

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

IT IS FINISHED...
HE IS RISEN!

The Open Doors Of Easter

After preaching in a small village of northern India, a Christian missionary was confronted by a Muslim. “You must admit we Muslims have something you do not have. When we go to Mecca, we at least find a coffin. But when you Christians journey to Jerusalem, you find nothing but an empty tomb.”

What a difference! Islam has its coffin at Mecca. Atheistic communism has the mummified remains of Lenin. The followers of Buddha pray over his relic bones. But Christians rejoice in an empty grave!

We would despair were it still occupied. For what the angel announced (“He is not here; for He is risen!”) St. Paul explained, “If Christ is not risen, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:17-18).

The drifting sands of Egypt and Babylon have long sealed the doors to

many a temple and many a tomb of the ancients. But the door to our Lord’s tomb was opened by an angel—not to let Jesus out, but to reveal how empty His grave was.

That open door—with its message, ‘Christ is alive!’—is the keystone in the triumphal arch of Christianity.

It is the very difference! It ended tears and brought joy to believing disciples. It leads to other open doors, to other soul-stirring vistas.

Incontestable Evidence

The open door of Christ’s tomb is an open door to the incontestable evidence and blessed assurance that God’s Word and His promises in Christ are true. One thousand years before it happened, the inspired psalmist said the Almighty would never allow His Holy One to see corruption. Eight hundred years before it happened, the watery, three-day experience of Jonah was a visual object lesson of Christ’s resur-

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rection.

Early in His ministry the Lord Himself foretold exactly what would come to pass.

If ever there is logical proof of Christianity's truth, this is it. Since we have a God who so fulfills His promises—hundreds of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ—who need doubt or wonder about His credibility or truthfulness in anything He says?!

The open door of Christ's tomb is an open door to confidence and conviction.

The open door to our Lord's empty grave also means His task was carried through to absolute completion. Christ voluntarily submitted to pains, sorrows, and the horrors of hell and death that He might bear in His own body the punishment we deserve by reason of our sin. His resurrection gave proof of a mission accomplished. The heavenly Father was satisfied and accepted His Son's sacrifice as totally adequate to wipe out all sin and guilt.

The open door to the tomb means we are no longer in our sins, but have been freely justified for the sake of the living Christ.

Eternal Life!

One open door leads to yet another: the open door to eternal life.

How humans love life. How we rejoice when life is prolonged but for a few months. Yet despite all human effort, death is inevitable.



But our Champion went into the tomb and laid death low. It was the power of God that opened our Savior's tomb, and by the power of God the "hour is coming in which all that are in the graves will hear His voice and will come forth . . ." (Jn. 5:28).

John also testified to the fulfillment, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God . . ." (Rev. 20:12). The open door of Christ's tomb verily means that those who fall asleep in Jesus shall not perish, but shall join the Lord in a life so beautiful, so glorious, so everlasting we can hardly begin to explain or comprehend it.

Long before the 'Open Door' policy was forced upon China, God graciously planned and then effected His own Open Door Policy. The Muslim had it exactly right.

May the empty tomb and the living Christ—who Himself is the "Door"—mightily inspire us to put away the works of darkness and walk confidently through the open, blessed doors of Easter.

—Pastor David Fuerstenau

IT IS FINISHED...
HE IS RISEN!

The Joyful Hope of the Resurrection Morning

A new day dawned, and with it the women who served and so loved the Lord Jesus looked forward to a sad duty of love. The prospect of a dismal future lay before them—a future without a living Lord.

They made their way out to the tomb where they were certain the body of the Lord lay awaiting their ministrations of final anointing. They could not see past death and the grave. They did not possess the hope of the resurrection. Although Jesus had already risen, for all they knew Jesus was dead and not risen.

For us it may sound a bit mind-boggling, but there are increasing numbers of people within what is called Christendom today who question the reality of the Savior's resurrection. Indeed, the vast majority of people in the world today do not believe that there is such a thing as a bodily resurrection for anybody, Christ included. Many choose the fantasy of believing in reincarnation. Many others choose to believe that at death one simply ceases to exist—that is the end of the story.

What a dismal prospect comes with such hopeless unbelief that there is no resurrection!

The apostle Paul speaks to the hopelessness of that scenario: "For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of



all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:16-19).

A Blessed Reality!

There are so many today who would have our Christian faith be about this life only. One look at how miserable the women were on their walk out to the sepulcher confirms the words of Paul. That would be most pitiful.

But when the women heard the angel declare, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen" (Lk. 24:5-6), their misery disappeared, their sorrow was turned to joy. This is also our joy as we again hear the words: "The Lord is risen indeed" (Lk. 24:34).

This is not wishful thinking, or (as some say) a mere continuation of His loving spirit in the teaching of the apostles. It is rather the blessed reality of our salvation!

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20-22).

In the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we find the dismal

hopelessness of unbelief vanquished by the joyful hope of our resurrection to eternal life! He died and rose again to make this reality—there IS a resurrection!

This resurrection of all the dead has

already begun in the person of Jesus Christ, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Just as surely as He has risen from the grave, we too shall rise at His coming. HALLELUJAH!

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels*



A SIGN OF GOD’S REDEEMING LOVE

“Teacher, we want to see a sign from You” (Mt. 12:38). With this, Jesus’ enemies demanded a miraculous sign from Him that would prove He was the promised Lord and Christ who was to come and redeem Israel.

In response Jesus characterized these sign-seekers as being a part of “an evil and adulterous generation,” saying that the only sign He would give them was the “sign of the prophet Jonah”: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (v.40).

This one great sign given to the religious skeptics and to all the world symbolically pictured Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection as the Lord and Savior of the world.

From the time of Christ to the present, people have vainly demanded to see signs and wonders before they will believe anything about the Lord. In our day we have heard skeptics say: “If there is really a loving God in heaven, I want Him to prove it to me with a special sign and show me that He loves me personally.”

In various situations of life, if we were inclined to walk by sight and not by faith, we too could fall prey to the temptation of expecting God to give us

a sign that would satisfy our human senses. Doubting Thomas responded to the eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ resurrection by saying: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (Jn. 20:25).

When Jesus’ enemies demanded a sign from Him, their unbelief wasn’t due to a lack of proof, but rather due to their unwillingness to accept the words and teachings of Jesus. Having turned a deaf ear to Jesus’ Word, their eyes were closed to His mighty signs and wonders that manifested His divine Sonship and His heavenly calling as the Savior. Even when Jesus rose from the dead (thus fulfilling the “sign of the prophet Jonah”), the religious skeptics still didn’t believe, because their hardened hearts had rejected the Word of God.

Testimony Of The Word

And besides, saving faith doesn’t come through seeing signs, but through the hearing of God’s Word (Rom.



10:17). Jesus brought out this important truth in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus. When the rich man cried out in hell for Lazarus to be resurrected and appear to his brothers so that they would believe and not end up in hell, the answer came back to him: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Lk. 16:29,31).

When Jesus appeared to Thomas and showed Himself alive, He made this declaration which reminds us of the saving grace we enjoy as Christians: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29). It is through the miracle of God’s grace working through the Word

of God that we believe in the crucified and risen Jesus. Through the testimony of God’s Word we know by faith that Jesus’ resurrection gives evidence of Jesus being our Lord and Savior God (cf. Rom. 1:4, 1 Cor. 15:12ff.).

And through the Word of God we have come to believe that God loves us personally, for the very resurrection of Jesus is a sure sign of this. The apostle Paul declares: “(Jesus) was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Jesus’ resurrection shows us that the heavenly Father accepted Jesus’ redemptive work for us and has declared us forgiven and righteous through Him.

Praise be to God for enabling us to walk by faith instead of by sight.

—Pastor Mark Gullerud



As Easter Message from our CLC President—

“Abide with us, for it is
toward evening . . .”

Many congregations have an Easter sunrise service. Joyful hearts sing the Easter message with enthusiasm in the early morning.

I will never forget the Sunday morning that started with an overcast sky, but that during the sermon (“He is not here, but is risen!”—Luke 24:6) the sun burst through the window behind the pulpit. It was as if the Lord Himself were punctuating the message of forgiveness sealed by our Savior’s resurrection.

The message of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation sheds light and warmth into the heart.

On Easter day the Savior attached Himself to the Emmaus disciples who were discussing the day’s events as they returned home from Jerusalem (*see the account in Luke chapter 24—Ed.*) “We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (v. 21). The report which said that certain women did not find His body where He had been laid, but instead that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive, left them confused. Jesus then “expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v. 27). They were so taken by the instruction of this Man whom

“ . . . Many congregations have an Easter sunrise service. . . . Maybe at the end of the day we should have an Easter sunset service!”

they did not recognize that they invited Him to remain with them: “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent” (v. 29). Jesus remained with them. Over bread they recognized Him.

The Easter sunrise resurrection became an Easter sunset revelation! The Emmaus disciples had an Easter sunset service. They returned to Jerusalem and announced to the other disciples, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared unto Simon” (v. 34).

The sun is setting upon the nation and the world in which we live and upon the church in the world. Each ache and pain reminds us that it is setting on us as individuals. Observe the activities in the world and the nation and recognize the lies of Satan in this post-Christian age. Consider the direction that the church is going and even the challenges within our own church and synod. Recognize the weaknesses and sins in your own life. In weakness and weariness and maybe in a state of confusion we wend our way toward the sunset of life and the end of life’s day.

To paraphrase the Emmaus disciples (v. 21): “We thought that Jesus was the one who had destroyed the power of the devil.”

Today so much of the church and the religious world have lost their focus. It is easy for us to get caught up in the flurry of activity and empty religiosity. In the necessary confessional challenges that confront us regularly, it is not surprising that—if in the thick of such challenges—we are overwhelmed

by events so that the message is momentarily forgotten.

Surely Jesus had explained to the Emmaus disciples what would happen to Him, and that He would rise again. They had heard it, but events overwhelmed them—so much so that they did not even recognize Him when He walked with them. He touched their heart with the Word.

Most graciously He has left us with His Word. When we hear, we remember. Our Lord was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day He rose again from the dead. Jesus lives. He has overcome the devil, as He said. Because He lives, we who believe in Him have life and shall live. At the end of the dark night of this life, we shall bask in the brightness of the Son before the throne of the Father. It is God’s promise.

“Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Heaven!

The Word of God makes our hearts burn within us.

Maybe at the end of the day we should have an Easter sunset service!

May the message of the Easter sunrise service—Christ lives, the victory’s won!—translate into an open invitation: “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.”

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



Appreciating Our Lutheran Hymns

1 Come, ye faith - ful, raise the strain Of tri - um - phant glad - ness;
2 All the win - ter of our sins, Long and dark, is fly - ing
3 But to - day a - midst Thine own Thou didst stand, be - stow - ing

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both are in 4/4 time. The melody is written on the top staff, and the bass line is on the bottom staff. The lyrics are written below the top staff, with three verses. The first verse is: "1 Come, ye faith - ful, raise the strain Of tri - um - phant glad - ness;". The second verse is: "2 All the win - ter of our sins, Long and dark, is fly - ing". The third verse is: "3 But to - day a - midst Thine own Thou didst stand, be - stow - ing".

Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain An Easter Hymn #204 in The Lutheran Hymnal

This Easter hymn is based on the Song of Moses in Exodus 15. As he contemplates the resurrection of Christ, the author recalls the events of the Exodus which foretold the work of Christ in picture and type.

In the Passover the believing children of Israel were saved from the plague of death when they painted the blood of a sacrificial lamb on the doorposts of their houses. They left Egypt in triumph, set free from the yoke of slavery, only to find their lives threatened by Pharaoh's army as they approached the Red Sea. God divided the sea and brought them across on dry land, drowning the pursuing Egyptian army. With this mighty act God made the deliverance of the children of Israel complete.

The true Passover Lamb was slain when Christ died on the cross. By His sacrificial death He delivered us from the plague of death, for He took our sin and sinfulness on Himself and endured the punishment for it. But the work of Christ appeared to end in defeat when He died and was buried. Only with His

resurrection on the third day was His victory over death declared openly. With this mighty act God made our deliverance complete.

It is appropriate that on Easter we sing the refrain that both begins and ends this hymn: "*Come, ye faithful, raise the strain Of triumphant gladness. God hath brought His Israel Into joy from sadness.*" We and all who believe in Jesus Christ are the Israel of God, who have been set free from the bondage of sin and death.

The author is John of Damascus, the Greek theologian and hymnwriter of the eighth century. The translation in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is by John Mason Neale, the nineteenth century poet and classical language scholar. It is through his gifts and efforts that we have in English translation many fine, ancient Latin and Greek hymns, such as *Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel* (#62); *A Great and Mighty Wonder* (#76); and *All Glory, Laud, and Honor* (#160).

—Pastor John Klatt

What Wonderful Love In Taking Back His Life

St. Matthew's account of the Easter story

What gracious, wondrous love is this, my soul?
The tomb that held the body of our Lord
Was open, empty, that first Easter morn.
Is this a trick, illusion, devil's brew?
A fable, fabrication, forgery?
Have we, as Christians, perpetrated lies?
If so, says Paul, of all men we are duped
And to be pitied far above the rest. ¹⁾

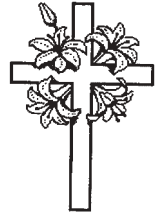
Or is, in fact, the tale we have to tell
A 'burden' to be witnessed far and wide
Across this sin-and-death-filled world of ours?
Oh, mark it well, dear Christian friends, there is
No 'faith' that men have dreamt or conjured up
(From 'wisdom,' reason, ingenuity)
That can compare. The Bible, Word of God,
Is there for us—for all—to ponder, read.
If Christ has not been raised, we preach in vain;
Our faith is futile; sin, death, hell remain.
But now indeed is Christ, who died, alive!
He's risen from the dead, no more to die;
He's but the firstfruits of all those who sleep! ²⁾

This Passion Season we again reviewed
The wondrous love of God so on display
Each step along the way to Calvary —
In upper room the new command to love;
The institution of the Sacrament;
Gethsemane, the bloody sweat and prayers
(Not My will, Father, Yours alone be done);
Poor Judas' sad betrayal with a kiss;
Before the Sanhedrin, and Caiaphas,
And Pilate too. "Behold the Man!" said he;
Yet "Crucify Him!" was the people's cry;
The mockings, scorn, the ridicule and spit;
And basis for it all? All trumped-up lies;
Then crucifixion of the sinless One
Who took our place when we deserved to die.
When dying, "It is finished!" came the cry.



*(The mission done, accomplished—sin atoned;
The world of sinners reconciled, redeemed!)
Once dead, the burial in Joseph's tomb.*

T*he end of story? Hardly! Check it out.
Each Gospel record in the Word of God
Contains the details, evidence galore,
Of Jesus' resurrection from the dead!
The record tells of eyewitness accounts.
This is not, friends, the stuff of fable, myth!
Let's hear again how Matthew tells the facts:*



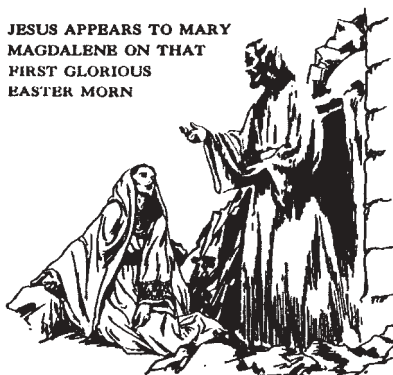
T*hat Sabbath dawn two Marys were the first
To view the tomb. An angel of the Lord
Came down from heaven, rolling back the stone.
Like lightning he appeared; his clothes were white
As snow—as were the guards for fear and dread
(They shook and were like dead men lying there).
The angel told the women: Do not fear,
I know that you are looking here for Christ,
The crucified; He is not here, you see!
He's risen from the dead, just as He said!
Come, see the place where once His body lay.
Then quickly go and His disciples tell:
'He's risen from the dead and goes ahead
Of you to Galilee. You'll see Him there.'
Now I have told you what you need to know. ³⁾*

S*ee how the facts back up the prophecies.
Said Christ: Destroy this earthly temple and
In three days I will raise it up again. ⁴⁾
As Jonah was three days and nights entombed
In belly of a fish, so long will He
Who is the Son of Man be in the earth. ⁵⁾
No man can take my life, I lay it down
That I may take it back again myself! ⁶⁾
Except a grain of wheat falls in the ground,
It is alone; but dying, bears its fruit. ⁷⁾
Because I live, so also you will live! ⁸⁾
I am the Resurrection and the Life,
He who believes in Me, though dead, will live;
And he who lives in Me will never die. ⁹⁾
Behold my hands, the nail prints, and my side;
Because you see me, will you now believe?
Oh, blest are they who, seeing not, believe! ¹⁰⁾*

*There's more of Matthew's gospel news to tell.
 The women hurried, full of fearful joy,
 To bring disciples word! And suddenly
 The Savior met, and greeted them! They came,
 Fell down and worshiped Him, and heard the word:
 Fear not. But go and tell my brothers all
 To go to Galilee; they'll see Me there. ¹¹⁾*

*What wondrous love—when taking back His life!
 Upon that theme we close our ponderings.
 The Savior's "Go and tell" is for us too.
 This doubting, dying world needs to be told
 The gospel of this wondrous love of God.
 He that believes, is baptized, shall be saved. ¹²⁾
 Authority is mine in heav'n and earth;
 Lo, I am with you always as you go
 To all the world to baptize and to teach. ¹³⁾
 Dear Christian friends, let's witness far and wide.
 Sin, death, and hell are conquered, overcome.
 The sting of death, its 'victory,' is gone. ¹⁴⁾
 Mortality is swallowed up by Life!
 Embrace in humble faith this truth of God.
 Come one and all and join us in our song:
 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing, I'll sing . . .
 I'll sing His love for me through all eternity! ¹⁵⁾
 Thanks be to God!*

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:19
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:17,20
- 3) Matthew 28:1-7
- 4) John 2:19
- 5) Matthew 12:40
- 6) John 10:18
- 7) John 12:24
- 8) John 14:19
- 9) John 11:25
- 10) John 20:29
- 11) Matthew 28:8-10
- 12) Mark 16:16
- 13) Matthew 18:19-20
- 14) 1 Corinthians 54-55
- 15) Hymn: *What Wondrous Love Is This*



—This blank verse reading was used as the sermon on Easter Sunday, April 23, 2000, at Grace Ev. Lutheran Church, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. Paul Fleischer is pastor.

Easter With An Exclamation Point!

What a world of difference a simple punctuation mark can make. It can be the difference between disappointment and delight.

For instance, one man realizes that he has gone as far as he will ever get in his career. He looks around himself and says: “This is as good as it gets?” He’s obviously unhappy with the way his life has turned out. Another man says exactly the same words, but with a different punctuation mark. He surveys his accomplishments and exclaims: “This is as good as it gets!” The words are the same, but the meaning is as different as sleet and sunshine.

Easter is like that too. Some react to the news about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead with a question mark, while others use an exclamation point.

It has been that way since the very first Easter. Early on the first Easter morning a dark question mark hung over the hearts of Jesus’ followers. Consider Mary Magdalene, who saw the empty tomb of Christ and wept at first, thinking that someone had stolen the body. Consider Jesus’ own disciples who were told of the empty tomb and the angel’s announcement that Jesus had risen, but did not at first believe it. Consider the two disciples who were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus that afternoon, who told a stranger about the reports of Jesus’ resurrection. With downcast hearts they considered it to be only a rumor, because “him they did not see.”

In each of these cases, news about the risen Christ was met not with conviction, but with a question—“the Lord is risen?”

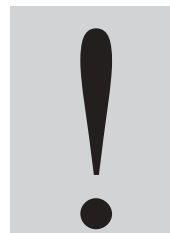
Today it is no different. Many people get no further than Jesus’ empty tomb with a question mark hanging over it all. Many would agree that “Jesus lives,” but only in the same sense that other inspirational figures from history “live on.”

In this way you could say that Thomas Jefferson lives on in the ideals of our U. S. Constitution, and Martin Luther King lives on in the civil rights movement. Likewise, some would say that “Jesus lives” when we love our enemies as well as our friends, or when we try to be as forgiving to others as we would like them to be to us.

But the Bible claims much more than this for Christ!

The Bible testifies that the man Jesus is also God. It says that this man’s body was dead, but came back to life—a living, breathing flesh-and-blood Savior who still lives today!

To prove His point to His doubting followers, Jesus appeared to them in just this way. On Easter evening He showed Himself to them—not as an idea, a figment of their imagination, or a ghost—but with His risen body. “He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’” (Lk. 24:38-39).



Jesus later appeared, alive and in the flesh, to hundreds of people, so that the news of His victory over death could be proclaimed with conviction down through the centuries.

So which is it for you? Is it “Jesus lives?”—or “Jesus lives!” The punctuation makes all the difference, for if you know the Lord Jesus as a living Savior, then you can also say with conviction, “He died for me!” and “My sins are forgiven!”

A heart that knows this knows what

the future holds and says with joy: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another” (Job 19:25-27).

Easter with an exclamation mark means gloom is turned to gladness. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

—Pastor Bruce Naumann

(First written for the clergy column of a local newspaper.)



LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

“That We Might Have Hope” (Rom. 15:4)

First Kings, Chapters Twelve through Fourteen

The Divided Kingdom

While I was preparing to write this article on the dividing of the kingdom of God’s people in the Old Testament, my thoughts turned to the division that our country faced in the wake of the last Presidential election. How can we apply the truths of this account to our daily lives today in this country? May the Lord bless our study.

Solomon was dead. The kingdom was left to his son Rehoboam. During Solomon’s reign the people had been taxed heavily, both monetarily and in work, in order to support his lavish lifestyle. Therefore the people made the request that Rehoboam should treat them more leniently than his father had.

Rehoboam sought advice from his

father’s seasoned advisors, who told him to grant their request, and the people would prove faithful to him. But Rehoboam wasn’t satisfied with their advice, so he sought counsel from his young friends. Their advice to him was to be even more harsh on the people that Solomon had been. This advice Rehoboam followed. This turned out to be ruinous, for the ten northern tribes rebelled and anointed their own king, Jeroboam, to rule them.

What lesson can be learned from this? We live in a society where a lack of respect for elders is evident. In fact, many heathen countries treat their elderly in a much better way. We often lack the patience and humility to hold in high regard the words of those who

have more experience than we do.

The Proverbs of Solomon are full of admonitions for the young to seek wise counsel. May we learn to seek such counsel.

More important, however, is what Rehoboam did not do. He did not go to the Lord with his problem. Solomon, when given one request of God, sought wisdom to be a more capable ruler of his people. What could have been a better time for Rehoboam to seek this same wisdom from above? Instead, he turned to humans for advice.

Don't we often do the same thing? When faced with important decisions, how often do we turn to the wisdom of the world? Surely secular counselors and self-help books can provide good advice at times, and shouldn't be ignored entirely. But let us not forget the treasure of God's Word and the direct line we have to God through prayer. Take advantage of the counsel available through your pastor and other Christian friends. We also pray that the leaders of our country would be led by the Holy Spirit to make God-pleasing decisions based on God's Word.

Sobering Warnings

The story of the ten northern tribes is a sad one. Since Jeroboam felt that worship in Jerusalem would lead his people away from him, he established worship centers in Bethel to the south and Dan to the north. In these cities he had golden calves constructed for worship. He also made shrines in the high places and made priests out of non-Levites. In these ways he clearly led his people into idolatry.

No doubt Jeroboam looked upon these changes as innovations rather

. . . Many would have Christianity become more user-friendly by not focusing so much on sin and its consequences. They would have us pick and choose which teachings apply to our modern world. These 'progressive' changes only lead to doubt and confusion. Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word.

than idolatry and was pleased with his progressive thinking. In the modern-day church we need to be careful not to depart from the truth of God's Word. Many today say that God's commands regarding marriage and the role of women in the church are outdated philosophies. Many would have Christianity become more user-friendly by not focusing so much on sin and its consequences. They would have us pick and choose which teachings apply to our modern world. These "progressive" changes only lead to doubt and confusion. Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word.

Jeroboam continued in his idolatrous ways, refusing to repent. This led to judgment on Israel. Through Ahijah the prophet, Jeroboam was told that cruel deaths would come to those who succeeded him: "The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field" (1 Kings 14:11). He was also told that the ten tribes of Israel would be attacked and scattered abroad, never again to reestablish themselves in the Promised Land.

What a sobering warning to our

country and its leaders today! Under Jeroboam's leadership the people were led into idolatry and suffered the consequences of it for generations to follow. Many have lost their way in our country as well. We too are an idolatrous people. We too have set up false gods, including materialism and humanism. Let us pray for our leaders that they set a good example for our country, and may we as citizens be lights shining in a dark world.

One last lesson we can learn from this account is full of comfort and hope. In spite of all the idolatry of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, God did not forsake His promise of a Savior who was to come from the seed of Jesse. Jesus was a descendant of Rehoboam! God used the tragic events—recorded for our learning—to accomplish His

will for the benefit of those who love Him—those called according to His purpose.

Our account even provides an example of one who loved him. Abijah was the one descendant of Jeroboam who did not forsake God and die a cruel death “because in him there is found something good toward the Lord God” (1 Kgs. 14:13). God called him home to heaven when he was just a boy. What a blessing death is for a believer!

So as a new administration begins in Washington D.C., let us not be afraid. God is in control of our lives. God will work things out for our good. He will keep His promises. May we remain faithful to Him and look forward to meeting Abijah in heaven.

—Prof. Joseph Lau

2001 Immanuel Lutheran College Tour Choir



Between March 9 and April 1 the Tour Choir, under the direction of Prof. John Reim (left), presented its sacred concert to CLC congregations in the following cities: Eagle Lake, Minnesota; Kansas City, Missouri; Dallas, Texas; Spring, Texas; Weslaco, Texas; Corpus Christi, Texas; Valentine, Nebraska; White River, South Dakota; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota; Millston, Wisconsin; and Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

THE WORSHIP SERVICE

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

Psalm 95:6

Fourth in a Series—

The Amen and the Confession of Sins

Amen

Amen is a common expression found throughout our liturgy, hymns, and prayers. It is often said at the conclusion of a prayer, hymn, or confession of faith. What does it mean?

Actually *Amen* is a Hebrew word taken over—just as it is—into the Greek and English languages. In other words, it is pronounced the same in these languages and has the same meaning.

In Isaiah 65:16 *Amen* is used to describe God as “the God of *truth*” (Amen). In Isaiah 49:7 it is used to speak “of the LORD who is faithful” (Amen). Thus, since God is “truth” and “*faithful*,” His words are *sure*, that is, *Amen*. As the apostle Paul writes: “For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are Yes, and in Him Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20). In fact the word *Amen* is used as a name for Christ when the apostle John is inspired to write: “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14).

Thus we see that *Amen* is not merely a convenient conclusion to a prayer. It is a definite statement of confident faith. As Luther describes it in the section of the Lord’s Prayer in his catechism: “‘Amen’ means that I should be certain that these petitions are really heard by the Father in heaven; for He

himself has commanded us to pray in this way and promised that He will hear us. ‘Amen, amen,’ that is, Yes, indeed, it shall be so.”

Each time we use the word, may we use it with confidence, knowing that our faithful and gracious God will always keep His promises without question.

Amen, that is, so shall it be.

*Confirm our faith and hope in Thee
That we may doubt not, but believe
What here we ask we shall receive.
Thus in Thy name and at Thy word
We say: Amen, Oh, hear us, Lord!*

The Confession Of Sins

Confession of sins is spiritually good for *us*! Of course, God already knows that we have sinned. It is not as though we are telling Him something that He doesn’t already know. True confession is an action which flows out of a heart of faith—a heart which fully realizes that we have done, said, and thought things that are contrary to the will of God. In short, we have sinned. A heart of faith is burdened by sin and will only be released when we have fully admitted it before God and are assured of His forgiving love.

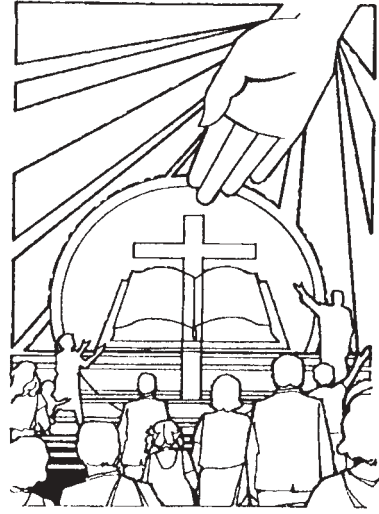
The LORD gave Moses these instructions: “Speak to the children of Israel, ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and

that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has done” (Num. 5:6f). In the New Testament James is inspired to urge confession as part of the spiritual healing process: “Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jms. 5:16). Sometimes we speak of this as private confession. We may need to confess specific sins in a private setting with our pastor or another fellow believer. This will enable the hearer to “talk things through,” so he can be assured from the Word of God of forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. (Such an assurance of forgiveness also may include private communion.)

The apostle John makes the matter of confession crystal clear when he writes: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8-10).

Confession of sins is something that we do privately, regularly, many times a day. How many silent confessions go on in the heart of the child of God each day as he slips and says, thinks, or does something that is not demonstrating love toward God or his fellow humans. We may catch it and silently pray: “Oh Father, I have sinned. For the sake of Jesus my Savior, forgive me. Help me by Your Spirit to make amends if possible. Help me to avoid this kind of action in the future.”

Confession is also part of our worship service. As we approach the Lord in this special worship experience, we need to humbly acknowledge that we



are coming before the holy God of heaven and earth as sinful human beings.

The pastor addresses the people in a loving fashion, “*Beloved in the Lord!*” We need to be assured that, sinners though we be, we are indeed “Beloved in the Lord!” By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we are drawn together by the Holy Spirit into the family of God’s people. We are dearly loved by God, and we are loved by each other in the Lord. This expression is used at many places in Holy Scripture. For example, the apostle Paul addressed the believers in Rome, “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (1:7). The apostle John urges believers, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn. 4:11).

We who are God’s beloved people are now invited to come before our Lord and confess our sins. “*Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God, our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.*”

The beginning words are taken from “Let us draw near with a true heart . . .” (Heb. 10:22). Our confession ought never be merely “lip service,” for remember, it is for us! *We need* to confess our sins, and to do it from the heart, as David prays, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

This is something which needs continual emphasis with all of us, namely, heartfelt worship. Familiarity may easily result in mechanical words and responses. The final outcome of heartless, mechanical involvement can easily be no involvement at all. The Lord spoke to His people about this matter in these descriptive words: “These people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but (they) have removed their hearts far from me” (Is. 29:13). Worship, whether it be private or public, needs to be a matter of the heart, or it is no worship at all.

The invitation also reminds us that we need to “*confess our sins unto God, our Father, beseeching Him in the*

name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.”

We are fully aware that we sinners are able to approach the heavenly Father only “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The prophet Isaiah tells us: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Is. 59:2). We are described as “having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12-13). Through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, true God from eternity, we now have access into the very presence of the living God.

What a blessing this is. What a privilege to hear this invitation. What a joy to come into His presence with heart and mind and voice:

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

—Pastor L. Dale Redlin



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

FACING HOMOSEXUALITY

(Part 4 of 5)

In part three of this series we saw the variety of ways in which great effort is being made to make the sin of homosexuality acceptable. These efforts are also being made within the visible church—efforts which invariably lead to a corruption of God’s Word, as we will see in the following.

The Existence of “Pro-Gay Theology”

To a dedicated Christian it may be hard to imagine a “Christian” church

that would not only condone homosexuality but even defend and encourage it. Yet, this does take place. There are many self-proclaimed Christian/Bible-teaching churches that are part of the

so-called “Gay Christian” movement. In these churches those who openly practice the sins of homosexuality are welcomed without rebuke.

God’s intent is that the conscience of a sinner will rebuke the sinner and leave him uncomfortable in his sin. Many practicing homosexuals are uncomfortable in their sin and they search for relief. When a supposedly Christian church allows its members to continue unrebuked in their sins, the sinners’ consciences are soothed by the false comfort of being involved in a Christian church. At the same time their consciences are hardened, because the church is confirming them in their sins.

Pro-Gay Theology’s View of the Bible

The pro-gay movement has at its center the desire to redefine “normal” and “moral.” This goal has been largely absorbed by the media, political groups, the education community, and the fields of psychiatry and psychology. There is one other large social conquest which the pro-gay movement has to conquer in order to most effectively reach its goal . . . THE CHURCH!

God’s Word is abundantly clear concerning His view toward homosexuality (see previous installments in this series—ed.). Therefore in order for “religion” and pro-gay beliefs to co-exist, the TRUTH of God’s Word must be changed. Pro-gay theology does not necessarily teach that the Bible is not authoritative. However, it does say that in the verses treating homosexuality the Bible is either mistranslated OR misinterpreted OR misunderstood. Consider just two examples, remembering that these things are set forth as

“Christian” teaching:

+ *Sodom and Gomorrah*: The sins of these cities are well documented and condemned in Scripture. The English word “sodomy” is still used to describe sins like those committed in Sodom. The homosexuality of Sodom and Gomorrah is clear when the men of Sodom surrounded Lot’s house and demanded: “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally” (Genesis 19:5). Scripture is clear that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their great wickedness. A pro-gay theology approach claims that Sodom was destroyed because of the inhospitality of its citizens toward strangers.

+ In *Romans 1:26-27* Paul describes homosexuality as sinful and unnatural. He writes: “. . . God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” A pro-gay revisionist approach concludes that Paul was condemning people who were not *truly* homosexual. In other words, those who are created homosexual may practice it in a God-pleasing way, because they are “naturally homosexual.” The sin is the pursuit of something that doesn’t come naturally to the individual.

One by one the words of the Lord which speak clear truth concerning this sin are warped, twisted, and denied under the pretense of a “better” interpretation. By their own admission advocates of pro-gay theology are

using scientific information, social change, and personal experience to mold their interpretation of Scripture, rather than approaching Scripture as an objective truth with which to mold our lives. It comes down to the question: “Am I interpreting Scripture in the light of my sin, or am I interpreting my sin in the light of Scripture?” Each of us can rightfully ask the same question with our own pet sins, if ever we find ourselves trying to justify sin by misuse of Scripture.

The Christian Response Defined by Radicals

Sadly, those who hold convictions are almost always identified with the extremists who claim to hold the same convictions. For many, the pro-life movement against abortion is defined by the extremists who bomb abortion clinics. Thus pro-life gains a “bloody” reputation as nothing more than a group of half-crazed bombers. The same holds true for those who speak

against homosexuality. Those who hold to what Scripture says regarding homosexuality are branded as extreme, homophobic, and worse. Thus, Christian opposition to homosexuality is associated with things like the brutal beating and killing of Matthew Shepherd.

People who were formerly gay speak of seeing anti-gay protestors with their signs proclaiming the wickedness of homosexuality and the judgment that awaited them because of it. One former lesbian, now a Christian speaker, pointed out that the signs always included 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (“Neither . . . homosexuals nor sodomites . . . will inherit the kingdom of God”), but never included verse 11: “and such *WERE* some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” The message of God’s judgment was being conveyed very clearly, but there was no message to tell those who



The ILC Tour Choir (see p. 15) travels comfortably by coach bus. Shown here are members of the 2000 Choir in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota on Easter Sunday. After presenting a concert at Grace church, they are ready to depart for the next stop on the schedule.

were caught in sin that there IS a way out through Christ Jesus, our Savior. There is a time for the Law and God's judgment, but a message that does not include Christ and the proclamation of how to escape sin is a message that is incomplete and decidedly not Christian.

In all our witnessing and ministering we strive to properly proclaim Law

and Gospel. This is likewise essential as we minister to those who are caught in the sin of homosexuality. Only the Law can expose sin and convict the heart of a comfortable sinner. Only the Gospel can effect repentance and lead the sinner to his Savior. We will consider this more fully in the final segment of this series.

—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt

Please note: it was first thought that there would be four articles in this series; we find that a fifth is necessary to bring the subject matter to a conclusion. — Editor



The last of three devotions on . . .

THE BEST WAY TO DIE

Take yet another look at the cross—the best way for Jesus to die, and the best way for you to die—and to go on dying, as Galatians 5:24 shows: “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The Holy Spirit creates a willing obligation in us which follows our justification. It too is gift. Do we have a hard time accepting this gift? “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). “Our old man was crucified with Him . . . that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6).

Out in timber country years ago, loggers used the chute from the splash dam up above as a fun lunch-break ride on shovels down to the river below.

All went well for one man until his foot got caught near the end of a ride—wedged firmly between two thick slabs of timber that were used to



construct the chute. Try as he might, he could not dislodge his foot. The whistle blew up above, and logs started coming down the chute again.

The man had his ax strapped over his shoulder. With seconds to spare, he chopped off the offending foot and fell free.

Matthew 18 says: “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.” Jesus is talking about spiritual surgery here, as did Paul up there in the introductory paragraph.

Or as in Colossians 3: “Set your

minds on things above . . . For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ . . . appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth . . . put off all these.”

We who live here “are always carrying about in the body the dying of the

Lord Jesus.”

It has been said that when we arrive in heaven we shall recognize Jesus by His death wounds. It seems fair to say that Jesus will recognize us by—among other things—the scars incurred by our constant dying, in Him.

—*Pastor Warren Fanning*

REFORMATION ORGAN CONCERT



Pastor Paul Nolting with Daniel Sullivan

An organ concert was presented at 4:00 p.m. on October 29, 2000 at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota by Daniel Sullivan. The artist, son of Prof. & Mrs. Paul Sullivan of ILC, is a member of Messiah Ev. Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, and is a senior organ performance and music theory double-major at the Oberlin

College Conservatory of Music.

Anyone who attended the concert will readily acknowledge that Mr. Sullivan has been given a special musical talent. A program folder listed special opportunities he has been given to display his gifts, including four recitals through the United Kingdom in the fall of 2001. Mr. Sullivan has, as well, an ambitious schedule of competitions and further studies.

Few of our CLC churches have the organ and acoustics of Immanuel, Mankato. It was a wonderful setting—and special occasion on the church calendar—for many area folks to enjoy the accomplished work of a gifted young musician. “We thank (Daniel) for using God-given gifts to bring us God’s blessing of music!” concluded the program folder. ●

A(NOTHER) MOVIE TO AVOID

Most Hollywood-produced movies today are not worth seeing because they promote behavior such as obscenity, violence, immorality, and a variety of other anti-Christian actions, ideas, and attitudes.

Now comes a movie which, though produced by Christian filmmakers and purporting to be based on the Bible, is also not worth seeing. We speak of the movie *LEFT BEHIND*. In our view this movie—based on an endtime series of novels by evangelist Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins—is not worth seeing because it promotes false doctrine.

We have not seen the movie, but have read a number of pre-release reviews on it in some religious literature. To us, at least, the false doctrine the movie promotes is suggested by the title. The story line revolves around a supposed endtime “rapturing” of believers out of this world to a better one, leaving all unbelievers behind. One reviewer writes: “*LEFT BEHIND* is a novel about the return of Christ and what happens to those not raptured up to heaven because of their sins and disbelief. . . .” Another reviewer puts it like this: “The movie has some amusing this-car-will-be-abandoned-in-case-of-Rapture scenes, including one on an airplane, in which the Christian passengers and children under 12 disappear, leaving their clothes behind.”

Such a “rapture” idea immediately sends up “beware” flares for those of us within the orthodox Lutheran community. For example, in speaking

about this movie, a CLC pastor recently posted the following on our synod e-mail: “(The movie) is a dramatic story based on the false premillennialistic doctrine of the rapture, the seven-year tribulation, the rise of anti-christ, the mass conversion of the Jews, the battle of Armageddon, etc. Remember Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* and *Countdown to Armageddon*? This movie is in the same vein. If you are a pastor, warn your members. . . . If you are a parent, talk to your kids about it.”

To explain what’s behind his concern, the pastor continues: “Those of us who have served in strong pre-millennialistic parts of the country know how the false doctrine can really mess up a Christian with simple, child-like faith.” Such words are a concerned earthly shepherd’s way of paraphrasing the words of the Good Shepherd who warns His sheep: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Mt. 7:15). In our day I trust we are hardly surprised at the suggestion that false prophets can hide behind the guise of a “Christian” movie on the silver screen.

With all this, subscribers to the *Lutheran Spokesman* might be reminded of the series that has been running in our church magazine called “Biblical Perspectives On The End Times.” From the time the series (written by pastor emeritus Paul F. Nolting) began in August 1999, we have seen it as a biblically based and orthodox Lutheran

response to the barrage of endtime speculations connected with the turn of the new millennium.

The *Spokesman* series may lack the drama and sensationalism of many of the end-time speculation books—and, may we add, movies. Yet there is no doubt in our mind that Pastor Nolting’s articles are much better for one’s spiritual digestion system. On the subject of the Rapture, see the article in the issue of February 2000.

As has been said, *LEFT BEHIND* is based on a book—in fact, on a series of books. And if the movie is not worth seeing since it promotes false doctrine, neither are the books worth buying for the same reason.

—Pastor Paul Fleischer (Editor)



Announcements

Correction

Most likely our subscribers noticed the mislabeling on the cover of last month’s issue. Volume 43, Number 9 should, of course, have been designated for the month of March, not May. Our apologies for any confusion caused. — *The editor*

From the ILC Board of Regents

Adelgunde Schaller has served at the high school level of Immanuel Lutheran College for forty years. She was one of the first two teachers in the 1959-60 school year when the campus was at Mankato, Minnesota. Through the years Mrs. Schaller was called upon to teach English, Social Studies, History, Biology, Problems of Democracy, and German. From 1982 until 1994

she taught part-time in the high school department. Mrs. Adelgunde Schaller also served our synodical school as librarian from 1982 until her retirement on February 15, 2001.

As a token of our appreciation we would like to collect a monetary gift for this dedicated teacher of our children. CLC members are invited to contribute to a “purse” that will be presented during graduation ceremonies on May 19, 2001. Please make checks payable to Immanuel Lutheran College, and stipulate: “For the A. Schaller purse.” Send gifts to Lowell Moen, ILC Business Manager, Immanuel Lutheran College, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701.

Cover: Matt Schaser

