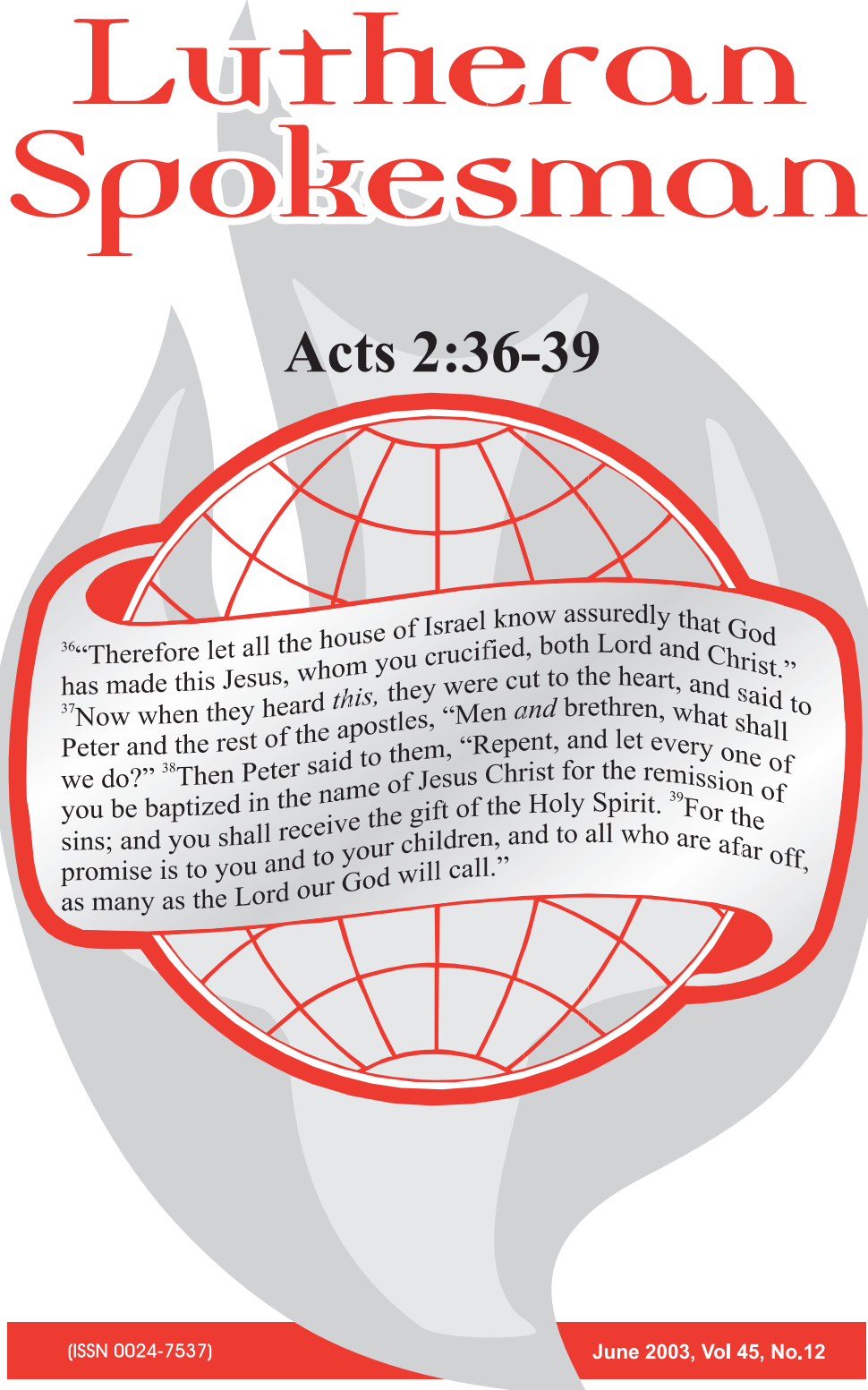


Lutheran Spokesman

Acts 2:36-39



³⁶“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
³⁷Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”³⁸Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

The Comfort of the Holy Spirit

Since March of 2002 our nation has been living under a new advisory system in response to the terrorist attacks on our country. This new system informs of the current threat level of an attack. It uses a color-coded system, with Red being the highest or severe risk of a terrorist attack. The lowest level of the five is Green, indicating a low risk of terrorist attack.

Since the system was put in place over a year ago, I can't recall the indicator being any lower than Yellow (significant risk of terrorist attack) for an extended period of time. Especially during the war in Iraq the threat level remained at Orange, indicating a high risk of terrorist attack.

Day after day we, the people of the United States, have been living under increased threats of terrorist attacks. For many, this heightened advisory level creates a heightened level of stress in a person's life.

It's easy to sit back and think that

since the majority of us are living many miles from New York City and Washington DC, we are safe. If only that were true! Yet no matter where we live, whether it's in the Pacific Northwest, the Atlantic Coast, or anywhere in between in these United States and even beyond, we are never very far away from the devastating effects of evil. The Evil One has many faithful followers, who will not hesitate to unleash various forms of destruction on their fellow human beings. Our drinking water or food could be poisoned; the air we breathe could be laced with biological agents of many kinds. A simple trip to the shopping mall could end in chaos and fear after a mad man plows his car bomb through the front door.

Are we living in frightening and unsettled times? It would seem that we are. However, the child of God has a distinct advantage. Being under Christ, we have been blessed with many spiri-

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tual blessings, which come to us by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. Our ever-protective God reminds us in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of man who will be made like grass?" (Is. 51:12)

One of the blessings we receive from our God the Holy Spirit is comfort—including comfort from the evil actions of terrorists, which can harm only the body. We need not fear them, since they too are mortal and will die. We need not fear, but be comforted by the fact that our sins are forgiven in Christ.

The Lord Jesus soothes our troubled hearts with these words: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my

name, he shall teach you all things ... " (Jn. 14:26).

The Holy Spirit brings comfort by convincing the believer that the Lord who made all things is in control. The Holy Spirit brings comfort to the believer by showing him that on the other side of death (no matter how torturous or seemingly unfair it is) waits life eternal in the comforts of heavenly paradise.

Our salvation is sure, and by the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace (the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper), we have a comfort which cannot be found in any other name under heaven.

Do we live in unsettling times? Yes, we do. Are we unsettled? No. We have the comfort of the Holy Spirit working in us through the means of grace to soothe our troubled hearts.

Joy of the desolate,
Light of the straying,
Hope of the penitent,
fadeless and pure;
Here speaks the Comforter,
tenderly saying,
Earth has no sorrow
that Heav'n cannot cure. (TLH 531:2)

—*Pastor Mark Gurath*



Dry Bones Walking

I've never seen a valley full of dry bones. The closest I ever came was on a certain prairie pasture on the great plains of South Dakota. Although only a few bones could be seen (poking up whitened limbs amid tufts of grass), the rancher told of days in his youth when the same ground was so strewn with buffalo bones a person could not take one step in any direction without touching one. Hundreds of wagonloads

of those dry bones were gathered and ground into bone meal. Through another's memory I saw that day a field of dry bones and envisioned a prairie perhaps not to be seen again.

If we want a picture of dry bones walking, the Prophet Ezekiel (chapter 37) tells of how the Lord once set him down in the midst of a valley of dry bones. The question was, could those bones live? The prophet was living

with a people who were captives of the Babylonians. They had suffered loss of freedom, cities, homes, and family. Their sorrow was his sorrow, their grief was great. “Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off” (v.11). Everywhere was the scene of death, stunning and stark, bleached bones in a valley of carnage. When God asked, “Can these bones live?”—the prophet had no answer. Seeing only devastation, he threw the question back to God: “You know.”

Whereupon God instructed: “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ... Surely I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord’” (vv. 4-6). The prophet obeyed, ordering the dry bones to get walking. A great army of dry bones became alive and stood on their feet. Israel was ready to go home.

As we celebrate Pentecost, it is good to have the perspective of the Old Testament. Surely Scripture is a unity, and God has not changed the way He carries out His saving work. In a spiritual sense I have seen a valley of dry bones. We all have. In fact, we all by nature were like dry bones ourselves—dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, hating God and His life. None of us were spiritually any more lively or more healthy than those dry bones Ezekiel saw (or than the ones on a South Dakota prairie).

Could we possibly live? Could any? In addition, who cared? Certainly not the scavengers of dead flesh or the merchants of dry bones.

But God cared! He knew! And yes,

bones—dry and brittle and sinfully lifeless—can live. They can and will live only because the God of all grace will Himself draw them together with sinews and muscles and cover them with flesh and skin. His Spirit breathes new life into them and they live—dry bones walking.

Impossible? Perhaps for the buffalo. But not for God who says, “Let there be”—and it was! Not for God who redeemed His people from the guilt and power of sin when His Son, the Lord Jesus, died that all might live. Not for God’s Holy Spirit, who breathes life into sacks of bones and creates faith and new-born creatures. A whole people—a whole Church—can live and walk and live forever. For to be alive with God’s breath means to know and believe in Him as Lord and Creator and Savior. Apart from that there remains only the valley of dry bones, bleached and whitened, waiting to be ground into powder eternally.

Can these bones keep living? Do we complain of shortness of breath, or that a certain vitality of life is lacking or dulled? Return daily to the Spirit who alone gives the rich supply of God’s oxygen in Christ Jesus. Breathe in deeply of His grace in Word and sacrament. And so live—formerly dry bones now walking: walking in faith, walking with God in His Word, walking in humble service, walking Home with great joy and expectation.

‘Tis through the purchase of His death
Who hung upon the tree
The Spirit is sent down to breathe
On such dry bones as we.

Raised from the dead, we live anew;
And justified by grace
We shall appear in glory, too,
And see our Father’s face.
(TLH #382:5-6)

—Pastor David Fuerstenau

Seeking God's Nurturing

"If they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"
(Luke 23:31)

This little proverb is recorded from the mouth of our dear Lord as He was being led to Calvary, and by it He advised the women lamenting His execution to redirect their concerns from Him to themselves.

What has that to do with Father's Day? Christian fathers and mothers are often caught short in their daily duties (privileged responsibilities) to one another and to Jesus. Let us apply the truism to ourselves—that if the fire of divine retribution will find fuel aplenty in dried-out dead wood of this world, will it not also singe and scorch Christian flora in their spring greenery? To be frankly direct: is the work of Christian fathers becoming a patch of dried-out dead wood in the orchard of God's planting? Or are Christian fathers promoting lives that are godly green, bearing blossom and fruit unto eternal life?

Well, that depends a lot on what fathers are concerned about and busy with. On June 15 the Sunday papers will publish children's essays on their favorite memory of a precious moment with Dad; if one of them mentions that Dad brought them the love of their Savior and exemplified Christian values in the home, we will be pleasantly surprised. (Perhaps Christian children are private about loving their fathers?)

We don't know how parenting works among those who have no

Father in heaven; perhaps the sad condition of American homes affords some evidence that non-Christian families are up against horrific obstacles they cannot surmount. How can anyone expect marriages and families to be green/alive unto God without His nurturing and His crisis intervention?

Here the child of God has a distinct advantage over others. Being bonded with our Father in heaven undergirds and overlays our entire living. Christian fathers have an inspiring role model, and Christian children do too. If Christian fathers are revered, honored, and obeyed, it is because they have done well as representatives of their Father in heaven. If Christian children

"... And that's just for starters. The Christian father and mother will not take vacation from caring for their children as Jesus cares—and not only talking that way but living that way, for doing so cultivates fair greenery in godliness."

are reverent, honoring, and obedient to their fathers, it is due to their being small replicas of the Son of God.

We know something about this from personal experience; it is a miracle of Father God's great mercies when a Christian father manages to foster a Christian marriage and a Christian family. This is a blessing grounded on something deeper than human love for

a life partner and higher than fatherly love for their children—though we grant that such human nurturing makes a great deal of difference in non-Christian homes, too.

Reflect again upon the truth of Jesus' proverb about the green and the dry. If our congregations are experiencing diminishing returns from work of pastor and teacher, is it not also due to diminishing examples of the Christian father who gathers his family together—perhaps after the evening meal—for his own and his family's bonding with Father God? Is the half-hour of family devotion (formal or informal) becoming a lost art in Christian homes?

Yet if the Christian father sets his mind and heart on this priority for his children, the time dedicated to nurturing family-style Bible-oriented spiritual discussion will not be displaced easily by social, school, or entertainment events. And that's just for starters. The Christian father and mother will not take vacation from caring for their children as Jesus cares—and not only talking that way but living that way, for doing so cultivates fair greenery in godliness.

Dear Christian fathers and mothers, heed the warning brought to you by your dear Savior! A healthy seedling planted among the diseased and dying may suffer from worse than shallow watering or poor nutrition. How will you protect your child's verdant growth in godliness from the blight of Satan's deadly spores? In the spring of their lives will you not inoculate against infestation and attend to the protection of bud and blossom? At the swelling of fruit, will you not guard against marauders?

I'm talking spiritual talk, of course, just as Jesus was mourning the decay of true spiritual life among His friends and neighbors. Perhaps it was too late for them; but it is surely not too late for us Christian fathers to cultivate and maintain the orchard of godly living in our own family circle for our children's (and grandchildren's) eternal welfare—for of such is the Kingdom of God among us.

Father's Day is an extra reminder for us Christian fathers of our privileged responsibilities. God bless us, one and all, as we get on with it! Amen!

—Paul R. Koch



A WEDDING ADDRESS

Text: "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"
(Ecclesiastes 4:12)

The book of Ecclesiastes, even as Proverbs, was written by Solomon, son of King David. Solomon was a man whom God had richly blessed with a special degree of wisdom. The reason was that when the Lord had invited Solomon to request anything he would

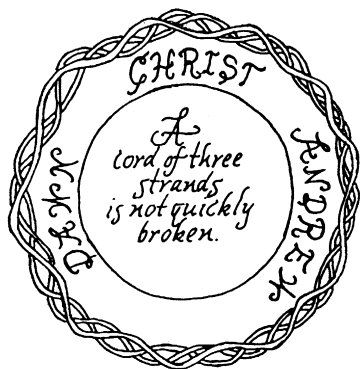
like, he did not do what most people would have done and request earthly riches. No, Solomon requested wisdom for ruling God's people. Consequently God granted him both riches and wisdom.

Solomon's wisdom is evident in his

many little gems of truth, including the oft-quoted words: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance . . .” and so on (Eccl. 3:1ff). Surely the occasion of marriage would be one event the king had in mind when he speaks of a time for joy and laughter—and even for dancing in a manner which glorifies God.

As for marriage itself, Solomon has a number of things to say, including “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). Every married couple would do well to put into practice the king’s many kernels of wisdom touching on relationships in general and marriage in particular. One such kernel is our text, which in its larger context says: “If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken . . .” We have always taught and believed that companionship is a God-intended blessing of the marriage union. In fact, God tells us that one of the primary reasons He created woman from a rib of man—thus instituting marriage—was companionship. God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18).

Think of the many blessings—psychological and emotional as well as physical—which God intends for husband and wife in marriage. In our spouse God intends that we have a



Ecclesiastes 4:12

most intimate friend—one with whom we might share our joys and divide our sorrows; one who knows us and loves us enough to point out our strengths and to correct our weaknesses (but doing this without harping criticism); in our spouse we have one who stands by us and comforts us in trouble and difficulty, in good days and bad, in sickness and health. Unfortunately, however, when Satan caused Adam and Eve to sin, he threw a monkey-wrench into the works. After sin entered, Satan got Adam and Eve to point the finger of blame at each other. Ever since, Satan has not let up. The devil, the world, and our own sinful natures make it difficult for a deep and lasting friendship and companionship to develop and grow within marriage.

It’s because of these influences that a “strand of two” within marriage is seldom strong enough to survive. But a “cord of three strands” is much stronger, much more difficult to break. On this big day in your life, I can do no better than to impress upon you the importance of having the Lord God as that third strand in your marriage. When God is present and involved in a relationship, that relationship will not be “quickly broken.” I say, “when God

is involved.” God deserves to be more than a mantelpiece in your home, but you will want Him to play an active role there. You are making a good beginning by choosing to be married before the altar of God—with family, friends, and fellow Christians joining you in imploring God’s blessings. However, from this time forward may you take God with you day by day.

Among Solomon’s many gems of wisdom are those in which he speaks of the vanity, the emptiness, of life apart from God. In one place he speaks of such a life as “chasing the wind” (Eccl. 2:17). Experience bears this out. Life apart from God is often little more than a hectic, frantic scramble for earthly, material things, for things which guarantee little lasting peace, joy, or happiness. By contrast, a life intertwined with God and with His Son Jesus Christ is a life blessed with true and solid values and lasting spiritual comforts. Jesus Christ is the true Friend and Companion any of us sinners need; He is the One who came into this world of sin to live a holy life, suffer and die innocently on the cross to gain for us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Knowing the crucial role that Jesus, the Friend of sinners, has as the Third Party in a marriage has caused many couples to put up a plaque which reads: “Jesus Christ is the Head of this house, the Unseen Guest at every meal, the Silent Listener to every conversation.”

Today the two of you are becoming one under God. You may have had a friend or two who kidded you about this day, saying “Marriage is a ball . . . and a chain!” While intended to be humorous, the statement really calls attention to a mixed blessing. Marriage

“ . . . a ‘cord of three strands’ is much stronger, much more difficult to break. On this big day in your life, I can do no better than to impress upon you the importance of having the Lord God as that third strand in your marriage.”

indeed brings two people together—not to be a drag and a burden to each other, but to enjoy and develop a deep and lasting friendship and companionship. The truth in the statement that “marriage is ... a chain” is that you are giving up your independence. As a matter of fact, people who try to keep their independence within marriage won’t long have a good marriage, but are likely to cause strain within that holy union and even shatter it. Dear young friends, you are giving up your independence today in order to make the most of what you can be together as husband and wife. May you ever remember Solomon’s word to the wise, “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken,” taking God with you day by day.

On TV a civil magistrate conducting a wedding asked the couple: “Do you promise to do everything in your power to make this a lasting marriage?” While he no doubt meant well, the question asked reveals a humanistic and shallow view, doesn’t it? You know that relying on your own power won’t cut it. As Christians, we know that the power for a sanctified Christian life comes from God and His Word. May you from this day forward work and pray to be best friends and good companions to each other. With God’s help may you build a home for yourselves

and for your children in which He will be daily present with His blessings. We ask that for your own peace and joy

and for God's honor and glory. Amen.

—A wedding sermon (adapted),
Pastor Paul Fleischer



Studies In Philippians

**"Rejoice in the Lord always.
Again I will say, rejoice!" (4:4)**

Chapter 4: 1-7

THE POWER OF GOD'S PEACE

It's a long tradition. The sermon is finished. Worshippers rise to sing the Offertory. While the organist gets back on the bench, the preacher declares . . .

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!"

Sweet words—this *votum*. A kindly wish? Yes, and much, much more.

It is, in the language of the apostle, a *promise* with its own built-in *power*. It speaks of a kind of peace that can actually do something we all need so desperately: protect our hearts and minds. This God's peace can do. This the peace of God will do.

No Troubled Hearts and Futile Thoughts

In Bible times people thought of their heart as the seat of their personality. The mind was for them the place of their thinking process. Then, as always, both heart and mind are subject to all the assaults the sinful nature can muster. Mental health is a matter of paramount concern at all ages.

Attention deficit, eating disorders, addictions, dementia, and the like, plague our society. We thank God for the clinics and treatment programs that give what help science can offer, especially for mental ills caused by some physical problem.

The revealed wisdom of our Biblical text, however, goes far beyond what any human understanding might come up with. The problem dealt with here and its effective therapy can come only from the God who heals *all* diseases (Ps. 103:3b).

Think of the troublesome thoughts which can afflict the Lord's people just because they *are* His.

Worry Beads

Some anxieties (v. 6) that likely plagued the Christians in Philippi?

Certainly worry for the well-being of Paul and Epaphroditus in Rome (2:25-27).

Would their little flock in Philippi survive its persecution? (2:30)

Could the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche be bridged so

that they might continue their faithful service of Christ as true yoke-fellows? (4:2-3)

Would their joy in the Lord fade? (4:4)

Would they lose their sense of the Lord's early returning, and with that the gentleness of patient humility? (Chp. 2; 4:5)

Would their support be enough for Paul's needs in prison? (4:10)

Is their eternal salvation certain? (4:3b)

High level concerns, aren't they?

Yet such anxiety, as well as anxiety for personal matters, has no useful place in the hearts and minds of the Lord's people. "Be anxious for *nothing*" (v. 6). Worry cripples and handicaps us in the work of the gospel. It sucks the life out of our joy (v. 4). It's a deadly virus.

How Rid of It?

In modern Macedonia you'll see many a person fingering a string of beads while on their way or on the job. Working off nervous energy? Possibly. Letting each bead be a way station for a quick prayer? Could be. In any case, it is a traditional way of dealing with worry.

The Lord's apostle gives us a divine way to be rid of anxiety. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. ... "

How comforting, how calming it is to know that our gracious, loving God is waiting for us to unload our burden of care in prayer—prayer that is unlimited in range, boldly earnest, radiant with thanks for the answer to come, and specific in what is asked for!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Ev'ry-thing to God in prayer!

"And . . . "

In this setting, the little word *and* is loaded with meaning—when *this* happens, *that* will follow.

What follows such prayer is that "the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

This is not a mere pious wish; it is a promise of God!



The Peace of God

What is this peace with its power to stand sentry over our hearts and minds?

In Bible times it was common for people to greet one another with *shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace.

This shalom, however, is vastly greater than any human thought, imagination, and understanding. This is Jesus' special gift to His Church ("My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid!" Jn. 14:17)

What is your favorite Bible reference for this peace, should anyone ask you a reason of this great hope we have in Christ? Try 2 Corinthians 5:19 for the core of the matter: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Here is our peace-pact. Here is Christ. Here is the platform for

our personal peace of mind and heart.

Let that be our first request of God.
He's minded to give it to those who ask

of Him.

Peace be unto you!

—Pastor Rollin A. Reim



"CLOSE COMMUNION"

Or: "Who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper?"

Fourth In A Series

Partaking of the Lord's Supper is in and by itself not beneficial, because all depends on HOW one partakes. This is no mechanical or magical meal. Nor is it medicinal in the sense of receiving a pill or injection, which may have their effects regardless of faith.

The Sacrament requires faith—even a weak and feeble faith—in the Christ of the Scriptures. Such faith is bestowed through the hearing of the Word, whether in private instruction class, or sermon. Without such faith, the grace imparted by the Sacrament is not received, with the result being wrath and judgment—which makes this a most serious matter.

He who is worthy and "in good standing" with regard to the Christ of the Scriptures, who repents sin and trusts the Savior, who is willing to serve Him who died and rose again for sin, need not at all worry about God's wrath and judgment. Rather, one should be joyful and delighted, and have a good mind and heart when partaking of the body and blood of Christ.

The venerable Dr. C.F.W. Walther wrote that, on the other hand, "dreadful is the sin committed by him who partakes unworthily of the Holy Supper. And those who say: 'Still, we ought to be glad that the people still come to the Lord's Supper,' clearly reveal how piti-



ful their knowledge of the holy Sacrament is."

Let us now consider nine guideline questions—there could perhaps be more or fewer—to be asked prior to admission to the Sacrament:

1) Have you been baptized, with water, in the name of the Trinity?

2) Have you been taught the basics of Christian doctrine, as in the *Small Catechism* of Dr. Martin Luther—so that you are able to perform a spiritual self-examination according to Scripture?

3) Have you publicly professed your Christian faith before your fellow-Christians, as in the rite of Confirmation or in another such rite?

4) Do you believe in the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins?

5) Have you taken steps to remove any private or public offense(s)?

6) Are you living in the "sin of implacability" where you find that in your heart and mind you are unwilling to forgive someone's trespasses?

7) Are you guilty of the sin of unionism—as a promoter or adherent of religious teachers or organizations which deviate from Scripture?

8) Are you known to the (officialing) pastor as a Christian person?

9) Have you the desire to amend your sinful life and to grow in grace?

Some of the above could receive a closer look. In the meantime you might wish to read Ezekiel chapter three, verses seventeen to twenty-one, to obtain a grasp of the seriousness with which God speaks of the public ministry of the Word.

—Pastor Em. Warren Fanning



Excommunication— An Act of Love!

In the Explanation of Luther's *Small Catechism*, Question 253 asks, "*What is the purpose of excommunication?*" (Sydow edition)

Answer: *The purpose of removing a person from the "communion" is to show him or her how serious and dangerous it is to be impenitent. We do this in the hope of leading him or her to repent, for a person who dies in impenitence will not have eternal life.*

Bible Passage: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together . . . deliver such a one (someone who is impenitent) to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

The purpose of removing a person from the "communion"¹ is to show him how serious and dangerous it is to be impenitent. We do this in the hope of leading him to repent, for a person who dies in impenitence will not have eternal life.

In our day the topic of Christian discipline in general, and excommunication in particular, often makes people

uncomfortable. Does not Jesus say, after all, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1)? Yes, He does, but when Jesus says that, He is speaking of "sinful" judging in which someone out of pride condemns someone else without just cause. Jesus is not speaking of the proper judging of sin which God commands.

When it comes to sin, the Bible very clearly tells us that we are to make judgments concerning sinful actions and then attempt to lead a fellow sinner to repentance. Paul tells us, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Jesus also outlines a process we are to undertake if an individual sins and then refuses to repent: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him

¹ "Communion" here does not refer to the Lord's Supper, but rather to the general fellowship enjoyed through membership in a Christian congregation.

Editor's Note: As a companion to the article on Excommunication, we copy here (from the Sydow Catechism) what Martin Luther recorded regarding *The Office of the Keys*:

1. What is the Office of the Keys?

The Office of the Keys is the special power Christ gave to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners and to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

Where is this written?

The holy evangelist John writes in chapter 20: "[Jesus] breathed on [His disciples] and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" (John 20:22,23)

2. How does a Christian congregation use the Keys?

A Christian congregation, with its pastor, uses the Keys according to Christ's command, either by forgiving those who repent of their sins and are willing to change, or by excluding those who are obviously impenitent from the Christian congregation. These actions are as valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord were dealing with us Himself.

be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-18).

Why bother? Why get involved? The fundamental reason is love! Every human being has been the object of Jesus' redemptive love (cf. John 3:16, Romans 3:23-24, 2 Corinthians 5:19). Every human soul is precious in God's sight, and His desire is that every human being be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:3-4).

Satan, on the other hand, wants to enslave and destroy souls (cf. 1 Peter 5:8). He hates God and seeks to lead human beings into the darkness of sin and its ultimate end—death and eternal damnation (cf. 1 John 1:6, Romans 6:23a, Revelation 21:8).

We, who have been the objects of God's love, are now to love one another as we have been loved (cf. John 13:34). We are compelled by the love of our Savior to take the time and the risks to get involved, to seek individu-



"The Prodigal Returns"

als out and strive with humility to rescue them from their spiritual danger. Anything less would not be true love!

Our young people in their catechetical studies learn about excommunication and its purpose. Excommunication is the final step in Christian discipline. It is the recognition that an individual through his impenitence has removed himself from the family of God and so

can no longer remain a member of a Christian congregation.

As stated above, when an individual refuses to listen to fellow believers and continues down the road of impenitence leading to eternal destruction, the church as a whole is called upon by God to excommunicate that individual. The purpose of excommunication is not to "get rid of someone," but rather to point out the serious and dangerous consequences of impenitence. Those who die in impenitence will lose their

souls.

Our prayer must always be that the Spirit of God use our testimony to lead lost souls to repentance, renewed faith, and also renewed fellowship with the congregation.

Excommunication is seeking to save a lost soul! It is an act of love!

—Pastor Paul D. Nolting

(first written for the newsletter of the congregation he serves, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minn.)



The Discourses of Christ

the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's
Well—John 4:15-26

Part Two

God has prepared your salvation!

Halfway into their visit (vv. 7-26), the woman at the well was beginning to catch on that her visit with Jesus about H₂O was heading into deeper waters. That's because Jesus, shaping a course for her soul's salvation, had steered her around the shoals of their ethnic differences and was maneuvering her past the shallows of prejudice against Himself. Since she was not a novice about what men wanted from her, she began to see that Jesus was there *not to take, but to give*. And that's the turning point, always.

This One was turning things around; He had won her confidence, and she was feeling her thirst for His "water springing up into everlasting life ... Sir, give me this water, that I

may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

Let's give her a helping hand, as Jesus did; He was patient with her ignorance, for human ignorance can be enlightened. Since her everlasting future was teetering in the balance (was she prepared for that?), Jesus nudged her just enough to make her reach out for stability. "Go, call your husband, and come here." Normally, a husband would be stabilizing, but for her that wouldn't work, and she knew it. Her life was so far out of balance that five husbands had not helped; one after the other had fallen away until by now she had given up any pretense of virtue in her alliance with a dishonorable partner in a disgraceful bond—and we know the name God has for

that stance.

But how could this stranger know all the wretched chapters in her sorry biography? She was impressed. "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." She probably thought or said as much: "You possess the gift of clairvoyance. You are a chosen spokesman for your god—and even though it's not my god, I'm open to talking about religion. I'm not descended from heathen, you know; and the high ground yonder has suited our honorable religious practices. We believe as do the Jews—that God will send Messiah to us, too. But you folks have made a divisive theological issue of it that Jerusalem worship is the only worship God will accept—and that's too narrow for us."

(We get the drift, for we see it on every hand. When theology goes wrong, religion becomes ritualized, and folks take comfort in externals.)

Was she ready for some real theology? We picture Jesus seated, intent and earnest; the woman poised with water-pot at knee—the classic tableau of the Savior at work, doing what He does best: seeking to save a lost soul—and He enjoyed the work, as He told His disciples, "I have food to eat of which you do not know ... My food is to do the will of Him who sent me ... " (vv.32,34). If she will but listen, she may hear the doors of heaven opening for her, and she might go home that day with heart lightened; her life gone to hell turned into a life going to heaven.

Real theology begins with listening to Jesus, and salvation comes with believing what He says. "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father." For starters, Jesus removes some miscon-

ceptions: God is not a tribal or ethnic totem, and in His space-time continuum, human geography is passe. The view of God is too narrow that limits Him to Earth's fragile framework of time and place.

SALVATION Prepared!

Getting past these human negatives ("You worship what you do not know"), Jesus goes on, "Let me open to you God's theological positives, including some particulars: God has set into place a specific mechanism for knowing Him and His plans for humankind. 'We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.' Not only is God knowable, He has placed Himself within your reach, and He has chosen the Jewish people as the channel of His revelation."

So much for the delivery system; now Jesus shifts our interest from the vessel to the contents of the vessel: God has prepared your SALVATION!

Salvation of sinners is God's great goal, and His grand agenda on Earth is to enlighten mankind with His saving truth, His worship, and (of course) His personal appearance among you to work out your salvation. It all fits together, and the time has arrived for you to interact with Him, as Jesus said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Jesus was making a heavy point, one that she needed; and He phrased it in a poetic format easily learned: "true worshipers ... worship the Father ... in spirit and truth; worship Him, Spirit ... in spirit and truth."

But what does it all mean? First, it is a given that religion/worship is agreeable to God on His terms alone. It all hangs together like the links of an anchor chain: true reverence hangs on correct concepts, and correct concepts depend on God Himself, who is the bulwark of reliable validity.

How can it be otherwise? Consider the opposite: a bogus deity is at the outset a false concept, and false religiosity must follow—to the confusion of precious souls.

Now as to "spirit" (heart and soul)—the human soul still bears the shadow of God's image. Our souls seek God and will not be satisfied until they find their rest in Him. Thus true religion/worship can be seeded in the human soul only when it becomes reunited with its image-Creator and image-Restorer.

To our surprise, this woman was already attuned to the crux of God's self-revelation, and she confessed her belief that "Messiah is coming and He will tell us all things." For centuries

she and her ancestors had been waiting for God's Gift—and she was willing to wait longer, if necessary.

Now in Jesus her waiting was over! "I, speaking to you, am He! I, Jesus, am the One chosen to reveal all things in heaven and on Earth that you will ever need to know: I am here to tell you about yourself (to expose your needs) and then to reveal the Father's program of salvation. Here I am, come from heaven to redeem you and win you back to your Father."

There you have it, dear reader—and it is enough!

Jesus comes to our hometown and speaks with us as we go about our daily chores; it is no waste of our time to bide awhile with Him. The next chapter in her life—as in ours—sees a friend going to neighbors with a testimony that means more when it comes from a friend who with a sparkle in his eye says, "I have found the Savior. Let me tell you about Him!"

—Paul R. Koch



SMORGASBORD

• **"MEMORIES"** (*Pictures have recently appeared on these pages of the Christian Women's Retreat held in March near Trego, Wisconsin. This report on the Retreat was written by one participant, Ruth Mueller of Immanuel Lutheran, Mankato; though abbreviated, the words give a real flavor of the fellowship enjoyed.*)

... The theme of our weekend was "Love One Another." Pastor Nolting opened our study on Friday with a discussion of "Learning from God's Love." These sessions have truly

become discussions. I am always struck by how easily everyone participates. It is almost like a group of old friends gathered in a huge living room. (These were people from all walks of life—teachers, nurses, homemakers, business women, single, married, divorced, young, and old.) The meeting room in Trego has a huge fireplace in which a crackling fire burned which added to the feeling of coziness and camaraderie.

Our studies continued the next morning, as we were led in a discus-

sion about increasing our mutual love within our marriages, our families, and our friendships. The afternoon provided us with choices including a hike, exercise routines, meal planning, a look at early brain development, dress alterations, crafts, and an in-depth look at ways to organize your life in order to leave room for the Lord.

After a tasty banquet, the evening program began and it was absolutely wonderful. There was a very personalized slide presentation on the early days of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) from Eunice Roehl and Ruth Sydow. Grace Schreyer led a sing-a-long, and I must say, there are a lot of gifted singers in our group because it sounded like a well-rehearsed choir in no time. A quilt show-and-tell was a big hit, and then Beth Kranz had us all laughing with her entertainment—my cheeks ached by the time it was over!

. . . Sunday morning brought yet another edifying discussion led by Barb Ruegge titled "Living in Love." A worship service with Holy Communion was held and then a brief wrap-up. Tearful good-byes were said as we packed up, but it helped knowing we'd have a great reunion when next Spring comes.

• BOARD REPORTS

The various synodical boards report to the Coordinating Council (CC) on their on-going work in our behalf. These reports (usually written by the chairman of the board) are generally prefaced with brief but pithy words of scriptural encouragement.

Seems to us that not just CC attendees, but all of us can benefit from such words. For example, at the April

30-May 1, 2003 CC . . .

The *Board of Missions* report was prefaced with these remarks:

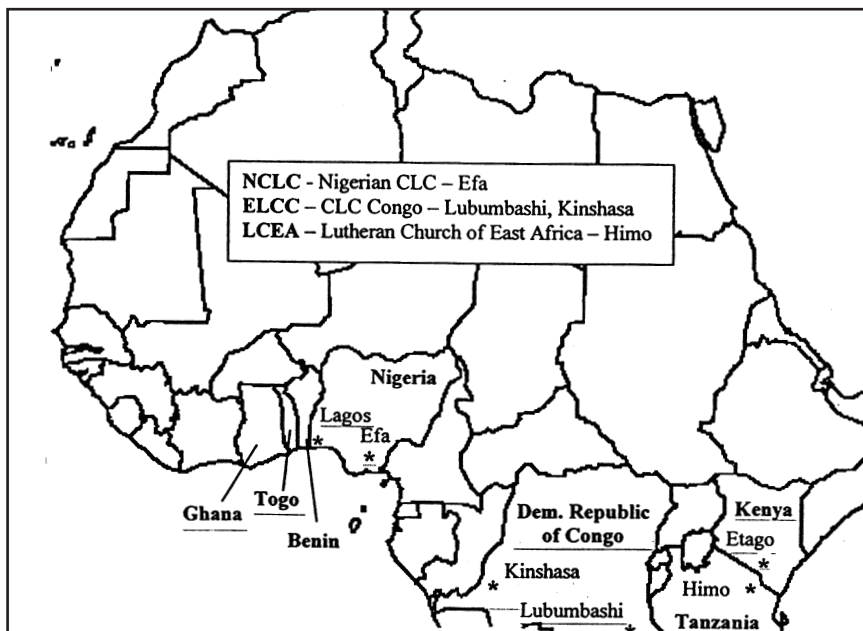
One of the biggest, boldest headlines ever published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel was just one word. In all capital letters three inches high it read: "TOPPLED." It was announcing the fall of the old regime in Baghdad and hopefully the dawning of a new life of freedom and opportunity for the citizens of the war-torn country of Iraq.

"TOPPLED" could well be the headline today too. Jesus' glorious rising from the dead on Easter means the toppling of the old regime of Satan, sin, and death and a new era of spiritual freedom and peace. We know what the situation was. Sin came into the world by one man, and so death came to all, because all sinned. Every human being is born dead in sin with no desire or ability to break free. All mankind was facing eternal death in hell.

"The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:56). Jesus came as an army of one to liberate the world. Single-handedly He took on Himself the whole massive weight of the world's sin, carried it to the cross, died the death we deserve, and won the victory! How do we know? Because He is not in the tomb, but risen! The Enemy is toppled, never to rise again!

The Lord has now "embedded" us in the world to report that news to sinners everywhere. From the battlefield of life with its suffering, guilt, and death, we can tell of objectives-achieved and conflict-ended. Christ offers forgiveness, peace, and never-ending life to all! May that saving message inspire

continued, p. 19



*From The Board of Missions Report to the
 CLC Coordinating Council
 April 30-May 1, 2003*

AFRICA (see map)

ELCC - 27 congregations, 15 pastors, 1633 souls

LCEA - 11 congregations, 987 souls

NCLC - 18 congregations, 14 workers, 900 souls

(The seminary in Efa has 14 full-time students)

INDIA

BELC - 150 congregations, 97 workers, 4034 souls

(The work is concentrated near the cities of Uthukottai
 and Nellore)

HOME MISSIONS

(location, average attendance, pastor)

Atlanta, Geo. (25), N. Mayhew
 Calgary, Alberta (21), S. Karp
 Chicago, Ill. (20), D. Baker
 Detroit, Mich. (20), W. Schaller
 Grand Rapids, Mich. (17), T. Holland
 Ketchikan, Alaska (20), D. Fuerstenau

Live Oak, Fla. (26), K. Stewart
 North Port, Fla. (25), P. Larsen
 Sioux Falls, S.Dak.(33), M. Gurath
 Tacoma, Wash. (22), P. Naumann
 Vernon, British Columbia (31), D. Reim
 Weslaco, Tex. (35), D. Fleischer

“Spread, oh, spread, thou mighty Word”

and move us to seize every God-given opening to go and proclaim "He is risen! He is risen indeed!"

The Board of Regents for ILC report was prefaced as follows:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). These God-breathed words of the Psalm-writer were recorded nearly 3,000 years ago. Lamps and lights are much more than they used to be, but still useless in the special darkness of which the psalmist speaks. Only God's Word, the Bible, pierces the spiritual darkness of our own fleshly nature and this world so that we may know and safely navigate the path to heaven through Jesus Christ.

How then could any Christian Day-School teacher be opposed to having his/her students study and memorize Bible passages? "The eight teachers of our school refuse to have their students memorize Bible passages, and the parents support them!" complained the pastor of a 2,000 member LC-MS congregation 20 years ago. Do some parents and teachers think there are better things to do in the classroom than to learn and recite Bible passages from memory?

The words of LC-MS President, Gerald Kieschnick, certainly address part of the problem in his church body: "Recently it has come to my attention that upwards of 50 percent of the teachers in our Lutheran schools have not received formal education in the Bible or Lutheran doctrine and confessions beyond their own confirmation instruction at the age of 13." (Quoted from LWML/Synod—Minnesota South district, October 2002) A special "task force" will report to the LC-MS Convention in 2004 with recommenda-

tions on how to correct this problem.

What about us? God forbid the notion that our own elementary or secondary schools are not as enlightening for "today's" children, because they place too much emphasis on Bible study and not enough on mathematics, science, computer skills, athletics, etc. Christian parents and children may have some good reason not to send their children to one of our "church" schools. God forbid that they choose not to make use of and support our CLC schools because they think the public schools have more to offer in those areas that are most needed to "make it in this world."

Surely our greatest ambition and our most treasured hope for our children is not that they "make it" in this world, but that they make it through this world to our Savior's world. "I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on the young folk." Luther said that. If it was true in his day, it is truer in ours. Commenting on Psalm 199:105 he wrote: "It is true that human wisdom and the liberal arts are noble gifts of God, good and useful for all kinds of things, wherefore one cannot do without them in this life. But they can never thoroughly tell us what sin and righteousness are in the eyes of God, how we can get rid of sins, become pious and just before God, and pass from death into life." (Plass, What Luther Says, para. 1327 & 1328)

May our gracious and merciful Lord Jesus preserve His Word at Immanuel and in all the schools, churches, and homes of the CLC, not so that we may claim the Bible as a

relic of the orthodox; rather that we may use it to light our way through the dark paths of this world to His new and glorious world.

Announcements

West Central Delegate Conference

Date: June 13-15, 2003

Place: Our Savior's Lutheran Church,
Jamestown, N.Dak.

Agenda:

1. Devotional Study of Matthew 6:24-34 —
Mr. Mike Fuerstenau
2. Live-in situations — Pastor Roland Gurgel
3. The Pitfalls of Teenage (Premarital)
Dating — Pastor Frank Gantt
4. Living in the United States—a Blessing
from God? a Temptation from Satan? —
Mr. Jonathan Wiechmann
5. Regarding the Support of
Organizations/Businesses — Pastor Mark
Gurath
6. The Addressing and Resolving of
Controversies in the Church — Mr. Roger
Knief

Communion Service Speaker: Pastor Andrew
Schaller

Chaplain: Pastor Paul Fleischer

*—Submitted by (appointed) Secretary,
Pastor Mark Gurath*

Women's Retreat 2004

Begin now making your plans for next year's
CLC Women's Retreat in Trego, Wisconsin.
Dates: March 26, 27, 28, 2004. Some scholar-
ships will be available.

CLC General Pastoral Conference Immanuel Lutheran College Eau Claire, Wisconsin Tuesday-Thursday, June 17-19, 2003

Essays:

- * Scriptural Guidelines for Enrollment Policies of our Christian Day Schools — Pastor Terrel Kesterson
- * An Examination of the Concepts of "Sheep Stealing" and "Proselytizing" — Pastor James Sandeen
- * New Testament Exegesis, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 — Pastor Philip Matzke
- * Scriptural Study of Forgiveness — Pastor Michael Wilke
- * Study of the Natural Knowledge of God — Pastor Michael Eichstadt
- * Study of Acts 15 (the Jerusalem Council) — Pastor John Ude
- * Old Testament Exegesis — Pastor Norman Greve

Preacher: Pastor Robert List

Liturgist: Pastor James Naumann

Chaplain: Pastor Mark Gurath

Program Committee 2004: Pastors John Hein, Paul Larsen, Roland H. Gurgel

Excuse Committee 2003: Pastors Frank Gantt, Tim Holland

Organ Coordinator: Pastor Paul Krause

