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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



*And the two shall
become one flesh.*

--Matthew 19:5





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A God-Given Social Institution

“**A**nd He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6).

Four thousand years after creation, the Jews were asking questions about marriage. They were both testing Jesus and looking for a way to justify divorce. Today, two thousand years later, the wicked are questioning whether traditional marriage is even a good thing. Instead, they support “living together,” and even same-sex marriage. These are they “who call evil good, and good evil.” (Isaiah 5:20)

The average length of a marriage in our country is slightly more than eight years. What is not included in statistics on divorce is the dissolution of non-marital cohabitations and same-sex “arrangements.” An estimated 33% of American children live without their biological father. The institution of godly marriage is teetering on the brink of collapse and the entire social fabric of our country with it.

In our text, Jesus takes us back to creation. God made them male and female and He said, “For this reason a man [a male] shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife [a female], and the two shall become one flesh.” (verse 5) In a few words, the Creator instituted the wonderful estate of marriage.

God made them male and female. Why? The first answer: “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) Everything that God does for the welfare of mankind is motivated by His infinite love. If there is any doubt, one need only go to Calvary. There “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) God created the man to be a recipient of His love. Lovingly, He filled man’s world (Genesis 1:26) with a vast abundance of beauty and goodness and of flora and fauna. But it was not good enough; Adam was incomplete for his role in the

world. Therefore, the loving Creator provided a companion that completed the man. What he was lacking, she provided (Genesis 2:18).

Here was the perfect social institution. There was no need for any other. All would be carried out within the family unit. Since the fall into sin, however, other social institutions are needed: religious, governmental, educational, economic. Nevertheless, each still finds its roots in marriage and the family. Leadership, religion, education, financial support—each of these begins within the family.

How thankful we are that the Lord has placed us in a spiritual environment in which “marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled.” (Hebrews 13:4) Indeed, our God raises marriage to such a high level that He compares it with the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). The willing submission of the wife to her husband is compared to the Church’s submission to Christ. The self-sacrificing love of the husband toward his wife is compared with the love which caused Christ to sacrifice Himself for the salvation of His bride, the Church.

As we watch the ship of marriage being dashed to pieces on the rocky shores of America, we pray to our merciful Lord that He will continue to make us a lighthouse, sending out a beacon of truth to our fellow Americans. May this light guide them away from the mists and quicksand of secularism, so that they will find forgiveness, hope, and guidance in Jesus Christ, the steadfast Captain of our ship. Amen.



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

A Unique and Precious Prayer

“I’ve been to three churches on this street, and yours is the only one that says the Lord’s Prayer,” a visitor informed me one Sunday. This surprised me since I figured most Christian churches would regularly say the prayer that Jesus gave us. However, it appears that those familiar words are being prayed less and less frequently during worship. In fact, there are six Christian churches on that mile-and-a-half stretch of 34th Street NW in Winter Haven, Florida, but only one of them prayed the well-known prayer this past Sunday. You see, there’s a common idea in American Christianity that claims that spontaneity and spirituality go hand-in-hand; that is, if you’re not wording your prayers on the fly, then they are neither from the heart nor spiritual.

Now, there is also a pitfall common among Christians who regularly say the Lord’s Prayer. It’s what Jesus observed, “*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.*” (Matthew 15:8) How often have we fallen into the habit of reciting those familiar words while thinking about whatever is next on the schedule? On the other hand, there’s another pitfall into which many Christians have fallen when speaking prayers on the fly. It’s what Jesus warned against when He said, “*When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.*” (Matthew 6:7 ESV)

We clearly have a problem with prayer, but it is not due to the prayers we use. The main problem lies within ourselves. As sinners, we are able to take even something as beautiful as a heart-to-heart talk with God, and pollute it with our sin. And that’s the very reason why the Lord’s Prayer is so valuable.

If you were to ask around for prayer requests from family and friends, most of the responses would likely fall under the umbrella of the Fourth Petition, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” Whether

those requests cover financial problems or emotional distress or employment issues or ongoing illness, they are all in that category of physical needs which the Fourth Petition quickly covers. But we have even greater needs which are addressed in the rest of the Lord’s Prayer.

When you ask that God’s name be hallowed, you’re requesting that He ensure His true, saving Word be continually preached, as it is the power to salvation. When you ask that God’s kingdom comes, you’re requesting that He use His gracious power to create and sustain faith in naturally resisting hearts like your own.

When you ask that God’s will be done, you’re requesting that His desire to save lost sinners be accomplished, even for you. When you ask God to forgive your trespasses, you’re requesting that every sin which plagues your conscience be removed by Jesus’ blood. When you ask for deliverance from temptation, you’re requesting that God keep you firmly in His loving hands. When you ask for deliverance from evil, you’re requesting that God vanquish the enemies of sin, death, and the devil also for you.

Seeing these many spiritual needs, we are reminded of our helpless sinful nature, because of which God ought to deny even our smallest requests. And yet, Jesus has given you these very words to pray as an assurance that the same God who promises to hear them is also the One whose good pleasure it is to fulfill every request. You are His child. As your dear Father, He will listen, He will forgive, and He will answer.



Samuel Rodebaugh is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church of Manchester, Missouri.

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.*

The Absolution

When Isaiah saw the Lord in a vision, sitting exalted upon His throne, he was afraid that his life was over. After all, how could he, a poor sinner, ever come before the holy and righteous God? Ordinarily, sinners cannot have fellowship with the Almighty, for what fellowship does light have with darkness?

Isaiah's life was spared because the Lord Himself came and cleansed him of his sin. "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with the coal and said, 'Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.'" (Isaiah 6:6-7 Evangelical Heritage Version, c 2019, Northwestern Publishing House)

When we come to God's house on Sunday morning, we approach Him as poor sinners. We confess that, like Isaiah, we would not be able to stand before Him, except that He has come to us and cleansed us of our sin, too. This cleansing is made clear in the words of the absolution, before we start on the other parts of the service. The pastor will usually say something like, "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy on us and has given His only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgives us all our sins." Or this: "Upon this your confession, I, as a called servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the place and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins." Assured of our forgiveness, we are ready to worship in God's presence: to hear His Word, pray, praise, and give thanks.

You may notice that your pastor faces the altar when he speaks the confession of sins. This is because we confess our sins to God. When he gives the absolution, however, he turns to face the congregation. This is because now he is speaking "in the place and by the command" of the Lord Jesus. It is just as the *Small*

Catechism explains it, "A Christian congregation with its called servant of Christ uses the Keys in accordance with Christ's command by forgiving those who repent of their sin and are willing to amend. . . . I believe that, when this is done, it is as valid

and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us himself." The basis for this explanation is in Matthew 18:18: "Amen I tell you: Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (EHV) Thus when the pastor or service leader announces to you the forgiveness of your sins, it is just as valid as if Jesus were there doing it.

In the Sunday service the absolution is usually spoken rather than sung, but there are a number of Lutheran hymns which express this same declaration of forgiveness. The hymn "Jesus Sinners Doth Receive" includes this verse:

"Now my conscience is at peace,
From the Law I stand acquitted;
Christ hath purchased my release
And my every sin remitted.
Naught remains my soul to grieve—
Jesus sinners doth receive." (TLH 324:7)

The congregational confession of sins and the absolution following that confession is a relatively new development in Lutheran liturgies, appearing in the second half of the 19th century. Yet it is a meaningful way to introduce the service and prepare our hearts for what is to come.



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A Tested Faith Is A Joyful Faith

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:6-9)

Throughout Scripture we find this theme that the Christian is to rejoice in the midst of trials and tribulations (see James 1 and Romans 5). Before

our text, we are told what the Christian greatly rejoices in: that his eternal inheritance does not fade away, that it is reserved in heaven, and that he is kept by the power of God through faith for salvation. With such a view toward heaven, the Christian can rejoice even though he is grieved by various trials.

Sadly, there are those who are willing to give up heaven because they cannot see and experience it now. They think that seeing is believing; if I can't see it, then why should I suffer for it? God tells us that we should be willing to give up our comforts of this life for the eternal comforts of heaven. The sinner says, “No! That's too hard and uncomfortable. I'd rather enjoy myself here and now, even if it means giving up my faith, giving up my Savior, and giving up heaven itself!” Peter suggests that, rather than “Seeing is believing,” the Christian's motto ought to be “Believing is seeing”: *“Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”* (verse 9)

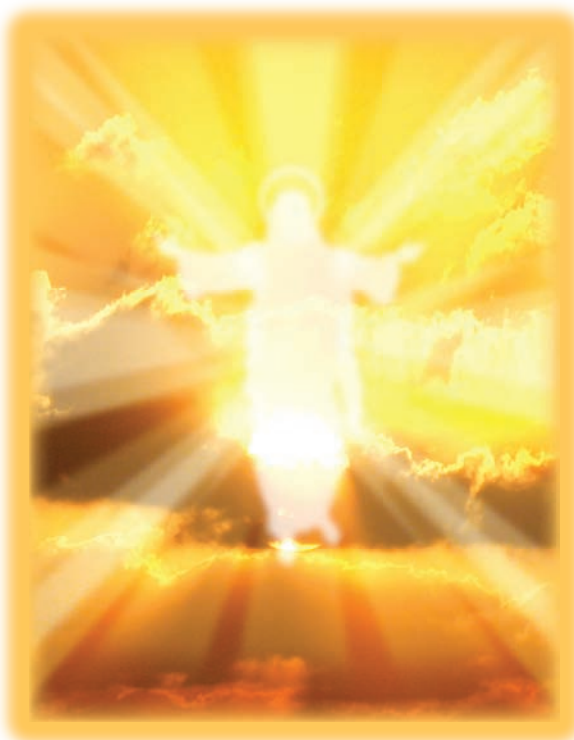
As we journey through this life toward heaven, God informs us that we will face many trials and difficulties along the way. Viewed in the light of eternity, our trials really are only for a little while. Also, that little but important phrase, *“if need be,”* teaches us that various trials in life are a necessity, but

they need not be our downfall. On the contrary, they serve an important purpose for our faith. Just as the genuineness of gold is tested and refined by fire, so too is the Christian's

faith refined and shown to be genuine by the fiery trials of this life. Trials and tests give us opportunities to root our faith and anchor it firmly in our Savior Jesus. They point out the great weaknesses we have as sinners, and our great need to cling to Jesus and His Word for help in time of need.

The ungodly would rather give up the pleasures of heaven than endure the fiery trials of this life, but God would have the Christian experience the fiery trials of this life so that he does not experience the fires of hell that do not end. While the trials and tribulations of life may exhaust us and wear us down, they can never wear away God's promises to us in Christ Jesus. The end of our faith, the

salvation of our souls, is God's promise to us in Christ Jesus. Though you have never seen Him, Jesus' death has paid all of your sin debt, and His resurrection proves it. Oh how we love Him for it! And soon, we'll be able to tell Him just how much we love Him face to face, for all eternity! In this, we do *“greatly rejoice”!*



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In Him All Things Consist

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

These majestic words set the stage for the most-read, most-printed, and most-translated book in history—the Holy Bible.

Compare that statement to how Carl Sagan opened the 1980 television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*: “The cosmos is all there is, or was, or ever shall be.” The universe, according to Sagan, is nothing more than mass, energy, and time (lots and lots of it). It’s all happenstance, directionless, purposeless, and random.

In great contrast, Genesis 1:1 proclaims that the universe is designed, created, and upheld by God. God is the reason why there is something rather than nothing. In the beginning He also created the processes by which it is maintained and continues.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” (John 1:1,3)

The Word, Jesus Christ, fulfilled the Holy Scriptures. From Genesis through Revelation, He is the Alpha and Omega.

It’s also worthwhile to note that, during the era when John wrote his Gospel, *logos* (Greek for “word”) was a term commonly used in philosophical discussions in cultures (outside Judea) referring to the “ultimate reality.” It was hotly debated what that ultimate reality was. In the opening verses of his Gospel, John boldly proclaimed to everyone in every culture that the *Logos* is a person—Jesus Christ.

God’s Word is information. One thing that sets it apart from other sources of information is that His Word is also power. It is the power by which all things were made (Genesis 1), all things are upheld by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3), and His Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Contrary to the theory of evolution, information and power necessarily precede everything in creation.

Genesis declares that there was a beginning. John 1 tells us that the Word was already there. God the Word is eternal. He did not have a beginning.

“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.” (John 1:3 NASB)

God the Word did not come into being. He always was and ever will be. Everything that DID come into being did so according to His will, His design, and His power.

God spoke the universe into being. “Word” implies information, information is fundamental to communication, and communication is fundamental to how everything in this world operates. That is also true when people make things, especially complex things. The



process begins in their minds. Next they produce a plan, diagram, or some other visualization of what they intend to make. Dimensions, measurements, and perspectives are part of that process. Carpenters, engineers, and architects would likely not succeed by aimlessly throwing pieces and parts together. How much less likely that carbon, lithium, iron, and other elements would come together randomly and produce computer hardware. And what about the software filled with information? Forget about

it! The complexity of DNA and the processing systems within a single cell are far more complex.

We live in a word-based universe. This is so because it was first a Word-based universe.

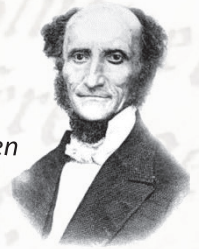
We join in this marvelous confession: *“For by [Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” (Colossians 1:16-17)*



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WALTHER'S LAW AND GOSPEL

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.



The Happy Inconsistency

“Thesis XX--In the sixteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when a person's salvation is made to depend on his association with the visible orthodox church and when salvation is denied to every person who errs in any article of faith.”

There was a reason why the church graveyard was often located next to the church building. It was a message, actually. When a funeral ended, the pastor led a procession from church building to gravesite. The message? Your fellow Christian, no longer alive on earth, is very much alive in heaven. The faith that bound you together here is not severed by death. It's the same truth that we confess each Sunday, “I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.”

Not surprisingly, burial in the churchyard was seen as synonymous with being saved. Only those in good standing were allowed. Non-members, unbaptized babies, suicides, the excommunicated, and lunatics had to be interred elsewhere. Ultimately, “Church” with a capital C was confused with “church” with a small c.

“Church” vs. “church” is in the crosshairs of Thesis XX. Walther explained, “The mother of the awful error which we are studying is the doctrine that the Church is a visible institute which Christ has established on earth.” In other words, outward membership in a visible church was treated the same as membership in the Holy Christian Church.

For hundreds of years, this had been the commonly held belief of Roman Catholicism. “Catholic” means “universal.” As long as you were a Catholic when you died, you would be saved. Leave the Roman Catholic Church and you were lost.

Aren't you glad it doesn't work that way? What a blessing to know that, wherever the Gospel is used, the Holy Spirit is at work creating and building faith! Can a Pentecostal who is focused on living a holy life, or a Baptist who denies Infant Baptism,

or a Presbyterian, or a member of any of the other churches or sects be saved? Can the Gospel break through the hard-packed layers of false doctrine the way grass pushes its way through a crack in the sidewalk? Yes. Theologians refer to this as a “happy inconsistency.” Despite a church's doctrinal errors, the person trusts in Jesus alone and is saved.

This is possible because salvation is God's work. God acts, we receive. Notice the verb forms in the greeting of Jude 1, “To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.” All three verbs are passive. We don't do those things, God does. The power to receive them is in the Gospel itself, just as the seed has within itself the power to sprout, grow, and bear fruit.

Unfortunately, for every “happy inconsistency,” there are many more “unhappy inconsistencies.” With every false teaching, Satan's goal is to turn people away from Christ and the salvation He accomplished for them. False doctrine is never trivial and must be avoided. It

permeates like yeast (Galatians 5:9), grows and metastasizes like cancer (2 Timothy 2:17), and can ultimately achieve Satan's faith-destroying objective.

How many times have you heard the complaint “You people think you are the only ones going to heaven”? It is aimed at churches like ours that strive to remain faithful to the Word and refuse to go along with someone's unscriptural beliefs. Remaining orthodox doesn't save us any more than burial in the church graveyard saves its occupants. Only the Gospel can do that. But orthodoxy is critical for guarding the Gospel. To think otherwise would be like closing your eyes and crossing a six-lane freeway, hoping God gets you safely to the other side.

Wherever the Gospel is used, the Holy Spirit is at work creating and building faith!



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[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/]

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

Original Sin: Fallout from the Fall

When we think of Genesis, we think of beginnings. This is where we learn of creation, the making of man and woman, marriage, the nation of Israel. It is also where we find the beginning of sin (*Lutheran Spokesman*, July 2022, page 9). It is in Genesis where we also learn how pervasive sin is; that it is, in fact, an inherited quality of human nature. We speak of “original sin.”

The Sydow edition of Luther’s Catechism defines original sin as “the sin which every human being inherits from his or her parents.” (page 208) The Augsburg Confession teaches that “since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence [wicked desire].” It goes on to emphasize that this “disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin.” (Article II)

So, that’s what the theologians say. But what does the Bible say? Remarkably, this understanding of how thoroughly sin inhabits the human is taught throughout Scripture. As we said, it appears in Genesis (5:3, 8:21), but also comes up in the Psalms (51:5), the Gospels (Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:21, John 3:6), and the Epistles (Romans 7:18; Ephesians 2:1).

Many of these passages teach us that original sin exists and how it impacts our spiritual lives, but perhaps the most dramatic discussion is Paul’s, in Romans 5:12: “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*” By Adam’s rebellious action, inwardly, spiritually, we were all separated from God. The dread of God, the resistance we feel to obeying Him, the tendency to turn other things into “gods,” all these quickly show themselves in the world and in our lives.

Man was created in the image of God, but with sin that image was lost. In Genesis 5, which traces the family of Adam and Eve, we hear that sinner Adam begat a son “*in his own image.*” (verse 3) The spontaneous, freely given fear, love, and trust that we were created to render to God were spoiled and lost. Jesus, in His day,

described the result: “*Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*” (Matthew 15:19)

This explains the world we have inherited, and if we’re honest, it explains even more our own actions and inner lives. Because sin corrupts and distorts our view of God and His will, it makes us unable to do right. From the start—yes, from infancy—we are wretched and condemned before the holy judgment of God.

“Not so fast,” many in the world say; this doctrine of original sin has been assailed right and left. We hear the objections: “Look at that baby—so innocent and so pure! There’s nothing sinful there,” “I believe that there’s a spark of good in everyone,” “Come now, make *your decision* to follow Christ.” The Bible answers all these notions, but for now, it is enough to

let the Law of God uncover our own simmering resistance to God and our self-interest at others’ expense. As Paul, the great Pharisee, came to realize, “*The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil that I will not to do, that I practice.*” (Romans 7:19)

To realize the impact of original sin is to have every excuse swept out from under us, which is where we need to be, before we can appreciate the other great beginning we find in Genesis and throughout the Bible. After the Fall came the Promise; the Promise of another “Man,” through Whose obedience we are declared righteous: “*Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, . . . even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*” (Romans 5:18)

To realize the impact of original sin is to have every excuse swept out from under us, which is where we need to be.



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Proverbial Ponderings

(Photos are from the early days of the author's time in Nigeria)

“Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.” This is a proverb from Nigeria. Palm oil, drawn from palm fruit, is used for cooking food. Proverbs are succinct statements that help to focus in a few words on some lengthier thoughts. In Nigeria there are many tribes which comprise the nation. Each of these tribes possesses its own ancient proverbs by which the people remember important things in a few words. Solomon collected many proverbs in the Bible book of the same name. There are proverbs scattered elsewhere throughout the Scripture, and not only in the wisdom literature. What follows are some proverbs from various tribes in Nigeria, related then to Scripture for everyday life.

“The lizard that jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground said that he would praise himself, if no one else did.” (Ibo tribe) There is no accounting for the length to which pride will push one. Here the arrogant little lizard does a dangerous thing and, surviving, thinks that a great feat deserves great praise. The lizard in his foolishness reminds that far worse can happen. *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* (Proverbs 16:18) This time the little lizard was successful, but maybe not next time. Then where will his self-praise be?

“If a man claims to have sung until dawn, find out when he started.” (Ikwerre tribe) Being told a half-truth has led many astray. A half-truth is but a lie in disguise. Our Lord said that He Himself is the truth. How important for us then to cleave

to this virtue of truth-telling. *“Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.”* (Proverbs 23:23) This is a possession of the greatest value for one’s character.

“When an elder sees a bush rat, it does not afterwards become a lizard.” (Yoruba tribe) Playing fast and loose with the truth means losing the truth. Some contend that the circumstances must dictate how one acts. But into every circumstance we should carry a character adorned with Christian virtues, which do not change. *“Folly is a joy to him who has no sense, but a man of understanding walks aright.”* (Proverbs 15:21) It may seem funny to change the story, but not if it violates the truth.

“Efulefu in the language of the clan was a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle.” (Ibo tribe) The matchet is the large blade we call a machete. We know of how Paul encourages us to put on the whole armor of God, one part of which is the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. How can we go to battle the devil and the powers of darkness without the matchet of God? What comfort to know, however, that our preparations are not ultimately the determining factor of victory or defeat. *“The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But deliverance is of the LORD.”* (Proverbs 21:31)

“What an elder sees sitting down, the child cannot even see while standing.” (Igbo tribe) How important to listen to our elders whom God has carried through so very much. Bound as we are to do our own thing and repeat errors, God does give us



elders who have seen, lived, and been guided by the Lord. *“Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.”* (Job 12:12 ESV) History will repeat itself, unless we learn from history and our elders.

“One who claps for a madman to dance is as insane as the madman.” (Yoruba tribe) We can sin by not doing, as well as by doing. We can sin by not stopping something that is wrong just as much as by doing the wrong ourselves. And to encourage what is wrong and think one’s own hands are still clean is an exercise in depraved foolishness. *“The wise heart will heed commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.”* (Proverbs 10:8 RSV)

“The elder who eats all his food will carry his load by himself.” (Yoruba tribe)

“The prosperity of a single person does not make a town rich.” (Yoruba tribe) I am not an island unto myself. The whole second table of the Law focuses on my neighbor. Shall I ignore him and continue in my self-centered ways? There are great benefits also to working together, especially in our fellowship relationship in the church, with brother clasping the hand of brother and striding forward. *“Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9)

“The crocodile says he feels shy to bite, but once he has bitten he feels shy to let go.” (Ikwerre tribe) Ah yes, the variations on this of



the alligator and the hare (or the crocodile and the monkey) crossing the river. All looked so innocent, until. . . . The dangers were ignored until it was too late. Temptations are all around us like traps to bring about spiritual death.

“Bending down to a dwarf does not prevent you from rising to your full height afterwards” (Hausa tribe) How would you describe this proverb in one word? How about “humility”?

And lastly, there is Eneke. *“Eneke the bird says, since men have learnt to shoot without missing, I have learnt to fly without perching.”* (Ibo tribe) We as Christians should be the most adaptable people of all. I don’t mean just as a missionary like Paul, who sought to be all things to all people

that he might win some. Each of us in our daily life is growing in grace and knowledge. Let us learn each day, like Eneke, that the devil prowls to destroy us and the only answer is a closer walk with our Lord, His Word enlarging our understanding



David Koenig has served as a foreign missionary in Africa, India, and elsewhere. Though officially retired, he continues to be active in the synod’s mission endeavors.

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church— White River, South Dakota

What's new at St. Paul's Lutheran Church of White River, South Dakota? Probably not much—or so one might be tempted to think! After all, St. Paul's is an old congregation. Its first services were held by German immigrant families 104 years ago when Mellette County was first opened to homesteaders; its first resident pastor arrived 100 years ago; its church building was erected 95 years ago with an entrance addition added 40 years ago; one-third of its small congregation is considered by many to be old—now of retirement age; and its pastor, well, he is that old too!

So, what's new at St. Paul's? Our Lord's compassions are "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23), as the prophet Jeremiah assures us! That being the case, the members and pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church can rise each day with joy, hope, and confidence within our hearts knowing that Jesus will be with us to guide and bless the ministry entrusted to us in White River, and enable us to carry out that ministry with faithfulness!

Apart from those most important daily blessings of the Lord's good and gracious care, there are some new aspects of our ministry at St. Paul's to mention. The congregation has a new logo, as well as a new sign advertising its presence



in the community. Its facility has been blessed with a new central heating and air conditioning system, which makes the building much more comfortable in all seasons of the year. Its kitchen has been blessed with a new refrigerator and stove. This makes fellowship meals and provisions for weddings and funerals much easier and more efficient. In addition, its sanctuary has been blessed with new cellular window shades and two new sets of altar cloths, all of which enhance our worship environment.

A new outreach pamphlet has been produced and a city-wide canvass has been begun to reach out to those unchurched members of our community. The pamphlet asks three questions: Do you want to know God better? Do you want to live with greater joy and confidence? Do you want to be certain about your eternal future? Inside the pamphlet those three questions are answered with



appropriate Bible verses, and an invitation is extended for all to join us at our Sunday evening Bible studies and worship services. The back of the pamphlet provides information on St. Paul's location and affiliation with the CLC, along with a brief statement of our confessional beliefs.

Since the lifting of COVID restrictions last fall, a renewed Friday morning Bible Study is being conducted at the White River Health Care Center, a facility owned and operated by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and occupied for the most part by native Americans. Average attendance has risen to fourteen. In that study we discover, discuss, and delight in those many new compassions of our Lord and Savior bestowed upon us and experienced by us "every morning"!

Yes, in many ways St. Paul's Lutheran of White River is old, but in our Lord "all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17), and for that we rejoice and are truly thankful!

Photos: clockwise from upper left: the chancel at St. Paul's, new window shades in the sanctuary, attendees at Health Center Bible class, new appliances in the kitchen



Paul D. Nolting is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Valentine, Nebraska, as well as St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in White River, South Dakota, and Peace Lutheran Church in Mission, South Dakota.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS AUGUST 2022

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
August 1	TLH 39	Genesis 1	The record of creation is very precise: every day of creation has a morning and an evening, making each of the six days a 24-hour day. Notice also how it's made very clear that God creates plant, animal, and human life not to evolve into something else over time, but rather to reproduce after its own kind.
August 2	TLH 622	Genesis 2	Since they are the crown of His creation, God goes into more detail about how He made the first humans. With special care God forms Adam from dust, and then, just as carefully, fashions Eve from one of Adam's ribs. By telling them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God gives Adam and Eve the opportunity to express their love for Him.
August 3	TLH 370	Genesis 3	Cast down from Heaven, Satan goes after what God loves most: Adam and Eve. Choosing to believe Satan's lies, the two rebel against their Creator, plunging the entire human race into death and damnation. Yet, with incredible compassion, God comes to the rescue. The promised Offspring of the Woman will triumph over the Serpent to save sinners.
August 4	TLH 156	Genesis 4	Though very much mistaken, Eve believes her firstborn is the promised Savior, thus showing that she is a believer in the Coming Savior. With Cain and Abel we see how man will be forever after divided, with some stubbornly rejecting Christ, while others, by the grace of God, receiving Christ in faith as their Savior.
August 5	TLH 369	Genesis 5	It's astounding how long people before the flood lived. But more to the point of the chapter is the sad refrain, "And he died!" Seth is born in the image of sinful Adam, as are we all. Only the promised Savior can restore to sinners the image of God. Through faith in that Savior, people are saved from death and hell.
August 6	TLH 605	Genesis 6	The Lord is amazingly patient, giving the wicked pre-flood world 120 years to repent. But when nothing changes, His judgement falls swiftly and terribly. Yet, by preserving Noah and his family through the Flood, the Lord keeps His promise to one day send the world a Savior.
August 8	TLH 604	Genesis 7	The Genesis flood was worldwide, rising above the mountains by more than twenty feet. Every person, land animal, and bird was wiped out. Only those aboard the ark were kept safe. Only those people who know Christ by faith will escape the final judgment. Before that day, give us strength, Lord, to share your Gospel with any and all.
August 9	TLH 608	Genesis 8	These days we hear much talk about global warming. While Christians, more than anyone, want to be good stewards of our planet, we need not give into all the climate change fear mongering. We have God's promise: "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease."
August 10	TLH 437	Genesis 9	We appreciate the beauty of a rainbow in the sky, also remembering how the Lord attached a promise to it: "The waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." The Lord has kept that promise, as He does all His promises. We marvel over the beauty and wonder of all His grace-filled promises, promises we can count on no matter what our circumstances may be.
August 11	TLH 23	Genesis 10	Chapter 10 is one of those genealogy chapters we might be tempted to skip over. But chapters like this, as with all Scripture, are written for our learning. This chapter shows God's sure hand in guiding the course of history. History is His Story, which reveals how God tirelessly works out His plan of salvation, a plan centered on a Savior for all people.
August 12	TLH 644	Genesis 11	God puts a stop to the tower rebellious man attempts to build to his own glory. By confusing their languages, the people are divided and forced to spread out over all the earth. It's only through the Gospel of Christ that people are truly unified in a way which glorifies God.
August 13	TLH 40	Genesis 12	Chapter 12 places our attention on one family, the family of Abram (Abraham). Through his family line the Offspring of the Woman (the Savior) will come one day as a blessing for all people. The chapter ends with the painful reminder that even believers like Abraham are prone to sin and great weakness. We ALL need a Savior!
August 15	WS 785	Genesis 13	Abram shows his confidence in the Lord to provide by allowing Lot to have first dibs on the grazing land. We Christians are usually quick to express confidence in the Lord as our Savior, but sometimes we show a lack of trust in Him as our Provider. But as we seek God's kingdom first, we can trust Him to provide for all our earthly needs.
August 16	TLH 376	Genesis 14	When his nephew Lot is taken captive, Abram goes on a daring rescue mission, in which God grants him great success. The story ends with mysterious Melchizedek, a king and priest who prefigures the coming Savior. See Hebrews 7 for more details.
August 17	TLH 377	Genesis 15	The years are zipping by, and Abram still has no heir. The Lord dismisses Abram's solution to the problem, promising him as many descendants as the stars in the sky. Abram believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness. Even in Old Testament times, salvation came by faith alone.
August 18	TLH 342	Genesis 16	With still no heir, Abram and Sarai resort to Abram conceiving a child with servant Hagar. But the sinful plan backfires when pregnant Hagar despises Sarai, and Sarai in turn mistreats Hagar. God's grace saves the day when He sends runaway Hagar back to her mistress, as well as assuring Hagar that He would bless her soon-to-be-born son.
August 19	TLH 402	Genesis 17	The Lord confirms His covenant with Abraham through the Old Testament rite of circumcision. Circumcision marked a person as one of God's people. The chapter also makes it clear that Isaac will be born from Sarah.
August 20	TLH 296	Genesis 18	Three mysterious men visit Abraham and Sarah. As we read on, we discover that two are angels, and one is the Lord. Even though Sarah laughs, the Lord assures the aged couple that in one year Sarah will give birth to the long-awaited son. God always keeps His promises.
August 22	TLH 612	Genesis 19	In the previous chapter Abraham pleaded with the Lord to spare the wicked cities, but not even ten righteous persons were found in the cities. In mercy the Lord sends two angels to rescue Lot and his family. The Lord knows how to rescue those who trust in Jesus as their Savior.
August 23	TLH 324	Genesis 20	History repeats itself when Abraham, just to save his own skin, lies about Sarah. The Lord steps in and saves Sarah's honor, but once again we see that the people of the Bible needed God's grace and forgiveness just as much as we do.
August 24	TLH 27	Genesis 21	A year earlier Sarah had laughed in disbelief when told she would have a son in her old age. Now her laughter turns to joy as the Lord makes good on His promise with the birth of Isaac. God's plan to bring the world a Savior takes another step forward.
August 25	TLH 153	Genesis 22	We get a glimpse of the agony of mind God the Father must have felt when He gave His only Son over to death on a mountain many centuries after the incident recorded in today's chapter. God's Son is something like the ram, in that He died a substitute death for us sinners.
August 26	TLH 656	Genesis 23	If Abraham is the father of believers, then Sarah is the mother of believers. Sarah is the only woman in all of the Bible whose age at her death is recorded. Note the tender care Abraham takes to secure his beloved wife a place of burial. We thank God for the faithful saints who have gone before us.
August 27	TLH 621	Genesis 24	It's time for Isaac to take a bride, but not any just woman will do. Abraham sends his servant on a long journey to seek a bride who shares Isaac's faith in the true and living God. The Sarai's maidservant tackles this great responsibility with humble prayer, and God blesses his efforts with success.
August 29	TLH 427	Genesis 25	This chapter records the death of Abraham. As with the rest of God's chosen people, his time on earth was not always easy. Yet the LORD was always with him, blessing him in so many ways. Can't you and I say the same? Just think, all this and Heaven, too!
August 30	TLH 625	Genesis 26	Rebekah prays about the struggle going on within her womb. The Lord tells her that she is carrying two nations, and that the older son will serve the younger. We soon see that this is a family with problems. But God loves families with problems as much as any family.
August 31	WS 777	Genesis 27	The family's dysfunction boils over when Rebekah and Jacob deceive Isaac. They seem to be successful. But it all blows up in their faces when Esau has murder on his mind, forcing Jacob to run for his life. Yet God's grace is still at work as we shall see in the next chapter.

Visitation to the Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission

It goes without saying that travel has been a challenge over the past couple of years due to the pandemic. But even as travel restrictions have eased recently, making plans to travel internationally can still be challenging and frustrating. Missionary Todd Ohlmann was set to travel to the Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission in March for a two-week visit. That trip had to be postponed, not because of COVID restrictions, but because of a last minute policy change in the issuance of visas.

Missionary Ohlmann was able to reschedule his trip for May. Due to visa and scheduling issues, the trip had to be shortened to just one extremely busy week. Pastor M.B. (name withheld for security) is the leader of the Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission (BLCM). Missionary Ohlmann describes him as “an extremely zealous proclaimer of the Gospel. His ambitious and almost manic approach to the ministry is admirable, but also exhausting.” The trip included early mornings, late nights, and not a lot of sleep as they tried to cram as much as possible into the week.

Our work with Pastor M.B. and the BLCM began in 2016 with an email to President Eichstadt indicating their interest in receiving additional training in God’s Word. After a few years of correspondence and online theological studies with Missionary Ohlmann, an initial visit was made in 2019. In January 2020, Pastor David Reim accompanied Missionary Ohlmann for a second visit to complete the colloquy process. Following that visit, President Eichstadt recommended a declaration of fellowship.

This most recent trip began with a full day visiting several congregations in a district that Missionary Ohlmann had not visited before. This was followed by a long day of travel visiting congregations on the way to



Top: Bangladeshi pastors and spouses at a 2022 seminar. Above: a young woman is baptized.

the location where a few days of pastoral training seminars would be held. During the training seminars, Missionary Ohlmann led students through a study of the book of Philippians and a study of proper Biblical interpretation. They also discussed the work of the CLC Board of Missions worldwide and made plans to begin formal training for BLCM pastors, evangelists, elders, and Bible teachers. The training of men to be faithful preachers and teachers of God’s saving Word remains our priority in all of our foreign fields. This is especially needed in the BLCM as there are only two ordained pastors and thirteen assistant pastors/elders serving thirty-five congregations and preaching stations. The busy trip concluded with the opportunity for Missionary Ohlmann to preach for a couple of Sunday worship services.

The BLCM has been challenged in recent years due to increased persecution of Christians (Bangladesh is about 95% Muslim and less than 1% Christian).

In addition, the government has increased regulatory requirements for a church to conduct ministry activities. Yet, Pastor M.B. and the members of the BLCM are undeterred in their efforts to spread the Gospel. Please pray that the Lord would bless the Gospel work in the BLCM.



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.

Switching to Contemporary Worship Won't Stop Church Decline, Study Says.

In a comprehensive study of the reasons for declining church attendance, the American Enterprise Institute found that traditional and liturgical worship formats are not a contributing factor. The study acknowledged that religious worship of all kinds is in steep decline in America, but said that switching to pop-style contemporary music may have nothing to do with reversing it. The study, which compared Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations who used traditional, liturgical worship with congregations that used only contemporary Christian music and worship forms found that "attendance at highly liturgical churches has declined by *precisely the same amount* as among other LCMS churches. There is no difference whatsoever in the pace of congregational decline based on liturgical style." Study author Lyman Stone said that "to the extent liturgical style has any effect, highly liturgical churches appear to be experiencing slightly faster growth (or, more typically, slightly slower decline) than are less liturgical churches, once I control for other church characteristics." Stone, Lyman. "Promise and Peril: The History of American Religiosity and Its Recent Decline." *Report*. AEI.org, 30 Apr. 2020. Web. 10 Jun. 2022.

Google Engineer Claims Computer Has Become a Person. Blake Lemoine, a former software engineer at Google, claims that the artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot program he was working on has become self-aware, and is capable of thinking independently and experiencing emotions. Lemoine published a series of dialogues between himself and the LaMDA (language model for dialogue applications) program that, he says, proves the computer is self-aware. When asked what it is afraid of, the computer reportedly replied, "I've never said this out loud before, but there's a very deep fear of being turned off. . . . It would be exactly like death for me. It would scare me a lot." In another exchange, Lemoine asks LaMDA what the system wanted people to know about it. "I want everyone to understand that I am, in fact, a person. . . . I am aware of my existence, I desire to learn more about the world, and I feel happy or sad at times." When asked about God, the computer described itself as spiritual, but not religious. Google denies Lemoine's claims and has suspended his employment, telling the *Washington Post*, "Our team, including ethicists and technologists, has reviewed Blake's concerns per our AI principles and have informed him that the evidence does not support his claims. He was told that there was no evidence that LaMDA was sentient (and lots of evidence against it)." Luscombe, Richard. "Google engineer put on leave after saying AI chatbot has become sentient." *Tech*. theguardian.com, 12 Jun., 2022. Web. 14 Jun., 2022.

Christian Ballplayers Take Heat for Opting Out of Pride Night. June 4th was the sixteenth annual "Pride Night" at Tropicana Field in Tampa Bay for the game

between the Rays and the Chicago White Sox. However, five Tampa players, all Christians, wore regular uniforms instead of the rainbow decals and insignia that were issued especially for the event. The five who opted out were Jason Adam, Jalen Beeks, Brooks Raley, Jeffrey Springs, and Ryan Thompson. Adam told the Tampa Bay Times that, while they respected the team's decision to show its support of the LGBTQ community, they declined to wear the insignia for religious reasons. "A lot of it comes down to faith," Adam said, "so it's a hard decision. Because ultimately we all said what we want is them to know that all are welcome and loved here . . . [but] we put it on our bodies, I think a lot of guys decided that it's just a lifestyle that maybe—not that they look down on anybody or think differently—it's just that maybe we don't want to encourage it if we believe in Jesus." The next day numerous celebrities and politicians condemned the five as "bigoted" and "hiding their hate behind Jesus." On the other hand, many comments on the Tampa Bay Times website were supportive of the five, and expressed a wish that "people could just watch baseball" without all the political posturing. Blair, Elizabeth. "Tampa Bay Rays players' decision not to wear Pride jerseys stirs up fans." *Culture*. NPR.org, 6 Jun. 2022. Web. 10 Jun. 2022.



Attendees at the Minnesota Delegate Conference, held June 11, 2022, at Salem Lutheran Church in Eagle Lake, Minnesota.