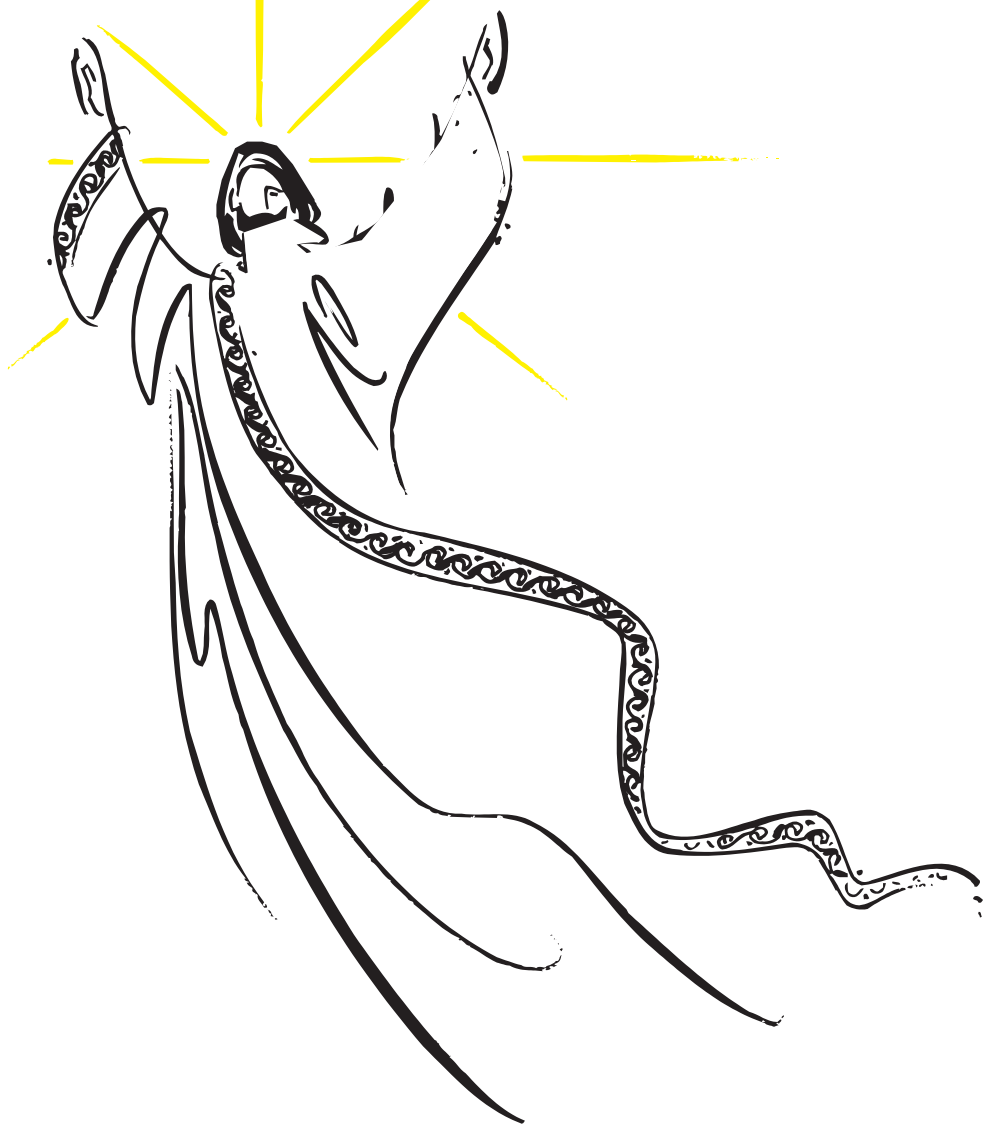


Lutheran Spokesman



"He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them"(Luke 24:50).

YOU ARE STILL IN GOOD HANDS...

Like many of my generation, I watched a lot of television as a child. While I don't necessarily remember all the programs, I can remember a great many commercials and ad-slogans. One such ad-slogan that sticks in my mind belonged to the Allstate Insurance Company. They were the "good hands people" and always reminded us—"You are in good hands with Allstate."

We will soon be celebrating the Ascension of our Lord Jesus. When a family member or loved one leaves us and goes away, we don't usually celebrate—we feel sorrow. We find it difficult to say "goodbye," because we are separated by time and space. While we might speak by phone, we can't meet face to face.

Why then do we celebrate Jesus' going away—His return into heaven?

We celebrate because Jesus' Ascension is a reminder, a proof that He finished the work the Father sent Him to do—He has redeemed us to God! Our Savior returned to heaven as the Victor!

We also celebrate because we know that Jesus returned to heaven to send us gifts from above: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8).

In Our Midst

Moreover, while Jesus has taken His visible presence away from us, we should not think He is far away, living in a distant place. He is as close at hand as prayer. He speaks to us from His

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Word and is present with us when we worship, according to His own promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20).

Our Lord Jesus is not confined by space and time. We may not see Him, but we know that He is still with us, providing for us day after day. We are still in good hands...with Jesus!

Jesus' disciples knew that to be the case. While they were saddened when He first spoke of His departure, having

been instructed by Him, they did not sorrow at His Ascension: "They worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God" (Lk. 24:52-53).

How could they be so happy? They knew Him as the Victor over death. They saw the nail prints and the wound in His side. They knew they were in good hands...in the hands of the One who laid down His life and took it up again.

The last thing they saw was—those hands! "He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them."

When Jesus lifted up His hands to bless them, what did they see? Well, they saw His hands—and the nail prints left from the crucifixion—one final reminder of the reason He came to Earth in the first place.

In Jesus' hands was printed the proof, the receipt of their and our redemption. WE are still in good hands today—the wounded, powerful, busy hands of the risen and ascended Christ.

—*Pastor Andrew Schaller*



Our Great Harvest Festival!

Harvest Festival in May?

Yes! The Jews of the Old Testament had two harvest festivals each year. The first was at the time of the wheat harvest in spring. This was the Day of Pentecost. Moses called it the Feast of Harvest (Ex. 23:16). It was also called the Feast of Weeks, because it came seven full weeks or fifty days after the

Passover.

That is why it was later given the name Pentecost, which means fifty. It was a joyous day of giving thanks to God for His abundant goodness.

The Jews celebrated this Harvest Festival by bringing the firstfruits of the wheat harvest to the Lord. By bringing the very first portion of the

wheat harvest, they gave thanks to God for providing their food. Since the grain harvest was the first of all their harvests in the spring of the year, the offering of the firstfruits was done with the confidence that God would grant an abundant harvest of the other crops.

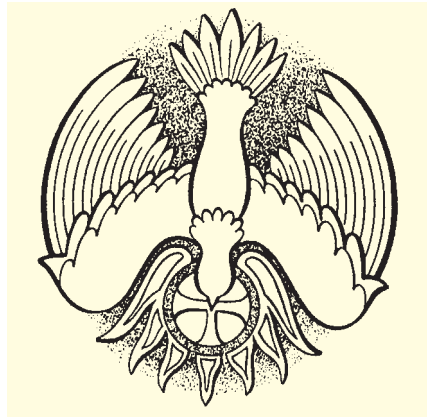
The second festival was in the fall after all the crops had been harvested. That final, grand harvest festival lasted for seven days and was called the Feast of Ingathering. It was also called the Feast of Tabernacles, because the people lived in tabernacles or booths during the entire festival in order to remember the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

God chose the Old Testament harvest festival of Pentecost to pour out His Holy Spirit on His disciples and to begin the New Testament Church. On this day thousands of Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem for the festival. How fitting that day was for the Holy Spirit, working through the apostles, to bring in the firstfruits of the harvest of souls!

Souls Won For Christ

We also see God's careful planning in that the day of Pentecost was connected to the Passover celebration. Knowing that Jesus' death and resurrection would happen during the Passover, the New Testament Pentecost is now connected with Jesus' death and resurrection on Easter, for it comes fifty days after that life-giving event. On Pentecost the firstfruits of Jesus' work of redemption were brought in with a harvest of 3000 souls.

Pentecost is really our Harvest Festival today—not the harvest of wheat or corn, but a harvest of souls won for Christ by the Holy Spirit.



Every year we celebrate the harvest that God has worked since that first Christian Pentecost. Many millions of souls have been added to the harvest in the centuries that followed.

We rejoice and praise God that we are part of that harvest. The gospel was planted in our hearts and we have been brought into God's Kingdom. We also praise God because He has made us workers in the continuing harvest of souls. He sends us out—equipped with the Holy Spirit just as the apostles were—to plant the seed of His Word and to watch the Spirit bring souls into His harvest. What a glorious harvest festival!

Today we are nearing the end of the harvest season, when the winter of God's judgment will come, and no one can work any longer. At that time Christ will come again with all His holy angels to gather in the entire harvest. Then we will celebrate the final, great Harvest Festival together with God forever and ever in heaven.

May we work all the harder to gather all the remaining harvest before that day comes. The firstfruits on Pentecost guarantee that the harvest will be great. Praise God!

—Pastor David Reim

“I CAN’T BELIEVE IT!”

It happened one evening at an Adult Instruction Class. We had spent several weekly sessions going through the Ten Commandments and had completed the First and Second Articles of the Apostles' Creed.

The class had just finished learning, at length and in depth, what the Bible teaches about the person, life, and work of Jesus Christ. Everything pointed to the cross and the open tomb, to His Ascension and His Coming as Judge. The whole account made us marvel once more at what Jesus accomplished for lost and condemned sinners everywhere.

In this new class session, now we're ready for the Article on the Holy Spirit. I suggested a quick review of the previous Article. Then we were reading through the Third Article and the Meaning—when she interrupted the class!

She said, "I can't believe it!" She blurted it out loud, so that you couldn't miss what she meant, and it caught us off guard. We soon realized that her mind was still back in the Second Article. "He has redeemed me ... purchased and won me." And she said it again: "I can't believe it!"

I knew the lady well enough to ask her: "But do you believe it?" (since I knew she did believe it). And she said, "Yes! But I can't believe it!" So I asked, "Do you have any trouble believing what the Bible teaches about what Jesus did for our salvation?" "No," she said, and then exclaimed again: "But I just can't believe it!"

Talk about a "gift opening" for Luther's Explanation of the Third

Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel... "

Some pastors and teachers have referred to the Holy Spirit as "the unknown God" or "the half-known God," because we do not always fully realize what—and how much—He does for us and in us.

As far as this class was concerned, it was the Holy Spirit who had been teaching us everything we had learned to date. He had brought us the Ten Commandments and convicted us of our sin. He had taught us about Creation and the Fall. He had brought Jesus Christ to us. And all of this through the pages of the Holy Scriptures.

We tend to forget the huge role that the Spirit of God plays in our salvation—in applying the law and gospel to our hearts and minds. Just this, for example, that "no one can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Sin and grace right there!

People may "mouth" the words—but they cannot confess that Jesus is "my" Lord, except by the Spirit of God.

And that is what we learned that evening! The lady in question could not believe it and could not say it on her own initiative or by her own power. On her own, she could not understand or confess that this was for HER. Yet she could actually say it! And she could say it because now she could actually believe it—and that only by

the Spirit's working.

What a sheer delight that evening, and that class, turned out to be!

In this 475th anniversary year of the Augsburg Confession, we believe that the Holy Spirit guided those Confessors by His Word. The Fifth Article of the Confession sums it all up, declaring that we obtain justification by grace through faith, because the ministry of teaching the gospel and

administering the Sacraments was instituted.

The same article declares that through these instruments the Holy Spirit works faith where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the gospel.

It is incredible! We can't believe it! And yet we do. Thanks be to God the Holy Spirit for His ongoing Pentecost.

—Pastor Warren Fanning, *Em.*



MOTHERS—BLESSINGS FROM GOD

The news today is filled with abortion-related issues, many of which pertain to state and federal legislative and court struggles on the part of pro-life and pro-abortion groups.

"Will we be able at least to soon ban partial-birth abortions? Will we ever live to see the courts reverse the infamous 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision legalizing abortion?" These are the questions on the minds of concerned Christian citizens, questions which have triggered a pro-abortion public backlash, as we have even seen here in Minnesota in recent months. One determined woman insisted she had fought too hard and long to win the abortion "right" and wasn't about to give up now. She wanted to leave this as her legacy to her daughter. Another said she had the same right to expel an unwanted fetus from her body as she had to throw an unwelcome intruder out of her home. Many women openly admit that pro-abortion views figure heavily into their election day voting.

In the midst of this climate, we are today celebrating Mothers' Day.

Women who demand their right to have an abortion will be accepting cards and flowers from the children they chose not to abort. We need, in Christian love, to share what God's Word says regarding conception and life as a miracle from God and children as a heritage from Him. We need to patiently and prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of those who do not value and treasure human life in all its stages and all its conditions.

One elderly Christian said: "I fondly remember my Christian mother who never considered abortion to be her 'right.' She regarded abortion as an attempt to seize from God a right that He reserved for Himself alone. According to today's thinking, my mother would have had good reasons to abort me. I was born in 1932 during the Great Depression. My parents were just getting by financially. The last thing they needed was another mouth to feed. Yet they never suggested I was an unwelcome intruder. They saw me as a gift from God and accepted the responsibility of caring for me and



Some mothers at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Sister Lakes, Michigan, gather with their young children last Christmas Eve

raising me in the Christian faith. I'm glad they did."

One is reminded of another mother from long ago. When God's angel told Mary she was about to conceive the Christ-Child, she could have come up with all sorts of logical reasons why this shouldn't be. Instead she said, "I am your servant, Lord. Use me as you see fit." Aren't we glad she did? Our joy is indescribable over the Special Child God gave us through her. We join with all believers in calling her "blessed."

On this Mother's Day we well call our Christian mothers blessed for all the blessings God has given us through them. In many cases we first learned of Christ and experienced His great love through them. They (together with Christian fathers, we pray) have been the most significant influence in our lives. In spite of the many shortcomings and failures of all of us as parents and children, God's great forgiving love in Christ Jesus has been the bond that has brought us together, nurtured us spiritually, and strengthened us as a Christian family.

There is no way to overestimate the value of such a treasure. In this age when human life and Christian "family values" are no longer important or

effective in the eyes of many, we face a special opportunity and challenge: that of truly believing in and living our faith in our various roles within the Christian family.

It is no easy task, yet it has never been more important. In our church and communion attendance, in our personal and family devotional life, in our attitudes and conduct toward our loved ones and all people, may we reflect the love of Christ.

May God graciously grant all of us such a wonderful attitude toward motherhood. May all of our Christian mothers strive to be what God has made them and called them to be—His special blessing to their children, children whom they regard as a special gift and trust from the Lord, to be raised in faith to God's glory.

This article appeared last Mother's Day in the bulletin of Berea Ev. Lutheran Church, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota; David Schierenbeck is pastor.



The Discourses of Christ

Spiritual Freedom—John 8:37-47

Part Two

Are You of Abraham's Seed?

That question of whether you and I are Abraham's seed might seem rather odd, but it is really quite to the point of Christianity. Are we genuinely Christian?

We know that the vast majority of people in our society make claims of Christianity, but are their claims to Christianity genuine, or are they presumptuous and false?

Now that is a question that we might consider worthy of examination—not only concerning the nature of Christianity in the United States, but also concerning the nature of our own faith and our own standing before the Lord.

Earlier in this "Bread of Life" discourse, many of the Jews had taken offense at Jesus' message. Jesus had plainly taught that partaking of Him through faith was necessary for one to be saved, to be a child of God. The Jews' response was that Jesus was not necessary, for they were children of Abraham.

In the portion before us, the claims of being Abraham's seed are examined by the Lord. He grants His audience the fact of their biological connection to Abraham, but then points out that the behavior of the Jews toward Him belie that connection.

Abraham believed God, and put his trust for life and salvation in that Savior who was to come. He would

never have plotted to kill Jesus. Very quickly Jesus directs this volatile dialogue back to the Word and to the failure of the Jews to honor the Word. If they received their direction from the Word, then indeed they would have been true children of Abraham who followed the Word of God with confident faith.

However, Jesus asserted that they received their guidance for life from another source—that is, from the devil. When they turned against Jesus to kill Him, they revealed themselves as children of the devil, just as Jesus had said.

Faith Makes Children of Abraham

As we are still basking in the glory of the resurrection from our Easter celebration, we know that in this Jesus, our crucified and living Savior, we have the Word of God confirmed as true, and our salvation is assured. We stand justified before our God. This is partaking of Jesus as the Bread of Life, and in these words Jesus teaches us that it is faith in Him that makes us children of Abraham.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to

teach this lesson directly for us Gentiles.

" ... Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Gal. 3:6-9).

Again later in that same chapter we read: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26-29).

So then—according to God's view—being of the seed of Abraham is not dependent upon one's ethnic or biological lineage, but upon one's spiritual lineage. Abraham believed that the Christ would come forth from God and that, in Christ, he would be saved.

By the grace of God we have been called to this same faith in Christ. We possess eternal life not by works which we have done, but by the merits of Jesus, Whom God sent down from heaven to be our Savior.

This knowledge doesn't come to us from human wisdom, but is revealed to us in the Word of God. Once again Jesus directs His audience to the Word. "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (Jn. 8:47). The condemning force of these words of Jesus

is unavoidable. Anyone dismissing the Word of God in preference for the word of man is demonstrating that he is not of God, no matter how loud or long may be the claims and protestations to the contrary.

Are you and I then of the seed of Abraham? Yes, for it is a great blessing of God's grace that He has led us to the truth of His Word. It is a great blessing of God's grace that we have come to know and believe that Jesus has come into the world that we might have life in His Name.

Those who turn away from the Word—dismissing it as a combination of myth and outdated philosophies from which we are only to cull a general truth or direction for life—have strayed from God.

We live in a society in which the prevailing attitude toward Scripture is slipping. Few consider the Word to be the verbally inspired, inerrant Word, the only divine rule for faith and life. Increasingly we hear parts of Scripture being attacked as backward and repressive, and God's messengers are characterized as hateful.

Only in the Word is the love of God for a sinful mankind revealed. It is revealed to us just as it was to Abraham, who believed the promise of God, and "it was accounted to him as righteousness."

May the Word always remain in our hearts that we also may be blessed with Abraham, and be counted as righteous before God through faith in Christ Jesus.

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels*



Studies In Colossians

**"In (Christ) are hidden all the treasures
of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3)**

Chapter 4:2-6

Folded Hands—Opened Doors

In the '60's, one of our great cultural inventions was the "supermarket"—a warehouse of goods that boggled the mind of those who had gone through the pre-War Depression. And one of the inventions that helped drive the growth of the supermarket was the 'automatic door'—a device that triggered the door to open when it sensed the approaching footfall of a patron.

The automatic door helped drive the growth of the store, partly because the novelty of such a contraption lured the curious in to view the possibilities. It helped again as the patron left the store, politely opening the door for the customer bearing armloads of purchases or facilitating the use of a grocery cart.

In the first century after Christ, a "door opening" device was of interest to the apostle Paul, and he spoke of this matter to the Colossians as he rounded out his brief letter to them. He knew that wonderful opportunities lay in store for those who sought to open doors with folded hands.

These closing paragraphs have dealt with aspects of the Christian life and interrelationships. Up to this point, prayer has not been mentioned since the opening verses of the epistle. Now Paul addresses the subject in a concise

exhortation: "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."

"Continue"—anything worth praying for is worthy of persistence. One might recall Jesus' illustration of the woman who had to deal with a corrupt judge. Even under such circumstances, the persistent petitioner is bound to succeed; how much more, when the child of God approaches his or her dear Father?

"Earnestly"—a half-hearted prayer, either because of carelessness or doubt, is no prayer at all. James said "let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (Jms. 1:6-7).

"Vigilant"—Paul had occasion to remind these Christians that they were members of the Church Militant, surrounded by so many seductive foes: "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4); "Let no one defraud you of your reward..." (2:18); "Put to death your members which are on the earth" (3:5).

"With thanksgiving"—a full and rich prayer life will encompass more than mere petitioning. It's as if you are

the guy that's always borrowing stuff from his neighbor. You start to feel funny approaching him for more, because you realize there's something missing from the relationship. The God who invites us to "call upon Me in the day of trouble" does also look for us—sooner or later—to "glorify Me" (Ps. 50:15). May our prayers thoughtfully include thanksgiving and praise toward "the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (1:12).

Pray for Open Doors

Early in the letter, Paul had related that he prayed for the Colossians (1:3,9). Now he seeks their prayers, particularly "that God would open to us a door for the word" (4:3). It was, after all, his "ministry" and "stewardship" to "speak the mystery which has been hidden...but now has been revealed to his saints" (1:25-26). Since the gospel of salvation through Christ is "spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14), it is God alone who can create an environment of receptiveness toward that gospel.

The Church needs to pray for open doors. In the Revelation, Jesus calls Himself "the Key of David" (Rev. 3:7). If He opens the door of opportunity, no one can shut it—but we can neglect it. If He has not opened such a door, we are foolish to think that we can accom-

plish much by our own ingenuity or heroic efforts.

The first mention of an open door was that of joy, as Paul and Barnabas returned from Asia Minor and reported the success they had in bringing Christ to the Gentiles. But they had been sent on their way with the support and prayers of the Christians at Antioch.

While in Ephesus (not far from Colossae), Paul had reported (1 Cor. 16:8-9) that he perceived an open door to evangelism, and that it was all the more urgent to seize the moment because there were adversaries around who would try to extinguish the light of the gospel there. All the more reason to pray, lest the door close before they could get through it with a full cart of goods.

What was true for Paul applied to the Colossians—and applies to us all!

Remember that one of the catchwords in Colossians is "wisdom." Psalm 90 reminds that wisdom involves "numbering our days." There is much to do; none of which can be done without the Lord's blessing—and nothing that can prevent it if the Lord is with us.

Let us therefore be alert, prudent in our words, clear in our testimony, loving in our attitude, "that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

—Pastor Peter Reim



Convention Organists:
(l-r) P. Schaller, P. Krause, J. Klatt, S. Pfeiffer, L. Fischer, D. Schaller, J. Gamble



CROSS PURPOSES



THE LORD, THE AUTHOR OF LIFE

The Lord God is the Author and Preserver of life. "God who made the world and everything in it...He gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:24,25). Job said, "The Spirit of God has made me. And the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). The Author of life is also the Preserver of life. "O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). He tells us of His loving concern for us as well as how precious we are to Him. He says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:29-31).

We know from Scripture that life originally was blissful and without worry or care. But then sin entered the world. Man became responsible for the evil in the world and all the misery that accompanies it. The ultimate consequence of sin is death. Medical science can extend life as God wills, but it cannot eradicate death.

We are all riveted on the case in Florida and the debate over pulling the feeding tube from the woman who is said to be in a "persistent vegetative state." Isn't it interesting that one can be arrested for cutting the wild flowers in the ditch, but that no one in authority can or will rise up to give life prolonging sustenance to one who is said to be in a vegetative state? And even

about that there is debate among medical authorities.

The purpose of our comments is not to get into the political ramifications of the case. Whether or not the government should get involved is subject to strenuous debate. Whether it is wise or unwise is a legitimate question. That in this context the question even has to be addressed is the real issue. What drives our concern is the reality that a society, theoretically Christian (a fallacy in itself)—which blithely aborts the unborn and thus takes a life which God has created—has progressed to euthanasia at the other end of a person's existence. Whatever the merits of the present case, the reality is that we live in a culture that disrespects God and therefore does not appreciate the fact that it is His right alone to take life.

There are many discomforts in life. All people sometime in life suffer afflictions and sorrows. Everyone



endures pain and various instances of discomfort, some longer than others. Each of us prays for a quiet and peaceful death without pain. None of us wants to endure the excruciating pain that debilitates and, indeed, makes one wish that he were dead. But having said that, where in Scripture do we have the promise that we will be spared?

Many years ago we were not confronted with the challenges that now exist with the advancement of medical science. It used to be that people got sick and died without fanfare or so-called heroic efforts to try to save them. Times have changed. As God has given men wisdom and ability in this area, as in so many others, man has taken upon himself the prerogative to play God on one hand and to cut God out of the equation on the other.

The present case in Florida has been described as "pulling the plug." We recognize that when life is being sustained only by mechanical means—and that, without the mechanical means, death would come—agonizing as it is, families may make the choice to "pull the plug." But pulling a feeding tube is not pulling a plug. Whether the patient suffers pain or not, or can respond or not, is not the issue. Whatever the condition of her brain and its function, in the case at hand the patient was breathing on her own and her heart was beating without artificial means. In spite of her condition, she was not dying until she was denied food. Feeding her by a tube is not a heroic means. It is not an artificial life support.

Anyone who has walked through a nursing home, and a pastor certainly has, sees people who—as far as society

"... The purpose of our comments is not to get into the political ramifications of the case. ... Whatever the merits of the present case, the reality is that we live in a culture that disrespects God and therefore does not appreciate the fact that it is His right alone to take life."

is concerned—have nothing more to offer. They may even be viewed as a drag on society because of the cost of caring for them. They may not be aware of their surroundings or of their family. They may be unresponsive. One may pray that the Lord call such an one from this life. But is that person to be denied food and sustenance in order to hasten the Lord's Day? If someone answers "Yes," we ask, "By what authority?"

This pastor can give anecdotal evidence of people given up for dead, for whom funeral plans were being made, but who lived because our times are in the Lord's hands (Psalm 31:15). These anecdotal expressions will be countered by arguments from the other side. But the point is that God determines the time of our life whether short or long, and whether we pass away with or without pain. Withholding food and water from one whose system otherwise functions on its own, regardless of the person's mental capability, is murder. How can it be anything else?

Emotional reaction to and so-called concern for the suffering and the quality of life of a patient do not trump God's Word. We know very well that there are difficult cases. We know full well questions can be asked, and that

we will not and have not satisfied every contrary argumentation, legitimate or illegitimate, on this issue. We know something else. We cannot persuade those who have no respect for the Lord, for His Word, or for life. If they were persuadable, our nation would not permit legalized abortion.

We pray earnestly that the Lord will spare us from such a condition as that of Terry Schiavo. We further pray that the Lord will call us in peace, and that we will be spared the anguish of seeing a loved one in such a state that tries our emotions and our faith.

Yet we know that our Lord Who has created us and Who has redeemed our

soul and body from destruction will give us the strength to endure whatever He asks us to bear. We also pray that the Lord will give us the courage to search His Word and the wisdom to make decisions based on the Word rather than on the emotional whims and societal fancies that exclude the Lord and His will. Above all, we pray that we and our loved ones will be found in faith in Jesus when the last hour shall come so that when the Lord calls we may be delivered from every vestige of this Earth to enter heaven, where is no more pain, sorrow, or tears.

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



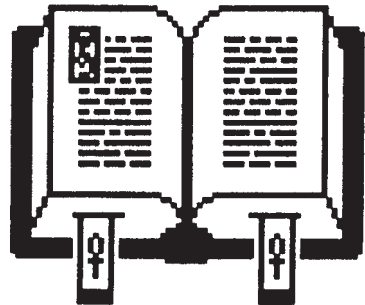
INTRODUCING the Books of the Prophets

Ezekiel

" . . . As for the Jews themselves—as days stretched into weeks, months, and years—the Lord came to them with words of promise and life and a return from captivity (chs. 36-48). God didn't want His people to feel as if He was now abandoning them in their captivity."

It had already been five years for Ezekiel (1:2). At thirty years of age the young priest was living by the River Chebar along with other Jews who had been taken into captivity.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire, had already been to Jerusalem twice. The first time had been after his victory at Carchemish over Necho, king of Egypt. Now that he was the sole power in the Fertile Crescent, Nebuchadnezzar had come down (in



605 BC) to "lay claim" to Judah and its environs. At that time he had taken a

Outline of EZEKIEL

I. Prophecies relating to the final destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 1-24)

II. Prophecies against heathen nations, the enemies of God's people (Ezekiel 25-39)

III. Prophecies telling of the restoration of Israel and the future glory of Christ's Kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48)

few key hostages.

A second "visit" (in 597 BC) proved to be necessary when King Jehoiachin rebelled. This time Nebuchadnezzar took many more captives, including Ezekiel. Perhaps it was his hope that, in so doing, he would break the rebellious spirit of these Jews.

If that was his motive, it didn't work. Those who were left in Judah under the puppet king Zedekiah remained rebellious, leaving Nebuchadnezzar with no choice but to return for a third and final time (in 586 BC); that time he completely destroyed Jerusalem, taking captive all those who remained alive.

It was in the years before the final destruction of Jerusalem that God came to Ezekiel. He was to serve the Lord as a prophet to the captive Jews there by the River Chebar.

God warned Ezekiel that his message would not be well received: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me;...for they are impudent and stubborn children" (2:3-4).

The message of judgment God had for them fills chapters 2 through 24. What brought this judgment on them was their unrelentingly rebellious unbelief. God's words plainly reveal how long-suffering He had been—but that, no matter what He had done to encourage, invite, and plead with His people to come back to worship Him and Him alone, nothing was working. They con-

tinued in their godless, heathen-idol-worshiping ways.

And now God's patience had come to an end—just as He had always warned that it would.

Exactly what was it that they had done? Ezekiel writes: "The hand of the Lord fell upon me in the sixth year...He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east...worshiping the sun" (8:1, 16). God also says: "You trusted in your own beauty;... you have taken from My gold and My silver which I had given you, and made for yourself male images;... you also set My food before them.... Moreover you have slain My children by causing them to pass through the fire" (16:15, 17, 19-21).

And the result? God says: "I will also give you into [your enemy's] hand" (16:39). As God revealed to Ezekiel, it was within years that the end came. (24:1).

At that point Ezekiel's ministry took a dramatic turn. No more were God's messages through him words of condemnation to the Jews, but rather chapter after chapter is filled with judgment on the nations around the Jews, many of whom had taken advantage of the fallen Jews—for example, words to Ammon, Moab, Philistia, and Egypt (chs. 25-32, 35-36).

As for the Jews themselves—as days

stretched into weeks, months, and years—the Lord came to them with words of promise, of life, and of a return from captivity (chs. 36-48).

God didn't want His people to feel as if He was now abandoning them in their captivity.

One of the many visions Ezekiel records addressed especially this concern. [It was a vision which was to be immortalized by other refugees many years later in the words of the Negro spiritual "Dry Bones".] In that vision (ch. 37) Ezekiel had seen a valley of dry bones which came to life when he preached the Word of God to them.

Visions such as this were meant to fill the people with the hope that their future under God's direction was bright, not dismal and dark!

But God did not intend Ezekiel's visions to be limited to a temporal, physical fulfillment in the return from captivity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple. These visions carry a fuller message intended as words of hope and deliverance and life to all of God's people of all time, including you and me!

As we see those dry bones coming back to life and see the vision of the plans for the Temple (ch. 40ff), we can take heart in our Savior God. One day He will cause our captivity under sin to come to an end, and He will deliver us to be with Him forever in that heavenly city Jerusalem—a city He Himself has set up and to which He gives the name "THE LORD IS THERE" (48:35).

—Pastor Paul Krause



475th Anniversary of THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION (1530-2005)

Godly Repentance: When Saying “Sorry!” Is Not Enough (Luke 15:1-10)

I'm sure that we have all witnessed (or even participated in?) the following scene:

Little Johnny hits Billy. The parental reaction is usually to encourage or demand that Johnny tell Billy, "I'm sorry."

This is fine for manners, but how does sorrow over sin play into forgiveness?

This was one of the elements of repentance that was under discussion in Article XII of THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION. In this article there is a distinction drawn between contrition and



WE BELIEVE & CONFESS

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

A CONFESSION OF FAITH PRESENTED IN AUGSBURG
BY CERTAIN PRINCES AND CITIES TO HIS IMPERIAL
MAJESTY CHARLES V IN THE YEAR 1530

Psalm 119:46

*"I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings, and shall
not be put to shame."*

ARTICLES OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE

XII. Repentance

It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they come to repentance, and absolution should not be denied them by the church. Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, "Bear fruit that befits repentance." (Matt. 3:8)

Rejected here are those who teach that persons who have once become godly cannot fall again.

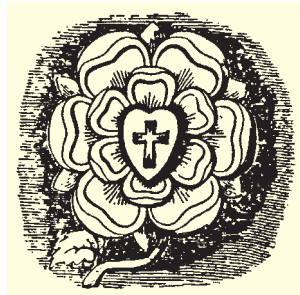
Condemned on the other hand are the Novatians, who denied absolution to such as had sinned after Baptism.

Rejected also are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.

repentance.

Contrition is merely sorrow over sin. Believer and unbeliever alike can be contrite. People of all faiths may find terror of conscience and have regret over what they have done. By all accounts Judas was very contrite as he came to the realization that he had betrayed innocent blood. Yet he saw no way out of the guilt, and his sorrow led only to his despair. There was no faith alongside of the contrition.

True repentance, on the other hand, involves not only sorrow over sin but also faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of that sin. Peter had deep sorrow when he considered his denial of Christ, and then in addition through faith in that same Christ he found forgiveness and restoration.



Being sorry has never been enough to pay for sin. Only the holy, precious blood of Christ has enough value to truly atone for sin.

If the belief stands that one is forgiven merely because of sorrow, then the door is flung wide open to all sorts of heresy concerning salvation. The act of simply hating sin might be seen as the

detergent that washes us clean from iniquity. If not, then other substitutes for Christ may follow—such as righteous acts or the word of a church leader. All of these may quell the conscience for a time, but true peace and reconciliation with God cannot be achieved without Christ.

Satisfaction Through Christ!

No matter what sin was involved, Christ has made satisfaction for it on the cross. No change in our status before God was made with our tears of sorrow, but through the blood of Christ we have been declared "not guilty."

Repentance is not a matter of the mouth or the head. It is a matter of the heart. The Lord desires such a change of heart in us. The Lord desires a heart that not only despises sin but that is also centered upon Him for salvation.

In Luke chapter 15 Jesus is speaking to two groups of people who had different ideas about repentance and its value. The tax collectors and sinners were sorrowful and drawing near to hear Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes considered themselves to be godly, but they were not repentant. There was no apparent lack of sorrow, but they also wanted nothing to do with Jesus.

The superficial nature of the Pharisee's godliness may have made them look good in the eyes of people, but it counted for nothing in God's sight. They found their consciences soothed by their own actions—even though nothing had changed in their hearts!

The change of heart found in the tax collectors and sinners is what God desires—a change that He alone can effect and a change in which He rejoices. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Lk. 15:10).

Saying "Sorry!" isn't enough to be forgiven. "Being sorry" isn't enough either. But the work of Christ? That is enough! God has accepted that and—through Christ!—has accepted the penitent sinner as well.

Rejoice that God moves us not only to be sorry, but also that He has provided an effective way to remove that sorrow by removing its cause.

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

— *Pastor Michael Schierenbeck*



Mark & Shelly Bohde in Thailand, with their children and orphans

#5: “Why is God concerned about me?”

This is a worthwhile question, and the answer is even more valuable.

Perhaps you asked your parents why they were so concerned about you when you were a baby—

"Dad, why did you take such good care of me when I was growing up?"

"Well, we did what we could for you because we loved you."

"But why did you and Mom love me?"

"Well, that's just how we felt about you; I can't explain it, but you were precious to us, and we enjoyed being able to hold you close; and we were so happy to see the first smile you smiled back to us. We were glad to have you as our child; life would not have been the same without you. You'll understand when you have your own child, and you'll love your own baby just as we have always loved you."

Now, did you ask why God is so concerned about you? Just because He loves you, as a good father loves his child. There is no logical reason for mother love or father love—it's just a great blessing; and God's love for you is the best and most wonderful love of all.

You have had God's love behind you and above you and below you and with you all of your life. Didn't you know that? If you didn't know it, you didn't learn to enjoy it—although God has

always been concerned for you, just because He loves you.

So if you understand the love a parent has for its child, you have a good start in understanding how God feels about you. If you know what it is to love your spouse, you know enough about love to have a feeling for God's love to you.

God affirms His love to us in many Bible verses: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you" (Jer. 31:3).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)..." (Rom. 5:8).

God wants you to trust Him, to learn that He will not deceive you, to learn that He is more dependable and loving than anyone else in the universe. Many have learned what our children know and love to sing—

Yes, Jesus loves me;
Yes, Jesus loves me;
Yes, Jesus loves me;
The Bible tells me so!

—Paul R. Koch



—The Bread of Life—

Daily Bible readings for home devotions

June, 2005

<u>Date</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>A leading thought on the text</u>	<u>Hymn</u>
1	Ex. 24:12-18	Prior to receiving more instructions	287,11-12
	<i>The Lord prescribed every category of service—place, time, priesthood, and sacrifices—all to point to the promised Messiah.</i>		
2	25:1-9	...who gives it willingly with his heart...	398,1
3	25:10-22	I will meet with you ... above the mercy seat	398,2
4	26:31-35	The Holiest Place...behind the veil divider	398,3
5	29:1-9	A sinful priesthood washed and anointed	491,1-3
6	31:12-18	I am the Lord who sanctifies you	398,4
	<i>God would send the Savior through Israel in spite of their sins, so He dealt with them in mercy, grace, and longsuffering.</i>		
7	32:1-14	Sin is self-destructive, every time	17,1-3
8	32:15-35	And rejecting Jehovah is at the root of sin	17,4-6
9	33:1-11	As a man speaks to his friend	347,1-3
10	33:12-23	Seek the Lord where He may be found	347,4-6
11	34:1-17	How shall God's name be sanctified?	152,1-2
12	34:29-35	A mediator between God and sinful rebels	152,3-4
13	35:20-36	Everyone has a gift—so use it for Him!	425,1
14	36:2-7	Much more than enough! Marvelous!	425,2
15	40:34-38	Jehovah made His presence visible	425,3
16	Leviticus 10:1-7	God expects more from leaders	425,4
17	Lev. 24:10-23	Whoever blasphemes the NAME	425,5-6
	<i>The book of Numbers covers the thirty-eight years of wanderings, designed to fit Israel for the land of promise. Here God's goodness and man's depravity run throughout like alternate gold and black threads.</i>		
18	Numbers 1:17-19	And they recited their ancestry...each one	446,1-3
19	3:5-13	Levites substitute for the firstborn sons	446,4-6
20	5:1-10	Cleanliness was next to godliness	400
21	6:22-27	We are blessed with God's holy Name	20
22	9:15-23	If Thy presence go not with me...	3
23	10:1-10	Sound the trumpets to advance	658
24	12:1-16	Slow to speak/ready to listen is better	322,1-2
	<i>The turning point in that generation was their faithless refusal to enter the Land of Promise, rejecting God and Moses—even as later they cried "Away with Him" in whom all the promises of God are guaranteed.</i>		
25	13:1-25	The reconnaissance troops were tested	437
26	13:26-33	Thirty-nine failed; two passed the test	434
27	14:1-10	But they refused to follow the Lord	427,1-3
28	14:10-19	Father, forgive them—You promised	377,1
29	14:20-35	I have pardoned, but your infidelity...	377,2-3
30	14:36-45	But they presumed to go against Him	377,4



MINISTERING TO THE YOUNG IN HELPING THEM STAND AGAINST THE TEMPTATION OF PRE-MARITAL COHABITATION

(first of two installments)

Some years ago while I was having a discussion about families and teenagers with a co-worker, he made the comment, "I would allow my son or daughter to move in with their girlfriend or boyfriend...as long as they really loved each other." I was surprised at his comment, for he was a very decent and caring man whom I had known for years. His comment reflects a growing acceptance and even support of young men and women "living together" out of wedlock. The temptation to "live together" is not new, nor is it reserved only for the unchurched, inactive members, or those with an unsettled family life. "Living together" outside of wedlock has gone on for decades; however, it seems to have become more commonplace and more accepted than ever, even among Christians. The Bible clearly states that men and women living together outside of marriage is sinful.* This is an issue, therefore, that has to be dealt with in our midst. Our consideration will be divided into three sections: worldly attitudes towards cohabitation; understanding temptations that young Christians face with the sin of "living together;" and counseling our young people and strengthening their resolve to resist this temptation.

First, let me say that the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) is

*(*This discussion does not impact brother/sister or daughter/father, or cousins, or aunt/nephew, etc. living together.—Editor)*

blessed with many wonderful and talented young people. They are our future. Our responsibility as parents and members of our congregations is to provide the knowledge of God's saving grace to our children and provide a foundation for them to grow in God's Word through the Holy Spirit. Our young people are, like all of us, sinful humans. We all have our weaknesses and shortcomings. We make mistakes. A young person who has fallen into this sin should be counseled in a loving and patient manner. Cohabitation outside of marriage is an overt sin, which is dangerous for those involved and can cause offense to others. It is our responsibility as individual Christians and congregations to deal with members in a God-pleasing way.

WORLDLY ATTITUDES TOWARD COHABITATION

There are nearly six million unmarried partner households in the United States—an astounding number! Many of us may be aware of friends or relatives "living together." The sheer number of people involved tends to make it "nothing out of the ordinary." It is a logical step for some. The world has the attitude: "Do whatever makes you happy." People yearn for instant gratification: "If it feels good, it can't be bad." With these attitudes, the state of immorality in our world continues to worsen. For the non-religious or inactive members, "living together" is an

accepted practice. There are no laws preventing a man and woman from moving in together. Minnesota laws regarding fornication or adultery are never enforced. In some cases, state laws and employers accommodate those in common-law relationships with regard to health care and other benefits.

When young adults finish high school, enter the labor force, or continue their education, they develop a more independent nature. Many prefer to make decisions on their own. For young adults, developing a close relationship with someone or falling in love can "turn their world upside down." The desire to be with that person can be all-encompassing. The thought of moving in with a girlfriend or boyfriend can be tempting, exciting, and tantalizing. Companionship, sexual gratification, convenience, and financial savings are many times too much to resist. Marriage seems to be too big of a commitment right now, but these couples believe themselves to be committed to each other. Why not live together and see if they are truly right for each other? There are many in the world, like my co-worker, who feel "as long as they really love each other"—go for it!

Young adults today, no longer under the wing of their parents' guidance, can make this decision seemingly with little resistance or second-guessing. Their decision to "live together" is often easily accepted by others. While all people are born with the knowledge of the natural law of God and may even recognize that something is not quite right about the situation, any doubts about "living together" are soon pushed aside in view of the perceived benefits. There is no need for remorse as long as they are living a decent life in other areas by the world's standards.

. . . Now that we have discussed the attitude the world has towards cohabitation outside of marriage, let us consider our CLC young adults and the temptations they face. Christians are not exempt from these sins. We continually fall short of the glory of God and sin daily and much.

In 2001 in Minnesota, there were 33,000 marriages and 16,000 divorces. Would "living together" before getting married have helped those couples who got divorced verify their compatibility? No, statistics prove that is not the case, for people who "live together" before they are married have a higher divorce rate than those who do not! Divorces are the result of human weakness and sinfulness. A marriage that is not "Christ centered" is difficult to hold together. Without Christ, couples are often ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that occur in every marriage. "Living together" outside of marriage is a "bad start" for any couple, for it sends a clear signal that faith in God and obedience to His commands are not a high priority. Carrying that same attitude into marriage is dangerous.

UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATIONS THAT YOUNG CHRISTIANS FACE WITH THE SIN OF "LIVING TOGETHER"

Now that we have discussed the attitude the world has towards cohabitation outside of marriage, let us consider our CLC young adults and the temptations they face. Christians are not exempt from these sins. We continually fall short of the glory of God and sin daily and much.

Many Christian young adults, who choose to "live together," have had the benefit of Christian education through years of Sunday School, confirmation instruction, and perhaps even attendance in Christian day schools and high schools. Many come from strong Christian families. With that background, how can young Christians consider "living together" before they are married? It is simple—they have faults and weaknesses just like the rest of us and face the same temptations others in our world face. What the Bible says is true: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Our hope is that a faith grounded in God's Word will help our Christian young people deal with these struggles and temptations. We must be mindful that the devil is good at what he does, and because of our flesh the actions of our youth can be clouded by poor judgment. Jesus tells us, His disciples, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 6:41).

The temptation for a Christian to move in with one's girlfriend or boyfriend is sometimes a result of current circumstances. Consider, for instance, a couple that has been dating for a long period of time, is committed to each other, and enjoys each other's company. Suppose the young man's roommate moves out, and he needs to take on a new roommate or lose his apartment. The devil could use this situation to appeal to the young man's human reason and tempt him into thinking that "living together" with his girlfriend would be the best solution. Unfortunately, many young adults find out later that the rewards of these "best" solutions are short-lived. It is, in the words of an article in the *Christian*

Herald some years ago, "a relatively small measure of delight mixed with a large dose of guilt. You'll be short of contentment and long on anxiety. Living together outside of marriage sets in motion certain inevitable consequences, all of which are bad in the long run."

One couple who tried the "living together experience" commented that what suffered most was trust. They found themselves making silent but deadly statements: "I really don't trust our relationship enough to go public with a commitment.... I love you and need you now, but I want an easy way out in case things change."

The most important consequence of living in a sinful situation is the weakening of one's trust and faith in God. Pastor L.D. Redlin says regarding sin and faith in "Living Together Out of Wedlock": "Sin threatens faith! When sin is cast out of our lives by repentance and faith in God's forgiving love in Christ Jesus we remain strong and alive spiritually. But if it is permitted to hang around in one's life, it gets stronger and stronger, while faith grows weaker and weaker. And, finally, faith in the Lord God of heaven and earth may disintegrate and die. That is why the apostle warns, 'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.' People may provide an opportunity for their sinful flesh to operate as it wills. A few examples might be: 1) Insisting upon associating with worldly-minded people. 2) Excusing sinful ways in ourselves or in others as of little or no importance. 3) Using reason in approaching the matter of sin rather than God's Word and faith."

(To be concluded)

(A paper presented to the Minnesota Delegate Conference in September 2003 by Mr. David Aymond of Berea Lutheran Church, Inver Grove Heights, and condensed by Pastor Paul D. Nolting for inclusion in the 'Home Messenger' of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato.)

Announcements

CLC General Pastoral Conference
June 14-16, 2005
Immanuel Lutheran College
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Agenda:

1. New Testament Exegesis, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12—Pastor Philip Matzke
2. Old Testament Exegesis, continuation of Joel 2ff—Pastor Roland H. Gurgel
3. Promoting the Sanctity of the Divine Call in Our Midst—Pastor David Schaller
4. Effective Preaching in an Era of Short Attention Spans—Pastor David Povolny
5. Equipping the Saints for the Work of the Ministry (Ephesians 4:12, involving a wider range of members in the congregation)—Pastor Delwyn Maas
6. Review of the Canonicity of Scripture (What are the facts that determine our assurance of canonicity)?—Pastor Dennis Rieken
7. Encouragement to Evangelism (cf. Luke 14:15-24)—Pastor Todd Ohlmann
8. Flee Sexual Immorality: Godly Counsel for the Shepherd and His Flock (sexual abuse, perversion, addiction, etc.)—Pastor Mark Gullerud

West Central Delegate Conference
May 31-June 1, 2005
Redeemer Lutheran Church
Bowdle, South Dakota

Essays:

- * Teaching and encouraging Biblical stewardship in connection with maintaining church property and parsonage—Mr. Craig Ohlmann
- * A serial study of one of our Lutheran Confessions—Pastor Frank Gantt
- * A study of 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 (Should we be using v. 10 as a proof passage for fellowship?)—Pastor James Sandeen
- * A study and comparison of Psalm 2:7, John 1:14, Matthew 1:35 (Where does "begotten from eternity" come from?)—Pastor Roland Gurgel

* What specific support and encouragement from God's Word can be given for Pastors' wives in their role?—Pastor Peter Reim

* The blessing of public worship in the life of a believer—Mr. Clayton Hillstrom

* Study of gratitude: receiving our daily bread with thanksgiving—Mr. Andrew Mayhew

Communion Service speaker: Pastor Paul Fleischer

—Pastor Mark Gurath, Secretary

Appointments

In accord with the CLC Constitution, I have appointed Pastor Daniel Fleischer to fill the unexpired term of Pastor Thomas Schuetze as Visitor for the South-Eastern Conference.

In accord with the CLC Constitution, I have appointed Pastor Michael Roehl to fill the unexpired term of Professor John Ude as pastor-member of the Board of Trustees.

—Pastor John Schierenbeck, President



Spring 2005 Tour Choir, Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin