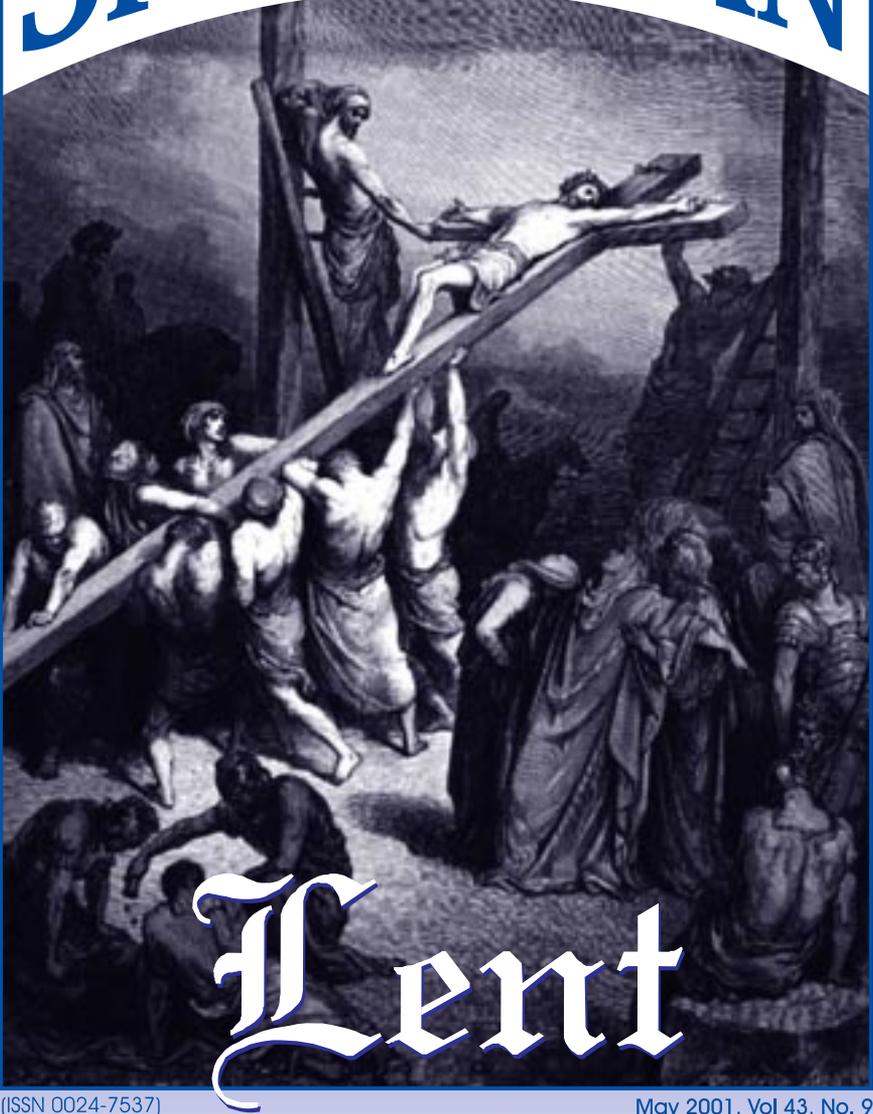


LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN



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*“They will look upon Me whom
they have pierced.”*
(Zechariah 12:10)

It is a long way from our home to Jerusalem. My family and I made this journey because we desire, at least once, to celebrate the Passover in this city. Though we are not Jews, we have come to faith in the God named Jehovah.

As we approach the city this Friday morning, we cannot help but notice the soldiers on the hill who are crucifying three men. They are, no doubt, transgressors of the worst kind.

We are arriving later than planned. Having obtained food, we find a shady place to rest.

As we begin to eat, we are stunned at the arrival of an unexpected darkness. It is difficult to see each other even though it is mid-day! We also notice that everywhere the conversation is alive with the topic of the crucifixion.

What makes this crucifixion so exceptional?

The more closely I listen in, I am amazed that some are saying that the Christ is being crucified! How can this be? Certainly this man must have been a fraud. Anyone could claim to be the Christ.

Yet I am curious and begin to ask questions.

They say this man preached convincingly and with authority. His was a message of repentance and faith. They say he supported his words with irrefutable miracles. The blind were given sight. The

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deaf began to hear. The crippled were able to walk.

Do not the Scriptures say that such signs would point to the Christ? I even heard that this man recently raised from the dead someone who had been buried four days!

Astonishing! The more I hear about this man's words and actions, the more it sounds like he may have truly been the Messiah. How can it be that he is being crucified?

Having instructed my family to wait for my return in the lodgings we found, I am going back to the place known as Golgotha. I must see this man again and try to understand what is taking place.

When I look upon him, I see nothing special. I can read the superscription. It says that his name is Jesus of Nazareth.

How strange it is that his crime is summarized as "King of the Jews."

It is a terrible thing to see a man being crucified. Yet he now seems strangely calm. They are giving him a drink from a sponge.

Listen—he is about to speak.

"IT IS FINISHED!"

That did not sound like a man defeated. He sounded victorious!

Now he is looking toward heaven and is commending his spirit into the Father's hands. He's dead.

What is going on? The ground is trembling in response to his death! Even the centurion says the man was righteous—yes, that he was God's Son.

God's Son is dead!? How? Why?

After so many years of waiting for the Messiah, is this what was supposed to happen?

As I make my way back to our lodgings, I am searching the Scriptures in my mind, attempting to make sense of this.

Wait . . . Now I remember! The prophet had written: "He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sins of many, and He made intercession for the transgressors."

Another prophet had said: "They will look upon me whom they have pierced."

I cannot stop the tears from welling up in my eyes. My heart is pounding in my chest. I have seen the Messiah! I heard Him speak!

By dying for me He has done what God had promised He would do. I cannot wait to tell my family and our friends back home!

From now on, my life shall have this one purpose—to get to know better and better this Jesus of Nazareth . . . my Savior.

—Pastor Delwyn Maas

EYEWITNESS GOOD NEWS

News Anchor: *We go now 'live' to Jerusalem. Describe the scene there for us if you can.*

Reporter: *Well, Dan, it's really quite a scene. A man from Nazareth has been beaten bloody by the Roman governor in Jerusalem in an apparent effort to appease this angry crowd.*

News Anchor: *Pathetic pictures indeed. Who is this Man? What is He being accused of?*

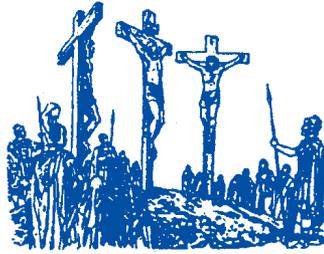
Reporter: *It's not clear exactly what this Man named Jesus has done; the best we can determine is that He has proclaimed Himself to be the 'King of the Jews.'*

News Anchor: *What's that you say? It's hard to hear you over the noise of the crowd. It sounds like they're saying, 'Crucify Him!'*

Reporter: *That's right, Dan. This Passover crowd is really in a frenzy now. They apparently want governor Pilate to crucify this Jesus. You can see Pilate washing his hands now. He has apparently had enough and is giving the Jews the go-ahead for the crucifixion.*

News Anchor: *That's the scene in Jerusalem right now. Stay tuned for continuing coverage of the unrest surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. When we return from our commercial break, our cameras go out to Golgotha to find out what preparations are being made for the crucifixion.*

In this day of courthouse TV news coverage and the instant replay rule, this historical fiction might well have



been the scene if television cameras had been present to capture our Lord's passion. But there were no video cameras there, no on-the-spot reporting, no web coverage on the internet.

Are we missing anything because of the lack of news coverage of Christ's passion? Why didn't God send His Son when it would have received better coverage? Did He perhaps send Him at an inopportune time?

No, God sent His Son at exactly the right time, as He tells us (see Galatians 4:4f). God wasn't concerned about media coverage or even with what historians would say. After all, as we have learned from this past presidential election, the media doesn't always get it right. You can't always believe what you see on videotape, since such things are open to interpretation.

Just looking at a picture of this Man from Nazareth being nailed to a cross, who would have guessed that this was not just a man, but true God as well? Who would have believed that He was suffering more than simply the pain of the cross?

Divine Reporters

God Himself tells us what happened and what it means for sinful man, for He had His own team of reporters on the scene. Prior to Christ's suffering

and death, the Old Testament prophets told us what was going to happen and why. As the prophet Isaiah says: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6).

The evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (verbally inspired by God the Holy Spirit) recorded the trial, suffering, and death of God’s own Son. Their report is so complete that there should be no doubt in anyone’s mind exactly what happened there in Jerusalem. In case anyone still had questions, the epistle writers provide after-the-fact analysis of what exactly happened there on the cross.

It is reported that Pilate wanted to know why Jesus should be crucified, for, as he said: “Why? What evil has He done?” (Mt. 27:23) But no earthly legal expert could tell us that it was necessary for this innocent Jesus to “die for the people and not that the whole nation should perish” (Jn. 11:50). The author of the ten commandments tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23); furthermore, that all people deserve the punishment for sin, for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

But no earthly judge would have come up with the plan to make satisfaction for the wrong that had been committed against God. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [the satisfactory payment] for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10). “He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Those who witnessed Jesus on the

cross misunderstood when He cried out “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” They said: “Look, He is calling for Elijah!” Only from God’s Word do we know that He was suffering the punishment of hell, for what He said is translated: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46).

Only from God’s Word do we know that Jesus was doing all of this in our place and on our behalf. He lived His innocent life so that His innocence could be credited to us; He suffered and died so that His sufferings would pay for our sins, as Jesus Himself says: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). The result? “And you, being dead in your trespasses... He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13).

Reporter: “*Dan, the reports here are just incredible! Jesus has just died and the scene in Jerusalem is absolute chaos. The city has been rocked by an earthquake, the sky has gone dark in the middle of the day, and now I’m told that the veil in the temple has been torn in half! We’re working to try to determine just what this all means.*”

Through the miracle of God’s Word we know what it means. We are eye-witnesses of this Good News. Through the eyes of faith worked by God’s Word we understand what man, looking with human eyes, tries in vain to understand. When Jesus died, the sin that separated God and man was taken away; the works of the devil were destroyed; death was conquered; when Jesus rose bodily from the dead His

words were fulfilled by which He assures us of eternal life: “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19).

Stay tuned to your Bible for continued coverage of this Good News.

—Pastor Joel Fleischer



The second of three devotions on . . .

THE BEST WAY TO DIE

Take another look at the cross. It was the best way for Jesus to die. Crucifixion turns out to be, by far, the best way for other people to die!

Seriously. Let’s go to the cross on Calvary and find out. In Luke chapter 23 you hear Jesus make two marvelous, miraculous, absolving statements: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” and “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

Imagine the love and pity towards sinful man that it took for Jesus—in utter agony—to express these thoughts. His love for sinners prevented Him from reviling and cursing His torturers and blasphemers. He wants all people to come to repentance. And when the one thief did repent, Jesus gave Him an eternal blessing.

Now let’s skip ahead into eternity, into heaven. You, as a believer, are going there eventually (not because of anything you have done, of course). Now imagine yourself meeting all kinds of fellow-believers there. You will get to meet that repentant criminal who died on a cross beside Jesus. And the chief topic of his eternal conversation will be gratitude. “The best thing that ever happened to me,” he will say, “was to die on that cross!” No, not to have been a criminal, but to have died there with Christ and to be brought to



the realization that this is the Savior of sinners the world over.

According to the Revelation of Saint John, chapter five, everyone in heaven will be singing praises to the Lamb who was slain for us. You will sing it too—along with that penitent thief, and along with Saint Paul who on earth once wrote: “I am crucified with Christ . . . I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Millions of people in heaven will sing virtually the same song. Why? Because all those millions will have been crucified! They will have realized (if not beforehand, then certainly in heaven) that crucifixion turned out to have been the best way to die. For Jesus. And for them.

“ . . . As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death . . . we have been united together in the likeness of His death . . . our old man was crucified with Him . . . if we died with Christ, we believe

that we shall also live with Him” (Romans 6:3-8).

This is heavy stuff! It’s the weight of glory. And the real marvel and mystery and miracle of it all is this, that it is all gift. Our whole life is gift. Our

whole Christian life—our life in Christ—is gift.

Our dying in Him is delivered to us through Word and Sacraments— together with our living in Him. It’s the only way to go.

—Pastor Warren Fanning



Appreciating Our Lutheran Hymns

1 Je - sus, I will pon-der now On Thy ho - ly Pas - sion;
2 Make me see Thy great dis-tress, An - guish, and af - flic - tion,
3 Yet, O Lord, not thus a - lone Make me see Thy Pas - sion,
4 Grant that I Thy Pas - sion view With re - pen - tant griev - ing

Jesus, I Will Ponder Now A Hymn For Lent #140 in The Lutheran Hymnal

Although his life didn’t go as his father had wanted, the perspective that Sigismund von Birken gained through his study has proved to be good for us today.

Born in 1626 and raised in a pastor’s family, he was forced to flee at the young age of three years with his family and other evangelical pastors from Bohemia to Nuerenberg, Germany. It was there he completed his Gymnasium training. At the University of Jena he began his study of law and theology, the latter at his dying father’s request.

But after a mere two years he left those studies behind and dedicated his efforts to poetry, where his true gifts lay. Two years after leaving Jena, he

was admitted to the Pegnitz Order, one of the most famous of the numerous Baroque literary societies, of which he became Chief Shepherd in 1662.

The combination of his gifts in poetry and his religious unbringing gave him a truly Christian perspective, which is evident in this month’s hymn study.

Every year as we celebrate the season of Lent, it is good for us to begin with the perspective of which Birken writes. When we see Jesus’ “*holy Passion,*” His “*bonds and stripes and wretchedness,*” we realize that “*I also and my sin wrought Thy deep affliction.*”

But never do we stop there in despair, for in “*God’s only Son*” who

“suffered without measure” we see that “God must have compassion”—yes, on us! Yes, we and our sins are the “cause . . . of Thy crucifixion,” but in Jesus’ sufferings and death God gives the loving solution to those very sins! So “If my sins give me alarm . . . Let Thy cross my fear disarm . . . Grant that I may trust in Thee!”

In Christ on the cross we are enabled to see ourselves from God’s perspective. We are forgiven sinners, saints bound for heaven. As Birken wrote: “May I give Thee love for love! Hear me, O my Savior, That I may in heaven above Sing Thy praise forever!” Amen.

—Pastor Paul Krause



Studies In Ephesians

**Proclaiming the Unsearchable Riches
of Christ (See 3:8)**

Chapter 5:8-14

WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

(Please open your Bible and read Ephesians 5:8-14.)

The book of Ephesians is a letter of pure grace, focusing its readers on Christ as the only source of a sinner’s election (1:4), redemption (1:7), and conversion (2:1). “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (2:8-9).

In the later chapters of the book, St. Paul emphasizes the impact God’s wonderful grace in Christ has upon how a believer lives his life. Grace has made us different people.

Our section speaks of this difference: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

The sinful world is a place of darkness and moral decay. In sharp con-

trast, Christ is light. Through Word and sacrament God’s grace has caused the light to shine in our hearts.

As light in the Lord we are admonished to live as children of light. One way we do that is by having “no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”

Having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness means not getting mixed up with the moral and spiritual garbage of this world: filling the heart with pornographic images; telling or listening to dirty jokes; shacking up before marriage; living a party life of drugs and booze; associating one’s name with those who hold to false doctrine. **THIS IS ALL DARKNESS!**

We Are Different!

Since we are now different people,

we want to live different lives. Keeping clear of the world's filth honors God and proves that our Savior is near and dear to us. A life of light is a vivid demonstration of the power of God's grace.

But not only are we to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. We will also want to expose them.

As a squad car drives by a closed store, its spotlight just might reveal a crime in process. We are God's spotlights. We are to point God's Word at sin and label it as sin.

By nature we don't like to rock the boat. But God wants us to rock the boat. If it's wrong, say it's wrong. If we don't speak out against wickedness,

are we not giving tacit approval to it?

We speak the truth about sin out of love for the unbeliever. Pointing out people's sin may anger them, but it may also prick their consciences, leading to an opportunity to speak to them of God's purposes in Jesus' death and resurrection.

One possible understanding of verse thirteen of our section reads: "But when you expose them, the light shines in upon their sin and shows it up, and when they see how wrong they really are, some of them may even become children of light!"

May the grace of God in Christ cause you and me to walk in the light—to God's glory and for the eternal welfare of our neighbor.

—Pastor Michael Wilke



Parables Of The Master Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee and the Publican

Sometimes we enjoy this parable more than we should, for we are tempted to feel superior to the bloated Pharisee and suffer little compassion over his spiritual cancer. Our Savior did not create the parable in order for us to despise the braggart or admire the humble IRS officer, lest this heavenly illustration be mistaken for a 'morality play.' Jesus put into it an eternal truth, and blessed are they who have ears to hear it.

We note well the introductory sentence: "He spoke this parable to some

who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Jesus would know how to use a pry bar to open some eyes and hearts to see themselves as guilty sinners, then to see Him as God's gift of Righteousness that they might thereafter possess the eyes and ears (Mt. 13:16) of converted disciples. Indeed, if the Pharisee could first see himself as Jesus saw him, perhaps he could be brought to repent as did the humble tax collector.

The way the religious paragon did his praying and the content of his

'prayer' were symptoms of his trusting in himself that he was *righteous*. Jesus does not draw our attention to his 'civic righteousness,' but to his heart-prompted sense of a cherished spiritual superiority. The Pharisee relished rehearsing his good conduct, even to God: he was generous to widows and orphans, he was unsullied by cheating, pure from sex sins, and unassailable in his tax returns. As to his relationship with God—he did double duty on fasting and was meticulous about tithing to the temple. We note that Jesus brushed-in the detail that he was praying "thus with himself" in a staged monologue—to which God was not even listening. At bottom, he had placed his reliance on himself when weighed on the divine scales; he trusted that his style of morality would bring him to balance with God.

He simply did not see the rot of his soul's cancer and his need for a Savior's cleansing. And that's about all we can stand of his bloated self-righteousness; he had not yet been blessed by God to appreciate: "*My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness....*"

In Contrast . . .

We want to spend a few moments now with the other fellow. How pointed the contrast! First, he's one of those tax collectors, commonly guilty of venal abuse in his job opportunities, a social outcast, butt of hearty hatred—and that's enough cause to pity him. He did not wish to be seen in church, nor that his praying be overheard. Eyes downcast, head bowed, a lump in the throat, utterly defeated in self-loathing, he could utter only the choked, desperate plea: "God, be merciful to me, a



sinner."

But what was he sorry about and what was he confessing? A few bad deeds all in a day's work? An apology for a life traitorous to his countrymen? It was much worse than that in his soul, for he stood *self-condemned*—his whole *person* an eyesore to God and a blotch to His church. The Pharisee might expect lightning to strike the Publican dead for the effrontery of his presence in the temple, and the Publican might agree. Yet there he was—without excuse and utterly without human defense.

But he knew how to ask for help.

From the shadows of his childhood he could yet recall: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions; wash me thoroughly from my impurity, and cleanse me from my sin...." With that in his heart he summoned the confidence to approach God, trusting that "a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51).

And that's what pulled him through. For the sinner's business is with God, not with himself; the sinner's refuge is with God, not with himself; the sin-

ner's salvation is with God, not with himself. And God, merciful in Christ Jesus to repentant sinners, comes through. "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Did we mention that repentance cannot be stressed too much?)

Neither the Pharisee nor the tax collector are caricatures; anyone who knows the sinner's heart—as Jesus does—can testify that they live among us. And need our help.

Lord Jesus, accomplish humbling in the one sinner as You have done for the other, in Your mercy! Amen.

—Paul R. Koch



THE WORSHIP SERVICE

"Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;"

Psalm 95:6

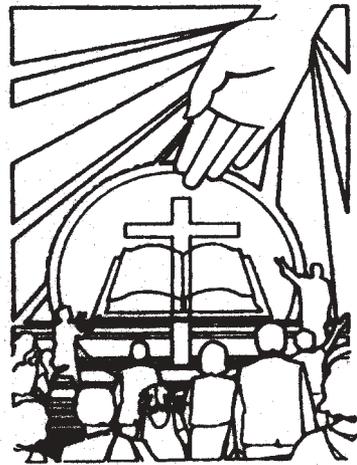
Third in a Series—

As The Service Begins

A Point Of Emphasis

As a pastor organizes a worship service, he does so with the worshipers in mind. It is planned with a desire to help supply the spiritual needs of God's people. Therefore it is not simply a matter of throwing together a hodge-podge of scripture readings, hymns, sermon text, and prayers. Each service is carefully planned to center upon one point.

Generally speaking, this point of emphasis is dictated by the season of the church year. More specifically, the point of emphasis is determined by the sermon text and pin-pointed by the sermon theme and, possibly, a sermon outline. Thus, the sermon text and theme determine the thrust of the worship service. The Bible readings, hymns, and prayers are chosen carefully to emphasize this one central theme. After all, one is preparing a celebra-



tion—a celebration of God's grace.

A Worshipful Atmosphere

Upon entering the church for this celebration, we should realize that we have come here for a special purpose. That purpose is to worship our Lord and receive special blessings from

Points To Ponder:

The worship service is made up of two primary elements— sacramental: God giving to us; and sacrificial: we giving to God in thankfulness.

God gives us, by grace, His spiritual blessings in Word and Sacrament. In thankfulness we give God our heart, our abilities, our possessions, our praise.

Much of our worship service dates back to the time of the apostles or to the first century. There is evidence also that the order of worship in the first centuries of the Christian era was fairly uniform. It is believed by some scholars that the Liturgy of Jerusalem, commonly known as the Liturgy of St. James, may have been committed to paper before A.D. 200.

Him. One of the older liturgies which some may remember attempted to set the proper mood for worship by beginning with the words: “The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Habakkuk 4:20).

We and our families should make a genuine effort to promote and maintain a worshipful atmosphere during the worship service.

We encourage parents to bring their infant children to the worship services. Being in worship services is something our children should grow to recognize as part of their lives. Obviously they will not understand why they need to be quiet so much of the time. Yet with the proper guidance they can learn to sit quietly. Think of it as training for a lifetime of regular attendance at worship services.

While our children are learning, however, we should try to prevent them from disrupting the worship of others. Such things as unruly actions and loud crying need to be disciplined promptly in a proper fashion in areas other than the sanctuary. A “parents’ room” is often available for that purpose.

Arriving late to worship services may also be disturbing to worshipers. For that reason ushers often close the doors to the sanctuary when the service

begins. Latecomers may enter by direction of the ushers during the singing of a hymn. While one waits in the narthex, one may be involved in the worship service— particularly if audio speakers are positioned for such purposes.

Preparation For Worship

The worshiper finds time for personal prayer when he has been seated. Page four of the hymnal carries some suggestions for such prayers. A pre-service prayer is often printed in the bulletin. With all this, the best may be a prayer from the heart, asking the Lord to bless us with His Holy Spirit that we receive His gifts of love in Word and sacrament with a receptive and thankful spirit.

The first hymn is to help set the mood for worship.

The Lutheran Church has ever been the singing church. This may well be attributed to Martin Luther. He said, for example: “I give music the highest and most honorable place; and everyone knows how David and all the saints put their divine thoughts into verse, rhyme, and song.”

In contrast to those “reformers” who proposed that art and music be removed from worship services,

Luther wrote: “I would fain see all the arts, and music in particular, used in the service of Him who hath given and created them.” For Luther believed that “music is a gift and grace of God, not an invention of men.”

Hymns have been a part of the Lutheran Church from its inception. Luther’s ringing declaration that all believers constitute a universal priesthood necessarily implied that the laity should participate in the worship. Congregational singing during worship services therefore became a natural happening.

The Welcome

As the pastors welcome the wor-

shippers, they may briefly summarize the primary point of emphasis in the service. This coincides with the “welcome” which is often printed on the face of the service folder.

Worshippers are welcomed in the name of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in whose name we live, worship, and conduct the work of His Kingdom. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:19-20).

—Pastor em. L Dale Redlin



THE LORD’S PRAYER—A Series

Our father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil; For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2nd Petition “Thy kingdom come”

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray: “Thy kingdom come.” We are praying that the kingdom of God will come to us, that God will rule in our hearts, and also that His kingdom rule will be expanded everywhere. It is the Christian’s confidence that one day he will be translated from this earth to the kingdom of heaven. The Christian is confident because the Lord Himself gives promise that all in whose heart He now rules will be with Him in heaven.

To ‘hold an office’ does not mean to sit in a room behind a desk. To ‘hold an office’ implies activity! Similarly, in the second petition when we speak of the kingdom of God, we are speaking first of all of the activity of the King. What is the King’s activity? He rules. Where does He rule? In that He is Creator and Lord, He rules over all things in heaven and on earth. The earth is His footstool. But most specifically, He rules on this earth in a special way in the heart of each believer in

THE SECOND PETITION

Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean? The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also.

How is this done? When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity.

—DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S *Small Catechism*
Concordia Publishing House, 1943

The Second Petition

“Thy kingdom come.”

What does this mean?

God's kingdom certainly comes all by itself, even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it also come to us.

How does the kingdom of God come?

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity.

—MARTIN LUTHER'S *SMALL CATECHISM*
by Pastor Mike Sydow, 1988

A comparison of two currently used versions

Christ. With what does He rule? He rules with His Word. For what purpose does He rule? He rules to save.

So the Kingdom of God is “God's gracious rule to save.”

The kingdom of God comes without our asking, but we pray that it may come to us. Martin Luther summed it up very succinctly: “The Kingdom of God comes to us when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that by His grace we believe His holy Word”

The King does not set up His throne in one's heart by threat or by intimidation. He does not use force of arms to bring us into His kingdom. He does not use political pressure and deceit as

some do in our political society. He establishes His rule through the preaching of the gospel.

The gospel is the message of salvation. It creates faith. Of those who were not subjects of the King, it makes subjects. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe.

Furthermore we are told: “Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet. 1:5). The royal rule of Christ within the heart of His children is preserved by the same means through which it was established! They who have been brought into the kingdom of God pray that they might be preserved unto salvation and,

as well, that through His holy Word they may “lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity.”

We also speak of the second petition as the “mission petition,” because it is our prayer that the gracious rule of the Lord to save will also be extended to others. We pray that the Spirit will, through the gospel, bring others to the knowledge of and confidence in God’s salvation.

We who pray this petition also are called to speak the Word of God. The Lord has commissioned those in whose heart He rules to share the blessed word of salvation. He has told them to

go into the world and preach the gospel. So when we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are praying that it might prevail in and among us to whom it has come, and that it will come to others.

To remain in this kingdom is the first priority of those who are under His rule. Lest we forget, we are reminded: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6).

“Lord, let Thy kingdom come, and preserve us under its rule until the day of Thy heavenly kingdom!”

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



A Christian’s Scriptural Response to the World of 2000—

FACING HOMOSEXUALITY

(Part 3 of 5)

In part 2 of this series we spoke of Scripture’s identification of homosexuality as a sin. In part 3 we will explore the variety of ways in which great effort is taken to make this sin acceptable.

A Planned Effort

The prevalence of homosexuality in modern culture didn’t happen by ‘accident.’ There has been and still remains a concerted effort to promote homosexuality and to make it seem innocent and harmless. In view of what God says about homosexuality (that it is, in fact, a sin), it becomes a serious matter indeed when we find a concerted effort to support sin and to make it seem innocent and harmless.

The devil is a very patient enemy. He doesn’t need to win over a soul or a situation overnight. He is content to

work in stages—gradually moving from outrage at sin, to indifference toward it, to an acceptance of it, to a support of it, to the promotion of it. Writings of ‘pro-gay’ groups speak very clearly of their agenda, namely, to desensitize the American public so that it gradually becomes indifferent to homosexuality.

An Effort in Education

One of the deceptive ways in which the promotion of homosexuality is made to appear acceptable is the subtle equating of homosexuality with differ-

ences in skin color, race, and so forth. The conclusion the gay rights agenda wants everyone to make is that since we can't object to a person's skin color, therefore, neither should we object to homosexuality. This is the main underlying approach of promoting homosexuality in the school system.

Through videos and workshops pro-gay groups are striving to have teachers and school curricula promote homosexuality. This is not a matter of aiding people to treat others with kindness and respect (as we should do toward everyone), but it is rather a matter of encouraging the acceptance of homosexuality as an approved way of living.

Homosexuality is also promoted in the books children are given to read. New books being promoted include "Daddy's Roommate," "Heather's Two Mommies," and other books with similar themes. In "Daddy's Roommate" the child's parents are divorced, and Daddy gets a new roommate who is homosexual. The book relates the child saying, "Mommy says that Daddy's gay. I asked Mommy what that meant and she said, 'it's just a different kind of love.'"

An Effort to Entertain

Perhaps one of the most effective ways to make sin seem acceptable is to make it look like fun and funny—that is, make sin entertaining. If something is couched in humor, if it is involved with entertainment and things that are "fun, relaxing, and something I can do with my friends," then how could it be bad?

The more that gay characters and gay themes have become "mainstream" in our entertainment, the less and less attention is directed to the

issue. As the content of entertainment slides more and more into equating sin with humor and enjoyment, the "real people" who play the characters are also becoming more and more involved with promoting the acceptance of sin. The actor who plays the gay character on the current TV show *Will and Grace* commented: "When old ladies out there say, 'Oh I hope he meets a nice man' that is when we'll know that the show has succeeded."

Although the evening news is not part of "entertainment" as such, the way in which news is reported is also a significant means by which our society is being exposed to a "positive gay" view. Most people heard many news items about Matthew Shepherd, the gay man who was beaten, tortured, and killed. This was a horrendous crime and should stir outrage and grief in everyone who hears about it. A similar case, the murder of Jesse Dirkhising, is far less known. Jesse's two killers, both gay men, killed him after performing bondage and sodomite rituals. The two men have been charged with six counts of "deviant rape" and murder. Again, this was a horrendous crime and should stir outrage and grief in everyone who hears of it. However, few ever heard about Jesse.

Christ Overcame the World

The so-called "Gay Agenda" is seeking to achieve normalization of homosexuality through desensitization of the issue. To understand the great efforts that are being made in our society (and the foregoing only touches the surface) can be discouraging for the Christian. However . . .

. . . We remember that our Savior says that what we pursue and find to be

our treasure and truth will be a sharp contrast with what we find in the world. “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you . . . In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 15:18-19; 16:33).

. . . When we consider the world “out there” we will be reminded of the dangers the devil wishes to put into our path and of the need to watch and pray. “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love” (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

. . . When we consider the world’s

needs and the knowledge that we have the means (the gospel) to call people out of sin’s darkness, we will be energized as ambassadors for Christ and carry His light into the world. “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? . . . You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden . . . Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:13ff).

. . . When our hearts and souls grow weary and burdened with our own sins and the sins of others, what a joy to hear our Savior say: Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28).

—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt



BOUNDLESS BENEFITS

“Why are you traveling all the way back to the Midwest?” “A teachers’ conference at the beginning of the school year?” “There are only *fifty* teachers at a national conference?”

These are some of the questions I hear from incoming parents as we present the school calendar. At times I find it difficult to explain how encouraging and beneficial our teachers’ conference is, and how anxiously I await this fellowship every year. But after three wonderful days of spiritual and professional encouragement, the benefits of this conference are once more brought sharply into focus.

Spiritual Benefits

The 2000 CLC Teachers’ Conference began on Wednesday,

October 11, at Gethsemane Lutheran School in Saginaw, Michigan. Chaplain Quinn Sprengeler introduced a series of devotions based on favorite Bible accounts and explained their application to us. We as teachers spend a large portion of our time applying these Bible stories to students, and so it was an edifying experience to focus on their relevance to a teacher’s life.

Mr. Sprengeler began with the description of Jacob’s journey and dream as found in Genesis 28:10-17. He reminded us that as Jacob found himself on an unexpected and difficult journey so we often discover ourselves in similar places. And like Jacob, who was comforted with the Lord’s promises in his dream, we too treasure the Lord’s promises as found in Scripture.



The Teachers' Conference choir sings praise to the Lord

The second day found the teachers focusing on the parable of the sower and the seed (Matt. 13). Mr. Sprengeler reminded us of the warnings of a loving God and the promise that His Word will accomplish its purposes! What an encouragement for His “earthen vessels,” as we daily share God’s Word with His lambs.

Finally, we enjoyed the retelling of 1 Kings chapter 19, where we heard of Elijah and the still, small voice. The law won’t convert and bring back sinners; this will be done only with that still, small voice of the gospel—the voice of comfort and encouragement as found in Jesus Christ.

The spiritual benefits continued in the Wednesday evening service, as we joined in the unique fellowship found in the Lord’s Supper. We heard the encouraging words of Mark 9:30-37, as Pastor Mark Bernthal shared the fact that true greatness in the kingdom of God entails suffering and service. The benefits of hearing this beautiful gospel message with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and then partaking of the gospel in sacrament with the same family, were truly of boundless benefit. We also enjoyed edifying music by the

conference choir, the Gethsemane choirs, and the handbell choirs.

Professional Benefits

The spiritual benefits of our conference by no means ended there but were found throughout the papers and presentations that we heard. However, we also enjoyed three days of professional development.

The results and conclusions of a survey were presented in Robert Snell’s paper, “Combating Materialistic Attitudes in our Students (and Ourselves).” A thought-provoking discussion followed, punctuated with scriptural support. We also enjoyed an interactive presentation on “Keeping Christ as Focus in our Schools,” with many practical applications. David Bernthal did an excellent job of offering suggestions on keeping the gospel as the center of our teaching and discipline.

Tina Stelter provided us with “Practical Ideas for Teaching Language Skills,” including journals and writing workshops. Some excellent resources (especially for us Friday morning punters) were presented by Karen Strike in “Teaching Art



The Conference in session

Appreciation along with Art Projects.” We also learned of useful ways to incorporate “Oral Language Activities” in primary, middle, and upper levels as presented by the Mankato faculty.

Seth Schaller and the Eau Claire faculty did much research on “Volunteer Programs,” a topic that is of benefit to small and large schools alike. The teachers also received many practical ideas for “Fun Night Activities” from Lane Fischer and Barb Mueller. Candice Ohlmann’s paper, “Using Children’s Literature as a Teaching Tool,” presented many wonderful ideas for the busy teacher.

We heard a review of the book *Raising Faithful Kids in a Fast-Paced World*, given by Ann Sprengeler. Lane Fischer and Dan Barthels presented a

hands-on tone chime/handbell workshop, where we learned some of the techniques used to make the beautiful music heard Wednesday evening.

During the course of the conference much business was discussed and decided upon. This included an update of the CLC Sunday School curriculum.

Fellowship Benefits

One of the intangible benefits of our conference is Christian fellowship. The warm welcome and hospitality of the Gethsemane congregation was evident and appreciated. It was a privilege to spend time with our brothers and sisters in Saginaw (and enjoy their delicious meals)!

Some of the most enjoyable times during the conference come in quiet conversation with fellow teachers,

The teachers gather round the Gethsemane church sign



sharing “moments” experienced with students, discussing difficulties and blessings that we share due to our callings, or just relaxing (?) during a game of volleyball. The camaraderie and friendship formed on the foundation of the gospel ministry are special ones, and something that I relish and look forward to renewing each year.

Above all, Christ was present working in and through every aspect of our conference, encouraging and strengthening our hearts. For this reason we were able to return to our schools refreshed and rejuvenated, and to share these benefits with our students. The Lord has granted us yet another week of benefits—spiritual, professional, and the exercise of our common fellowship.

We thank Him for this wonderful opportunity, and pray that He would bless the efforts of His workers everywhere.

—Submitted by Sara Pfeiffer

Cover: John Fox

YOUR CLC CONVENTION HAS DIRECTED

The CLC Foundation

To: “inform the membership of the CLC of the existence and purpose of the Foundation”

Which is:

“to provide the means for the CLC to administer special gifts and bequests given by members of the CLC for the Work of the Kingdom of God,” usually for longer-range rather than current purposes.

Gifts to the Foundation of cash and other assets convertible to cash, such as financial instruments and real estate, will ordinarily flow into the Foundation Endowment, with principal kept invested, and earnings disbursed annually for CLC purposes and projects as needs determine.

The Foundation was formed to be a potential part of CLC members’ estate planning. Thus, those interested in material reviewing options for giving to the Foundation are urged to ask for “Ways of Giving” from:

**CLC Foundation Board,
c/o Immanuel Lutheran College,
501 Grover Rd., Eau Claire WI 54701**

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

2 Cor. 9:10, 11