie Sagala, Ted Quade, Anna Sagala. Top Right: Pastor Enosh, Headmaster Bernard, Ted Quade, Pastor Fred at Etago School. Bottom: Ted teaching Sunday School at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Moiss Bridge



Robert Sauers is pastor of Luther Memorial Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions

SEEN IN PASSING

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

Christian Leader Murdered in Liberia. "William Richard Tolbert III, a Baptist pastor and the youngest son of a former president of Liberia, William Richard Tolbert Jr., was murdered in his apartment on November 1. The elder Tolbert was president from 1971 to 1980, when he was assassinated in a coup. The younger Tolbert was a political prisoner for 20 months and then went to the US and studied at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He returned to Liberia in 1999, becoming the pastor of a church in Benton City and an advocate for peace and reconciliation. No one has been charged with his death." Silliman, Daniel. "Baptist leader murdered." *Gleanings*. ChristianityToday.com, 13 Dec. 2021. Web. 13 Feb. 2022.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

West Central Delegate Conference

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Lakewood, Colorado

May 24-26, 2022

Agenda:

- Is It a Sin to Disobey Illegal Laws, Guidelines, Regulations, Etc.?—Mr. Loren Hansen "Blessed"—Does It Refer to a Preceding Action or Subsequent Action or Both, and How to Tell the Difference—Pastor James Naumann
- The Athanasian Creed: Is the Unexplained Use of this Creed, Once a Year, More Hindersome than Beneficial?—Pastor Timothy Daub
- How Can We Respond Biblically to Transgenderism and Its Social/Political Agenda? —Pastor Paul Nolting
- Contrasting the Ministries of Ezekiel and Jeremiah —Watertown Layman
- What Constitutes an Appropriate Use of the Phrase "Scripturally Sound"?—Pastor Paul Krause
- Minor Prophet Study (Essayist's Choice)—Pastor Timothy Wheaton
- Chaplain—Pastor Cory Drehle
- Speaker—Pastor Delwyn Maas

—Submitted by Pastor Timothy Daub, Secretary

Pacific Coast Pastoral Conference

Redemption Lutheran Church, Lynnwood, Washington

May 10-12, 2022

Agenda:

- Old Testament Exegesis (Essayist's Choice)—Pastor Drew Naumann
- New Testament Exegesis, James 1:19ff.—Pastor Michael Gurath
- A Study of the Concept "Waiting on the Lord"—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt
- Study of Free Will and Common Misrepresentations—Pastor David Naumann
- Semper Virgo and the Family of Jesus: Why Do Some Insist on the Perpetual Virginity of Mary and What Does the Scripture Say?—Pastor Mark Tiefel
- Chaplain—Pastor Luke Bernthal
- Speaker—Pastor David Reim

—Submitted by Pastor Mark Tiefel, Secretary



Exploratory Services in Lincoln, Nebraska

On January 29, twenty-three souls gathered for an exploratory service in Lincoln. We met at a rented space as a central location for CLC member families spread across the region, each living far from their home congregations. There were enough children to offer a Sunday school lesson afterward. We also had three nonmembers attend who asked for a follow-up visit and more information on the CLC. Lord willing, South Dakota pastors intend to offer the service at least quarterly, if not monthly. If you have any contacts in the Lincoln area we would be pleased to reach out to them with future service dates. Send your contacts to pastor_daub@hotmail.com.

—Pastor Timothy Daub

