

lutheran spokesman

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CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION

A MESSAGE FAMILIAR AND PRECIOUS

Matthew Henry, commenting on 1 Thessalonians 5:20 (“Do not despise prophecies”), makes this striking statement: “We must not despise preaching, though it be plain, and not with enticing words of men’s wisdom, and though we be told no more than what we knew before.”

What a strange thing to say, some would think. Isn’t it boring to listen to plain preaching? Isn’t it a waste of time to listen to what you already know?

Now these words are not addressed to preachers, who are not to be satisfied to put out sermons that are dull, thinking that the congregation should be glad enough to hear them. These words are addressed to hearers.

As hearers of the Word, we ought to recognize that faithful preaching of God’s Word is something rare and precious. We ought not despise it, but gladly hear it. Though we are hearing

what we already know, we need to be reminded of it.

We perhaps need to guard against the temptation to think lightly of preaching especially during the season of Lent, when we have midweek services. In these services we hear the history of Christ’s sufferings from the four Gospels read in its entirety. We hear sermons on portions of that history or on other related Scripture texts.

It is easy to pass up these services. Our attendance may not seem very important. Have we not heard the passion history read many times before? Can the pastor say anything about the passion that we haven’t heard before? Yet there are several reasons why we need to hear the familiar message again.

A young man home on leave from the service told his pastor that as a child he had wondered why he had to

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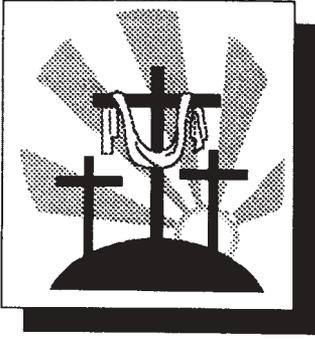
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Editor: Paul Fleischer, 710 4th Ave. SW, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085-1232, E-Mail to pgflei@prairie.lakes.com; Assistant Editor: Paul R. Koch; Artists: John Fox, Matthew Schaser; Staff (Also District Reporters): James Albrecht, Theodore Barthels, David Bernthal, Warren Fanning, Joel Fleischer, David Fuerstenau, Rick Grams (Minnesota), Mark Gullerud (Great Lakes), John Klatt, Paul Krause, Joseph Lau, Delwyn Maas, David Reim, Peter Reim, Rollin Reim (Pacific Coast), David Schierenbeck, John Schierenbeck (South-Eastern), Michael Wilke, (West Central).

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study the same Bible history lessons over and over again. After being out of Sunday School for a few years he began to realize that he could no longer remember all the details of those lessons.

It is generally true of knowledge that we lose it if we do not use it. It is true especially of knowledge of the Scriptures. We have a sinful nature and are naturally dull of hearing when it comes to spiritual things. If the knowledge of Christ and of salvation is not renewed in us constantly, it begins to fade. We ought to welcome every opportunity to renew it by hearing faithful preaching of the Word.

The Heart of the Story

The story of Jesus' passion is the

heart of the greatest story ever told. God's own Son become man willingly submits to the death of the cross because it is His Father's will. He offers His life as a sacrifice to the Father to carry out the love of God and ransom a race of sinners. The Son suffers to the point of being forsaken by His Father. The Father accepts the offered sacrifice and declares man justified.

The preaching of the cross of Christ speaks directly to our own hearts. It sharpens our awareness of our natural sinful condition. In the cross we see the horror of our sin and its consequences. In the cross we have to face where we would be without Christ. It moves us to sorrow and repentance.

The preaching of the cross assures us of the forgiveness of all our sins. It frees us from guilt. It liberates us from fear of death and the judgment.

There are many sounds that grow tiresome with repeated hearings. There are other sounds we never tire of hearing: a beautiful piece of music, the sound of a loved one's voice.

Let the passion history of our Lord be to us a somber yet beautiful melody—the voice of our God speaking to us in love. We cannot hear it too often.

—*Pastor John Klatt*

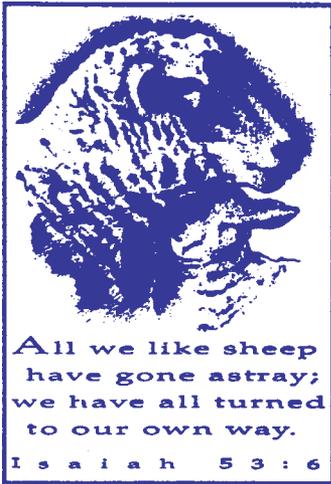


HE DIED AS HE LIVED!

Again and again Scripture urges us to “repent.” We are told: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17); “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins” (Acts 2:38); “Repent and believe in the

gospel” (Mk. 1:15). Literally, repent means “to turn.” We are to turn *from* sin and turn *to* God for forgiveness.

When a well-known Hollywood producer died a few months ago, her son said that his mother had died as unrepentant as she had lived. While he



was most likely speaking of his mother's career choices, and we don't know the condition of her soul, which of us would like that to be said of us?—"He died as unrepentant as he lived."

Such a sentiment is the opposite of what the season of Lent moves us to. The life of the believer in Christ, especially during the season of Lent, is one of continuing repentance. During Lent we sorrow over our sins and meditate on Christ's Passion. We marvel at the great love that God has for sinners in that He would offer up His only-begotten Son to pay for our sins. Were it not for our sins, it would not have been necessary for Jesus to die. Or to live, for that matter, because He lived and died in our place, innocent of sin, "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). Jesus had nothing of which He had to repent, for we are told that He "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Pet.

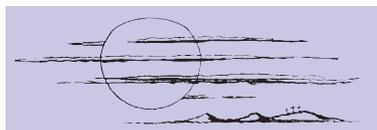
2:22). Yet He went to the cross anyway to be punished for what He did not do, namely, sin. Jesus died as He lived. Not unrepentant, but innocent, for Scripture says that "Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18).

Parents, which of you would volunteer your child to be punished for something that someone else had done? Yet this is what God the Father did in offering up His Son in our place. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:7ff).

The product of such undeserved love and eternal salvation is humble thanksgiving from those for whom the Son sacrificed Himself. And so, during Lent—and for as long as we are in this world—we repent of our sins and trust in the Savior for forgiveness, knowing that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

Cleansed by the blood of Jesus, the believer dies as he lives, that is, repentant and confident of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Believers can do so because Jesus died as He lived—in our place and innocent.

—Pastor Joel Fleischer



From Cradle To Cross

Among my favorite bulletin clip-art illustrations are those which show the silhouette of a cross behind a manger or a cradle. This captures the apostle Paul's thought that we preach nothing except Christ crucified.

We have celebrated the birth of Jesus with joy and gladness. We have marveled at the revelation of God's glory in the eternal Word made flesh. Now we stand in the somber season of Lent with its special mid-week services. The cross stands behind every season of the Church Year as well as behind every season of our human existence. The cross is the revelation of God's saving love for real sinners.

This is brought out in a little-remembered part of the Christmas story as recorded in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. We remember the song of Simeon when the forty-day-old Baby Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented to the Lord under the law of Moses. Every communion service we may sing with Simeon, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace according to Your word for my eyes have seen Your salvation." We do not always remember the traditional gospel reading for the Sunday after Christmas—Luke 2:33-40. Here Simeon continues addressing Mary, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34-35).

These words almost intrude into our



celebration of Christmas. The world does not understand—and we may soon forget—that God's Son became man and took upon Himself the form of a slave, so that He could become obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Mary herself had trouble with these words, urging (in effect) Jesus to do something at age thirty at Cana's wedding feast (John chapter 2). Even the disciples were looking for Jesus to restore an earthly kingdom of glory to Israel (Acts chapter 1). Our celebration of Christmas often does not leave much room for the cross behind the cradle.

No Middle Ground

Simeon reveals that there will be no middle ground. Those who believe in Him will be saved, and those who do not believe will be condemned. "This Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel." Jesus would become the stone which the builders among God's people Israel rejected, and which God would make the cor-

nerstone of His Church. This Jesus, Israel's Messiah-King, would turn out to be a sign which will be spoken against. The ministry of Jesus would result in the leaders and people of Israel crying out, "Crucify Him!" This Child—whose birth was announced by a choir of angels—would be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3).

We also, because of our sinful nature, hid our faces from Him.

"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:22-23). The cross would become a sign which would be spoken against.

Simeon prophesied that Mary's heart would be broken. Because of this Child "a sword will pierce through your own soul also." Mary would see her child grow up unknown and unrenowned. Mary would see her child begin His public ministry at thirty years of age. Three years later, Mary would stand at the foot of the cross and

grieve as her son died a horrible and excruciating death on this instrument of Roman justice. Mary would hear Jesus—as He bore the sins of the world—cry out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Mary did not understand what the Father's business involved, until she stood under the cross.

Yet through the cross would come forgiveness and life for people dead in sins and trespasses. At the cross God revealed His saving love and grace. The cross behind the cradle reveals the unbelievable love of God Who gave His only Son so that we would not perish but have everlasting life.

The story of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter all revolve around the cross. This preaching of the cross is the power of God which saves us.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom, and point me to
the skies,
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain
shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!
(TLH 552:8)

—Pastor John Schierenbeck



From the "Chapel Talks" file of Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch—

"And it came to pass . . ."

We were supposed to have our school photo day yesterday, but it did not come to pass; so we are rescheduling for another day; perhaps it shall come to pass on that day. Things like that happen due to human error or circumstances beyond human control.

The difference this item makes in your life may be minimal, but it has reminded me of a very simple statement of a few words in Scripture: "And it came to pass in those days . . ." "You recognize that phrase from Luke 2:1; I have been pleasantly surprised to find

similar versions scattered through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, usually at the beginning of chapters.

In those simple words lies a great truth: it is the truth that God carries out His business on schedule, without hindrance by world or the devil, with or without acknowledgement from the race of humans who pursue life as though it were their territory to manipulate. It seems, indeed, that relatively few of any generation have received the grace to acknowledge: “My times are in thy hands.”

Relatively few have the insight to live as God-minded as the half-brother of Jesus exhorts: “You ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this or that.’” Only the Christian heart is convinced that God will have His plans for us come to pass, after all.

Let us notice with pleasure that this is not the fatalism of “whatever will be, will be,” as though the universe functioned under rules of blind chance, and as if your future were the random luck of the draw. Nor is Christian security as groundless as that of the Muslim who intones: “Inshallah”—“as Allah wills.” Allah is an idol, a false god, and those whose allegiance is to Allah are devil’s dupes. It is not Allah who controls what comes to pass in these days or any other days, but it is our Lord and Savior Jesus, now reigning in heaven, who will make come to pass whatever He deems best in these days.

So when we come across that expression in Scripture: “And it came to pass,” or “And so it was, that . . .” our minds should soar to the mansion above where God our Father and God the Son our Savior rule together to make all history fit the pattern pre-set and foreordained from eternity for the

“ . . . So when we come across that expression in Scripture: ‘And it came to pass,’ or ‘And so it was, that . . .’ our minds should soar to the mansion above where God our Father and God the Son our Savior rule together to make all history fit the pattern pre-set and foreordained from eternity for the sake of redeemed souls . . .”

sake of redeemed souls. Is this not what the Spirit assures us of in saying: “All things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose . . .” “? And though the mechanisms that Jesus uses to bring such blessing to pass in these days are often not revealed clearly to our wondering hearts, those words make our hearts warmed, for we perceive that it is our Redeemer having HIS way come to pass for the blessing of His redeemed children—including you and me.

Your life and mine are not pawns of fate; your days and mine are not blankly discarded by random, aimless chance. That is not a viable alternative.

Consider but for a moment or two an awful alternative—the horror of a God-less alternative. What if it had NOT come to pass in those days that Adam and Eve stayed at the center of God’s love? What if there had been no redemptive plan formulated to come to pass in the days of Caesar Augustus? What if no message of hope for redemption of sinners had ever come to pass for them and for their children? Thank God that He IS God, and He gives us the victory through our Lord

Jesus Christ!

Therefore each day of this planet's history has dawned BECAUSE God has had His mind made up about humanity; and He has set His heart on getting people like you and me out of Satan's strong grip. And though God's love has often been disappointed, and His concerns often disregarded, HE HAS NOT GIVEN UP: the days of His mercy have come to pass on this earth and shall continue to come to pass because He is that sort of God, and we are the sort that need Him so much.

Your life here has reason, and your

efforts here have purpose, and your future has God-sponsored goals. For still to come to pass on this troubled globe are God's important programs of evangelizing and upbuilding the church, and then taking souls to glory.

May we ever be aware of how suitable our places are in God's plans in these days that are indeed passing—no one exactly like the other and so soon gone. May God grant that we use our days wisely, and may their passing find us richer in their blessings.

To God all praise and glory. Amen.



Studies In Philippians

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

Chapter 1:1-18

"But the Good News is..."

It is perhaps the finest and most moving example that we have of Christian joy under affliction.

The apostle Paul's epistle to the Philippians was written while he was in prison—his immediate fate in question (though not his ultimate fate, praise God!).

Still, in spite of his physical captivity, his words to this congregation (which he had founded probably about ten years earlier) reveal a spirit of confidence, joy, and peace that could grow only out of the fertile soil of God's grace in Christ.

The good news of Jesus Christ was

at the heart of Paul's thoughts, shared with the fellow believers, just as it was at the heart of his courage in captivity. As he explains later in this letter (see 4:11ff), regardless of his circumstances he always found cause to be content.

In other words, no matter what discouraging blow came next, Paul seemed always to be saying "but the good news is..."

"With Joy . . ."

Although separated by time and circumstance, Paul explained that his prayers for them were offered "with joy." Philippi was on the eastern coast

of Macedonia—the first stop Paul had made in A.D. 51 after the dream at Troas in which his mission expedition was urged to “come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9—the entire 16th chapter of Acts is important background reading for an understanding of the Philippian church).

His work there had prospered, and over the years the church at Philippi had proven to be faithful, devout, and generous.

But Paul was now at Rome, a “guest” of the Emperor Nero. He lived under house arrest, and while he was very much in danger, he seemed to have regular contact with believers there, at least for the first couple of years (Acts 28:30-31). His friends at Philippi were far away and might easily have forgotten Paul, or Paul’s interest in them might have cooled with the years.

But neither was the case. One day a man named Epaphroditus arrived at Paul’s lodging with a money gift from the Philippian church. That is what occasioned this “thank-you note” from Paul in return.

In his opening lines, the apostle explains that he had kept them in his prayers, and that those prayers for the Philippians were offered “with joy” (v. 4). He has nothing but gratitude for these faithful and generous Christians (it is the only congregation from which we specifically know Paul had accepted gifts) with whom he states he has had a “partnership” [NIV] in the gospel from those first days when he and his associates were invited to make Lydia’s residence their home base (Acts 16:15).

Time and circumstance cannot interfere with the fellowship of the

Body of Christ, which includes all those who are “partakers with me of grace” (v. 7).

Although he was still a prisoner, Paul points out the good news that “the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.” Yes, Paul was a prisoner. But he did not seem to think of his captivity as an obstacle to his ministry. The Philippians were well able to appreciate why not—some of the greatest mission work done was done in that cell in Philippi where Paul and Silas had sung their hymns and prayed after being arrested—which finally resulted in the conversion of the jailer and his family.

With Boldness

The case was the same now in Rome, where Paul’s captivity had led to a trial and to an opportunity to present a defense of the Christian gospel. With the passing of time, it had become apparent to the palace guard and to many others that Paul was no criminal or rabble-rouser. His chains were “in Christ”—they were a result of Paul’s faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth and his certainty that this Jesus was God and the Savior promised to the Jews. He was a victim of persecution and a devout worshiper of God.

The influence of the gospel was spreading, bearing fruit even “in Caesar’s household” (4:22). Paul’s own faith and patience were a catalyst to the local church, where believers were more and more “bold to speak the word without fear” (v. 14). They came to appreciate the fact that in spite of opposition the gospel of a Savior from sin—and the knowledge of the true God as revealed in and by Jesus

Christ—was news too good to keep silent about.

Even in the odd and pathetic circumstance where some tried to use the gospel to “add affliction to my chains” (v. 16), Paul could say that the good news is that “Christ is preached.” It’s not entirely clear, and even harder to fathom, what must have been going on there in Rome; but while some who believed were proclaiming the gospel out of love and sincerity—bringing joy to Paul’s heart—he was aware that others were also telling the gospel, but were motivated by some sort of party

spirit—perhaps attempting to draw disciples away from Paul and his work there.

Yet Paul was confident of the power of the “good news” itself to bring people to true repentance and to capture lost souls in the embrace of the gospel. That power was undiminished by the motive or corruption in the hearts of those who spoke it. The Word is not bound by the speaker’s weaknesses or unbelief. In this he rejoices, and would go on to rejoice, as he does throughout the remainder of this epistle.

—Pastor Peter Reim



**Our Nation in Crisis; Our God still a Refuge—
(#3 in a series)**

LET US PRAY!

During the past week we came to the one-month mark since the terrorists’ attack upon our country, and we saw our country begin its response to the attack.

Not only during the past week but in all the weeks since the attack, many people have offered many prayers.

Prayers that have been offered out of faith in the one true God (the Triune God as revealed in Holy Scripture) have surely been heard by God and answered according to His will and wisdom. Prayers that have been offered apart from faith in the true God have only been words that disappear into the air (see Hebrews 11:6 and 1 Peter 3:12).

Calls to prayer, prayer meetings, prayer vigils, and prayer services have been frequent in these recent weeks. Because so many people with so many views about “god” have been offering what they consider to be prayer, a confusing mixture of messages has developed around the whole concept of “prayer” and “praying.” The following are a few thoughts of what God teaches us concerning prayer—thoughts brought to mind by “prayer in the news.”



People often seem more active in their prayer life when catastrophe hits. Praying in times of trouble is God-pleasing. God says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble . . .” (Psalm 50:15). Yet, prayer is much more than a distress call.

Prayer is anything we say (or think) toward God. If the conversation between a child and parent only consisted of “Mom . . . Dad . . . HELP!” we would conclude that the child/parent relationship is lacking. Children and parents can talk about trouble and needs but also successes, joys, sorrows, the way things are going, things that are on the mind . . . in short, *anything!* Likewise, we are able to go to our heavenly Father in our troubles and needs (Matthew 7:7), but also to thank Him (Psalm 107:1), worship Him (Psalm 95:1ff), and simply to “just talk.”

Although it is true that crises will underscore the value of prayer, prayer is a blessing at *all times* and should occupy our time each day (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

In times of crisis we pour out our hearts to God and boldly take our pleas before the throne of the Almighty God. As important as prayer is in times of crisis, it is *even more important* that we turn to God’s Word for direction, assurance, hope, strength, and confidence.

In prayer we go to God and unburden our hearts; but through His Word God speaks to us and brings into our hearts the power and effective working of His gracious Word of salvation! Going to the *Word of God*—and not just praying to Him—is something that has been largely lacking in many of the “prayer functions” since the disaster.

A temptation for someone speaking a public prayer is to make the prayer

into a sermon or political speech. At least one prayer that was heard in the Sunday afternoon ceremony held at the Minnesota Capitol fell into this trap. The speaker began by addressing a “god” (a generic, undefined, Christ-less god), and five minutes later it occurred to the listener that he was now hearing a political speech about peace. It was difficult to know where the “prayer” had ended and the speaker’s opinions began. Prayer is not a preaching tool. Prayers are not required to be eloquent or impressive and inspiring to an audience. Prayers are not intended to instruct people or to convey any message at all to *people*. *True prayer* conveys our thoughts and whatever lies upon our hearts and minds *to God!* (cf. Matthew 6:5ff).

Prayer is a form of worship directed to God. For this reason, when we pray with others we will want it to be with those who share in our faith and confession—as is the case with all our worship. Gathering together with fellow Christians to collectively pray and unburden our hearts is good and God-pleasing. However, we may at times be led into the feeling that a prayer offered by many people as a group or in a “prayer vigil” is somehow stronger or more effective than a personal prayer offered privately. This is not true. The prayer of *one* man, Abraham, would have spared the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, if God had found ten believers in those cities (See Genesis 18:23ff). The prayer of *one* man, Elijah, brought an end to the rain and caused it to begin again (see 1 Kings 17:1ff, 1 Kings 18:41ff; James 5:17-18). “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man (a believer — one believer) avails *much*” (James 5:16).

When we consider the weight that often burdens our hearts and souls, we might well exclaim, "OH! I HAVE SO MUCH IN MY LIFE!" In other words, "I have so much for which to pray!" "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

When we consider how completely

in need of salvation we are, we might well exclaim, "OH! I NEED HELP!" In other words, "I will run to the Word of God to hear His words of grace, comfort, and the forgiveness of sins to give rest to my soul." "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you . . . come to Me and I will give you rest!" (Matthew 9:2; 11:28)

—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt



THE WORSHIP SERVICE

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

Psalm 95:6

Twelfth and last in a Series—

The Benediction

The (Aaronic) Benediction

The so-called Aaronic Benediction (literally: "to speak well of") is named such because Aaron, Moses' brother, and his sons were the designated priests for Israel. Therefore, it was to Aaron and his sons that the Lord gave these special words with which to bless the Children of Israel.

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine upon you,

And be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,

And give you peace.

(Numbers 6:24-26, NKJV)

"The LORD bless you and keep you."

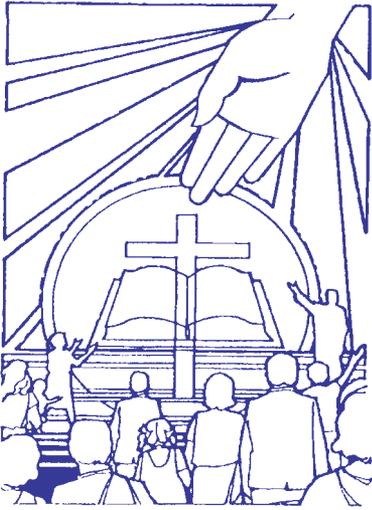
The LORD is the Giver of every blessing "Every good gift and every

perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (Jms. 1:17). Every temporal and spiritual blessing is here included.

But the Benediction also adds "and keep you." The word "keep" means to watch over, guard, protect. You "are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation" (1 Pet. 1:5). And what is the "power of God"? The Apostle Paul tells us, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). In other words, the LORD watches over, guards, and protects us as we make our way through this world of sin.

"The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you."

What is the "face" of the Lord? The



“The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

The same word translated “face” (and in other places translated “presence”) is here translated “countenance.” To lift up one’s countenance or face upon someone is to look upon that one with love, compassion, grace, and favor.

Thus, our LORD wishes to assure us that for the sake of Christ there is peace between us and God. He sees us as His holy children in Christ Jesus. Now our conscience can no longer accuse us. We are ready to meet our Lord whenever our time of grace is finished.

The three parts of the Aaronic Benediction seem to quite naturally emphasize the Trinity: the Father who pours out every blessing upon us, keeping and preserving us as His children; the Son through whom God’s face shines upon us in forgiveness; the Holy Spirit by whom we are moved by faith to recognize God’s gracious favor and thus enjoy peace of heart and soul.

It would seem that every Christian

word translated “face” in the Benediction is quite properly translated “presence,” as in Exodus 33:14: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Thus, in the Aaronic Blessing the Lord promises us that His presence will be with us every minute of every day, filling our lives with His gracious light of life and love.



The South-Eastern Pastoral Conference met at Lawrenceville, Ga. (Atlanta area) last September. Pastors present were (l-r): Daniel Fleischer, John M. Johannes (host pastor), Karl Stewart, Thomas Schuetze, Vance Fossum, John Klatt, John Schierenbeck, Todd Ohlmann, Paul Larsen.

would wish to remain in church through the end of the service and receive this very meaningful blessing from the LORD. Leaving early should happen only in extreme emergencies.

The threefold “Amen” concludes the service—again to emphasize the Trinity.

Though the formal order of worship service does not call for it, we usually conclude with a final hymn before the silent prayer.

A prayer of thankfulness to our Lord

for this opportunity to worship Him is very fitting.

Hallelujah! Let praises ring!
Unto our Triune God we sing;
Blest be His name forever!
With angel hosts let us adore
And sing His praises more and more
For all His grace and favor!
Singing, ringing: Holy, Holy,
God is holy, Spread the story
Of our God, the Lord of Glory! (TLH 23:4)

—*Pastor Em. L. Dale Redlin*

(This concludes the series. We thank Pastor Redlin for this instructive series of articles on the traditional “page 5” order of worship. — Editor)



Understanding Our Faith

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
(From a series of bulletin articles)

“Is religious practice after a disaster an effort to appease God? Why is religion after a disaster important, if it isn’t important when there is no immediate past or impending disaster? . . .”

Spiritual commitment

The terrorism on 9/11 is said to have had an impact on spiritual life. After that day many people gained a new appreciation for religion; people rushed to buy Bibles; church attendance increased. Nonetheless, things are now returning to pre-9/11 levels.

This raises a question—Why?

Is religious practice after a disaster an effort to appease God? Why is religion after a disaster important, if it isn’t important when there is no immediate past or impending disaster? If God is one to whom people turn in time of need, is He not one to whom

one would gladly turn in praise and thanksgiving when things are going well?

We propose that the answer to “Why?” lies in shallowness of spirituality.

Such shallowness is an indictment of the natural condition of man since the fall. Since the fall all people are born without fear of God, without trust in God (Augsburg Confession, Art. II, Triglot, p. 43). Natural man has a god, but it is not the Triune God. The Triune God is revealed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures declare Him to be the

Creator of the world, the Redeemer of the world, and the Creator of faith. Any other god is an idol. Paul recognized that the Athenians were too superstitious (very religious) (Acts 17:23). Their shallow religiousness was recognizable by worship of the unknown God.

It is a horrible indictment of our age that heathen are frequently more faithful—for all the wrong reasons—toward their gods who do not exist than are many Christians to the God in whom they claim to believe.

Shallowness of spirituality is a result of a lack of sin-consciousness. Every imagination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). As man rejects this divine assessment of human nature, one sees no need for a Savior from sin or for the gospel that proclaims Christ.

On the other hand, they who understand and know the consequence of sin will see an on-going need to come before the Lord in penitence and faith. They crave the refreshing message of forgiveness and the accompanying promise of eternal life in heaven. However, if one does not see sin as a disaster—and an on-going one at that—who needs the message of Jesus, particularly if one holds the false idea that he can appease God by showing up in worship once in a while, or by humoring Him with a good work?

Shallowness of spirituality is also a result of the lack of understanding of salvation. The salvation of which Scripture speaks is not a salvation from some political oppression, or a release from some fear of danger which can be forgotten when the cause for one's fear is past or perceived to be past.

Biblical emphasis on salvation is

salvation from the effect of sin, death, and the power of the devil. It is the salvation of the whole being, body and soul. It is salvation that is won through the meritorious suffering and death and innocent blood of the Lord Jesus. It is realized in all its peace and glory when the Lord takes the believer home to heaven.

As surely as sin infects us every day, there is never a day when the penitent sinner does not desire the message of salvation. But who needs to hear such salvation preaching when there is life to live, pleasure to pursue, and life has returned to normal?

Meaningful worship and religious practice are not activities exercised by man to earn approval from or to appease God. True worship is the exercise of faith through which man receives from the Heavenly Father comfort of heart, hope of heaven, and strength to face the rigors and trials of life.

The Christian worships privately, or in fellowship of the assembly, to give unto God the thanksgiving due unto Him—the living, gracious and benevolent Father. Faithful worship and practice of religion is a fruit of faith. It is not an antidote to the moment, but it is a living expression of one who knows his present and his future is found in Christ.

We are not surprised at the spiritual shallowness of our present culture. But we are deeply troubled and concerned when even among Christians (who claim to believe and confess Christ—and who are upset if their faith is questioned) the commitment to what they claim to believe is often hard to find.

We must conclude that if religion and the practice of our faith is not significant every day, it is not significant at all. Where it is not significant, it will

either disappear (as has happened in nations of the earth), or it will be at best a religion of convenience—one that is practiced when times are tough, but is otherwise forgotten.

Our Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy

day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes” (Luke 19:42). Jerusalem was not merely a city of stone and mortar. Jerusalem was people! May terror over our sin bring us to our knees, and Jesus’ love for us so compel us that He need not weep over us!



FROM A PASTOR’S DESK—

CAVING IN (PART II)

A few weeks back we wrote something in our church bulletin (cf. January, *Lutheran Spokesman*, p. 16) in which we took exception to what a local pastor wrote in the clergy column of the *Sleepy Eye Herald Dispatch*.

You may recall we referred to the fact that the pastor of a local Community Church “caved in” to the ecumenicism of the day when he changed his mind about “How we can pray in unity?” Previously, he said, he had always believed (on the basis of Scripture!) that people of different religions could not and should not pray together. No more. He has changed his mind. Now, in his view, it is all right (also on the basis of Scripture?). His rationale, briefly, was that it is both necessary and proper to make a distinction between state-sponsored and church-sponsored religious activities. In church-sponsored activities there should be no joint prayer. However, in state-sponsored activities, according to this pastor, the lay of the land is different. In such activities (the way we understood him) the God of the Bible apparently doesn’t care if His believers pray together with those who believe in other gods.

We begged to differ. We don’t find anywhere in God’s Word where He makes such suggested distinctions. Yes, there is a distinction between Church and State. These two spheres have different aims and ends (the Church operates with the Word and the spiritual for the soul; the State is concerned about civil matters and laws, protecting the body and its citizenry). While acknowledging that, however, we also believe that since it’s wrong to pray to false gods and with their adherents in the one setting (church-sponsored activities), it’s also wrong in the other setting (state-sponsored activities). In fact, if we are consistent, we find that the first commandment itself (“Thou shalt have no other gods”) applies across the spectrum of religious interaction. “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him,” (1 Kings 18:21) said Elijah to the people on Mount Carmel.

Our title suggests that we intend now to take exception with someone else who, in our view, has “caved in” to the prevailing ecumenicism. We have in mind Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, the president of the once staunchly conser-

vative, orthodox Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). The same scenario—the events following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks—prompted considerable unrest when Dr. Kieschnick gave his approval to certain Missouri Synod leaders praying with people of other denominations and faiths (Moslems, Jews, Buddhists) in an ecumenical worship service at Yankee stadium.

To make a long story short—subscribers to *Christian News* have been reading story after story about it for weeks—two conservative LCMS pastors undertook to oust the synod president as being guilty of false doctrine. In their support, says one article, “the synod’s 1847 constitution demands that its congregations and pastors reject both the mingling of Christian and non-Christian beliefs. Traditionally, Missouri Synod leaders have not led prayer services with leaders of other religions, or even other Lutheran denominations” (*Christian News*, Dec. 17, 2001, p. 7). Yet these two pastors seeking Kieschnick’s ouster, or at least his disciplining, soon hit a roadblock. The same issue of *Christian News* reported that the synod’s Commission on Constitutional Matters said that “only a national convention of the church body could deal with the charges.”

Problem is, the next LCMS convention isn’t until July 2004. By then, you can almost count on it, the turmoil will pretty much have ceased. We read that the 35 LCMS district presidents, aware of the turmoil, gave Kieschnick a standing ovation at a post 9/11 convention. And we’re told that “about 97 percent of (his) mail, phone calls, and e-mail has been supportive of the president.”

One of the pastors who brought the original charges against President Kieschnick concluded that “the matter of debate in regards to Christians and non-Christians leading prayer together will continue in our synod. It will hopefully be resolved with honest, loving conversation between the saints.”

In other words, the matter won’t be swept totally under the rug. President Kieschnick has asked the synod’s district presidents, together with the synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations, to “come up with specific guidelines to help pastors and lay people understand the difference between praying with others in civic events and in joint worship services.”

We will be watching, for such a statement intrigues. As does this quote from President Kieschnick in the current context: “Fifty years ago, there were few Hindus or Muslims in America. . . . This is not your grandfather’s United States of America.”

Perhaps, yet the Bible is your grandfather’s Bible. We wonder what support from that Bible will be found to alter the position of the 1847 LCMS Constitution and its 150-year tradition based on that Bible and that Constitution?

For our part, the following statements from a 70-year-old document have bearing on the current debate in Missouri: “. . . *We hold that all teachers and communions that deny the doctrine of the Holy Trinity are outside the pale of the Christian Church*” (Of God); “. . . *Since God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself through the vicarious life and death of His Son . . . therefore faith in Christ is the only way for men to obtain personal reconciliation with God, that is, forgiveness of*

sins. . . .” (Of Faith in Christ); “. . . We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9:10, and as involving the constant danger of losing

the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17-21” (Of the Church, On Church-Fellowship). (Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod, 1932)

—Pastor Paul Fleischer
Grace Ev. Lutheran Church
Sleepy Eye, Minnesota



2001 CLC Teachers Conference

Last October the members of Holy Cross, Phoenix, Arizona opened their hearts and homes to the CLC Teachers Conference.

Unlike the procedure of previous years, the conference began with a Sunday morning worship/communion service. Pastor Delwyn Maas, pastor of Holy Cross, led the worship. In his sermon he compared the love which a married couple shares and the perfect love Jesus showers on His Church. The service was filled with songs of praise by numerous choirs, with the acceptance of new members, and with a communion service.

The conference officially began with a devotion conducted by chaplain Doug Libby. He emphasized the importance and blessing of the fourth “R” in Christian education. Conference President Karl Olmanson called the conference to order, and roll was taken.

The first paper was written by Professor Joe Lau and was presented by Professor Ross Roehl. The paper reviewed different methods and goals used in the preparation and instruction of religion classes.

Miss Candice Ohlmann followed with an informational presentation aimed at helping students who struggle with reading difficulties. The first day concluded with a meal and a night of

recreation at a local park.

Monday began with devotion. In the first of many “power point” presentations, Mr. Ted Quade updated the conference on the concept of inclusion (the belief that students with disabilities should be integrated into the general classroom). Mrs. Beth Kranz led in the singing of many Christian choral pieces designed for children.

Other Presentations

After a wonderful lunch was enjoyed by the teachers, Miss Wendy Greve was given the floor to discuss the many duties performed by a called servant in a congregation. Mrs. Karla Olmanson then examined the emotional and motivational mind-sets involved in a student’s personality. Mrs. Barb Mueller reviewed the book *How to Talk So Kids Can Learn*, using power point.

The day was topped off with the first of two evening presentations by Dr. David Menton. He outlined Creation over Evolution. His sessions were open to the community, and many people came to hear the gospel message.

The final day of presentations

continued on p.20

CLC EXPLORATORY SERVICES

(Up-dated, January 2002)

This is a list of "start-up" congregations who are being served by an off-site pastor. Some meet in homes, others in rented facilities. Also included is our CLC exploratory mission in Detroit, Michigan. Visitors are warmly welcomed. Those who are considering a move or are just traveling through the area are encouraged to contact these groups and worship with them.

LOCATION	PASTORAL CONTACT	LAY CONTACT
Alaska , Juneau	David Fuerstenau 907-225-2842	
Arizona , Gold Canyon	Delwyn Maas 602-866-2341	
California , Stockton	Rollin Reim 650-364-2200	
Colorado , Colorado Springs	Timothy Wheaton 719-336-5773	Chuck Seelye 719-685-5848
Florida , Orlando	John Schierenbeck 941-299-4084	Paul Kuehne 407-277-2183
Florida , Coral Springs (North Ft. Lauderdale)	Paul Larsen 941-423-1822	Bob Doriot 954-429-0063
Michigan , Cadillac	Mark Bernthal 517-792-9390	Bob Remus 231-832-2687
Michigan , Detroit	Walter Schaller 248-307-0461	
Minnesota , Kimball (St. Cloud area)	Karl Neumann 320-764-2975	Reuben Streich 320-453-7562
Missouri , Kansas City	Todd Ohlmann 314-225-3458	Jim Priebe 816-781-4702
New Mexico , Albuquerque		Robin Vogsland 505-892-6934
North Dakota , Mapleton (Fargo area)	Theodore Barthels 218-847-2080	Gary Pansch 701-277-1727
Ohio , Columbus/Cleveland	Mark Bernthal 517-792-9390	
Tennessee , Monterey	John H. Johannes 678-376-9948	Wayne Everhart 270-618-4387
Texas , Amarillo	Timothy Wheaton 719-336-5773	
Texas , Temple	Thomas Schuetze 972-267-0738	Eric Rachut 254-853-2867
Virginia , Fairfax	Glenn Oster 803-926-0603	
Washington , Withrow	Terrel Kesterson 509-327-4203	Ray Lillquist 509-683-1192
Wisconsin , Appleton	David Naumann 920-922-3318	

(Wednesday) was opened with devotion. Dr. Menton walked the conference through the power point computer program. He showed the effective uses it has in a classroom.

Following noon lunch, Mr. Craig Owings presented a textbook review in which he compared the benefits and shortfalls of Abeka and Saxon Math programs. Conference concluded with an ideas exchange, a business meeting, and a closing devotion.

Throughout the course of the conference, mini-papers, called "Title Fives," were presented on a wide range of topics. The topics included Social Studies, ILC Music Fundamentals, Party Ideas, and Dictionary Skills. Holy Cross school board member Barry Zumach outlined strategies to make school boards more efficient.

On Wednesday a tour to the Grand Canyon was also available.

The Lord blessed the 2001 Conference with great food, fun, and above all, fellowship. It was truly a gift from God.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above. (TLH 464:1)

—Submitted by Teacher Kurt Koenig



Announcements

Call For Nominations

The Board of Regents for Immanuel Lutheran College invites nominations for the office of ILC president, since the current term of Professor John Pfeiffer expires May 31, 2002.

All pastors, professors, male teachers, and voting members of the CLC are entitled to nominate a man from the faculty of Immanuel to serve a two-year term beginning June 1, 2002. Nominations must be written or e-mailed (thomas.beekman@dot.state.wi.us) and received by the undersigned no later than midnight March 1.

Coordinating Council

The Coordinating Council will meet at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire April 10, 11, 2002. Board meetings begin on the 7th or 8th of April according to the discretion of the respective boards. Sessions of the Coordinating Council will begin after chapel on April 10.

—Daniel Fleischer, President

Mr. Tom Beekman
ILC Board of Regents
3087 Skyhawk Dr.
Eau Claire, WI 54703

Termination

Regretfully, fellowship with Divine Word Lutheran Church, Preston, Minnesota, has been terminated. This termination of fellowship acknowledges that there is a difference between the CLC and that with which the congregation is identified with regard to "speaking in tongues."

—Daniel Fleischer, President

CLC Co-ed Volleyball Tournament

This tournament will be hosted by Berea congregation of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota on Saturday, April 13. Registration and fee-payment deadline is March 22, 2002. Questions may be addressed to Melanie Sydow at 651-994-7894 or MelSydow@aol.com.

—Pastor David Schierenbeck