

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35



*But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings
like eagles, They shall run and
not be weary, They shall walk
and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*



Pastor Douglas Priestap is flanked by Pastor Em. Daniel Fleischer of the synod's Board of Doctrine and CLC President Pastor Michael Eichstadt

WELCOME!

Pastor Priestap has been placed on the CLC Clergy roster after fulfilling colloquy requirements in connection with the synod's General Pastoral Conference at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in June, 2013.

The new CLC pastor has served his entire pastoral ministry north of the border. He is currently serving Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Born July 27, 1952, he has B.A. and Master of Divinity degrees. "Doug" (as he prefers) and wife Doris have three daughters and one granddaughter, with another grandchild expected in September, 2013.

Together with its pastor, Resurrection Lutheran belongs to the synod's Pacific Coast District. "I much appreciate the Scriptural, confessional stance of the CLC," comments the most recent addition to the CLC ministerium.

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The One Thing Needful

Pastor Theodore Barthels · Austin, Minnesota

(Pastor Barthels is a member of the Board of Regents of the synod's Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.—Editor)

We are all familiar with St. Luke's account of Jesus' visit to the home of sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). We recall that while Martha used her God-given gifts in the kitchen, Mary sat next to Jesus, listening to His words. With so much to do, Martha saw this as her service to the Lord, while Mary sat on the sidelines.

Often we too find our lives very busy as we use our God-given gifts and abilities in the specific calling in which the Lord has placed us. It makes for a busy life to provide a safe and secure home—paying the bills, putting food on the table, supporting children in their studies and activities, or caring for the elderly.

Such activities are God-pleasing, and with them we are busy serving the Lord. We might say, however, that this is “Martha busy,” which can result in our neglecting the one thing needful. Remember Jesus' words to Martha, “...*You are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*”

How important was this encouragement from the Lord for Martha! She also secured that one needed thing from Jesus, and it was there when she needed it—for when her brother Lazarus took sick, she knew to turn to the Lord. And when Lazarus died, she was confident that he would rise again on the last day. “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*” (John 11:24).

But let us not forget what Mary learned at Jesus' feet. She had come to Jesus just shortly before His Passion and anointed His feet with that precious ointment—an anointing made for His death. By faith she comprehended what so many others close to Jesus denied—namely, that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer and die, be buried, and the third day rise again. That saving truth would never be taken away from her.

Christian Education is the storing up in our hearts of this one thing needful, and that education is so vitally important in our lives and the lives of those we love. For our children's welfare we will bring them to worship services and Sunday School, enroll them in our congregation's

Christian day school (whenever possible) and, if at all feasible, send them for extended Christian education for high school at Immanuel Lutheran in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, or Mankato, Minnesota, and then also Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire.

In our CLC Christian schools a foundation of truth is laid that shall not be taken away from our children!

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Our loved ones need to be armed against the deceitful philosophies of this world. However, the Lord does **not** endorse doing this in schools of other church bodies. He is against those who mix error with the truth. He is against those who with their fine words deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:17).

This is true for our young people in elementary and high schools, as well as for those pursuing higher education. Young people seeking a Christ-centered college education will be especially vulnerable to the flawed instruction in religious schools which are “almost” orthodox [truth-teaching] and/or “almost” faithful to God’s Word.

Dear readers, let us lay a solid foundation with a Christian perspective for life in this world by utilizing our Immanuel Lutheran College. There should be no doubt in our minds or hearts that the Lord endorses and will bless such an education.

Again, when mature adults want further instruction in the Word, may God grant that they seek God’s wisdom from their pastors in Bible classes or in other venues within our Christian fellowship (beware of the attraction of easily accessed radio or web sites from heterodox [false teaching] sources!).

All of us face the same trials and tribulations, temptations, and evils in this world. The Lord knows what we face, and He alone provides the needed blessing which protects the faith of His people. Such blessing is still found exactly where Mary found it—at the feet of Jesus.

May we never be too busy—even if it is “Martha busy”—to take time to sit at the feet of our Lord and receive from Him the one thing that is needful. Amen!

Christian Education's Ultimate Goal

Pastor Andrew Schaller • Watertown, South Dakota

“ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ” (Hebrews 10:23)

In general, it is not a good practice to assume that something is true or acceptable! But when the writer to the Hebrews urges us to “*hold fast the confession of our hope,*” it is assumed that we know what is meant by ‘the confession of our hope.’ It is assumed because the ‘confession of our hope’ has been the very subject matter the Holy Spirit has been communicating for the nine chapters leading up to these words.

The purpose of Christian Education is to make known and teach into the heart that which is the hope of our confession. Whether it be worship services or Bible Classes, Sunday schools, Confirmation classes, or Christian Day School, in each case the goal of Christian Education is to build up and build upon the faith granted by our gracious God at the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

The purpose of Christian Education is stated by the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians: “*...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*” (3:17-19).

Those verses show why Christian Education is so vital. If we fail in mathematics or struggle with history, we will hardly suffer eternal consequences. On the other hand, if we do not know Christ by faith, do not cling to Him and place our hopes for the future in Him and what He has done for us, then there are eternal consequences.

Christian Education’s goal is to help the person better to know Christ and to hold fast to Him and His promises. Notice why the Apostle urges us to hold fast the confession of our hope: “*...for He who promised is faithful.*”

So often ‘guarantees’ in this world aren’t worth the paper they are printed on. But God who promises us forgiveness of sins and eternal

life in Christ always follows through on what He says. Nothing strengthens our hope more than realizing the unchanging fact of God's faithfulness. Our hope of future glory—eternal life—does not depend upon us and our doing but upon the promises of God and His faithfulness.

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

That closing reminder is one more reason why Christian Education is such an urgent matter. We don't know the day and hour of Christ's Return in glory. It could be at any time, since the signs that Christ said would occur before His glorious reappearing have already occurred.

If Christ returns tomorrow, it won't matter if we've mastered algebra. It won't matter if we've been a star high school athlete. It won't matter if we graduated from school with honors. We can learn and know many things, great and small, but most important of all is knowing Christ by faith.

It is important to use to God's glory the gifts He has given us...but when the Day of Christ's coming in glory arrives...all that matters is that we know Christ by faith, and that He knows us.

This is the ultimate goal of all true Christian Education.



GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE

Of Ravens, Lilies, and God's Providence

Pastor David Fuerstenau · Ketchikan, Alaska

It is not unusual for our Tulip and me to enjoy the backyard together. I sip my morning cuppa while gazing at the flowers; our pet cat watches the birds. Even when it's raining, an assortment of winged neighbors are prone to gather there—some for insects and worms, pigeons for seeds, and an occasional raven or seagull for an offered snack.

Neither cat nor bird knows of God's sustaining power and His determination to provide for them.

It strikes me as noteworthy indeed that God once provided for Elijah's

sustenance by the brook Cherith with ravens, for I've never witnessed any raven offering to share with anyone—even fellow ravens—a McDonald's french fry or a kernel of popcorn. Yet God enlisted ravens to bring bread and meat to His prophet twice a day to enable him to survive the severe drought (1 Kings 17:1-7). And when the brook went dry, God had the widow of Zarephath waiting in reserve with a small portion of oil and flour that never ran out (vv. 8-16).

Usually God provides through normal and natural means. His sun supplies light and warmth. His laws of nature provide for seedtime and harvest, for rain and bountiful seas. Normally we humans are sustained by using and working with the resources God has given us.

But if necessary God can enlist His lesser creatures—against their every instinct—to do and provide what He wills. Oh, praise the Lord for His providential care! God's people should be ashamed if they are led to believe that God will let us run out of energy, food, and other essentials of life. God has assured us of His providence, and He has never failed. As the psalmist said: *“O Lord, You are preserving man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness”* (36:6). *“Trust in the Lord and do good...I have been young and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor His seed begging bread”* (37:3,25).

Another aspect of God's providential care is His guidance and control over human history and individual destinies. As He has controlled the past and present, so He will control the future—for the specific welfare of His beloved Church of believers on Earth.

Once again the experiences of Elijah instruct and comfort us (1 Kings 17 and following). God decided when best to send severe drought—to bring about repentance. God provided fire from heaven for Elijah's altar on Mt. Carmel—to bring shame to hundreds of idolaters and to promote reformation in Israel. God told Elijah whom to anoint as kings in Syria and Israel; God then decided the destinies of individuals through the swords of Hazael and Jehu.

Nothing happened apart from God's will, control, and permission!

Do we sometimes think that the unchangeable God has changed His ways in modern days?

And when Elijah allowed himself to sink into a grand funk, thinking himself to be the only believer alive in Israel, God showed Himself, not in the spectaculars of nature, but in the 'still, small voice.' With that whispering voice of grace and mercy God had protected and preserved

for Himself yet 7000 souls in Israel who had not bent the knee in worship of the idol god Baal.

God has recently shown His nature-power in the Midwest's tornadoes and Colorado fires. The next earthquake is near, and the hurricane season is almost upon us. And while such events will play their part in shaping human destinies on Earth, it is still the voice of God in His Word that brings sinners to repentance, comforts them with the mercy and grace of His forgiveness in Christ Jesus, and preserves His elect amid never-ending worldly temptation and the poisonous traps of false prophets.

Always God provides for and protects His people.

Always He controls events of human history, which is really His Story in Christ Jesus.

Always His Word endures while worldly philosophies prove themselves vain and fleeting.

Always His elect in Christ are being gathered and enlightened.

Always and continually God is working all things together for good to those who love Him, who are the called according to His purpose (see Romans 8:28).

What a thought: to be found like lost sheep, to be fed by ravens, protected by she-bears, and finally carried aloft to our God on the wings of an eagle. How amazing and wonderful are God's sustaining power and saving grace!



EDITORIAL

Of Ravens, Crows, and Pastoral Concern

Pastor Paul Fleischer, Cheyenne, Wyoming

In the process of laying out the August issue of the *Lutheran Spokesman*, including the article which mentions the selfish behavior of ravens, we came upon a quote in which the Reformer Dr. Martin Luther uses the ravens' cousins, the crows, to make a spiritual point.

Recall the times of Luther (b.1483-d.1546). In preparation for the Lutheran Reformation, Luther was moved to post his 95 Theses on the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, for debate within the Roman

Church (October 31, 1517) and then to make his staunch stand before Emperor and papal delegates at the Diet of Worms (1521) *out of pastoral concern*.

You see, Luther felt compassion for the sheep of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who were being deprived of the gospel of full and complete forgiveness of sins through the Savior—and, in effect, being left to feed their hungry souls on their own supposed good works and/or the legends and merits of the saints.

The quote below—from *What Luther Says*, (introduction by E. Plass), Vol. I, par. 834, p. 283—shows that Luther was not inclined to mince words wherever and whenever he uncovered and discovered the idea that the church (of all things!) was responsible for “playing crow”! The solution? As the Reformer shows, Christ Himself miraculously sees to the feeding of His own!

Plass’ Introduction: “...*He who provides for the fowl of the air will not neglect His children. So Luther...once remarked when the habits of crows were being discussed at his table (from notations of August 18-December 26, 1531).*”

(Dr. Luther) “*Crows are said to be very heartless in that they desert their young after they have hatched them and fly away. Thereafter God miraculously feeds them (Ps. 147:9). By these crows the false and faithless teachers and pastors of the church are pictured. For the sake of the belly or danger, they desert their young ones, that is, the Christians entrusted to their care. Thereafter Christ Himself miraculously feeds them in the midst of the wolves. So it happened under the papacy, where, beyond all the comprehension of human reason, God miraculously preserved His own so that they were not seduced by human traditions.*”

Compare the article in this issue titled “Of Ravens, Lilies, and God’s Providence” by Pastor Fuerstenau. He shows that as lessons could be learned from “birds of the air” when Jesus walked on the Earth (see Matthew 6:26f), and in Luther’s day, so it remains true today.

*Consider how the birds above
Feed day by day with care—free ease—
Does God not keep them in His love?
Are we not worth much more than these?*

*Seek first God’s Kingdom and His grace
His holy Name in all you do:
Christ first and last in ev’ry place;
All else will then be given you.
(WS 2000, #789:1&5)*



MEDITATIONS ON JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT:
MATTHEW CHAPTERS FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

LOOK TO THE SOURCE

Pastor John Klatt • Rapid City, South Dakota

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (MATTHEW 6:25-34)

We enjoy bird-watching as we eat our breakfast, for birds are a daily reminder of what Jesus tells us in this section from the Sermon on the Mount. Those little birds don't do any planting, harvesting, or storing. They are "birds of the air," not domestic fowl tended by a farmer, and yet they manage to find something to eat. They must, for there they are, day after day.

How do those birds manage? Jesus tells us: "*Your heavenly Father feeds them.*" God is the source of their food.

To assure us about our daily needs, Jesus directs us also to the lilies of the field. These aren't the flowers that people grow in their gardens; they are wild flowers that come up and bloom without anyone planting or tending them. They don't bloom for very long; after a few days, their beauty fades. Yet while they bloom, their glory can surpass that of a king dressed in his finest royal robes.

Where do the lilies of the field get such beautiful clothing? They don't spin thread or spend hours sewing. Jesus tells us: "*...God so clothes the grass of the field.*"

God is also the source of our food and clothing. If He provides for the birds of the air and grass of the field, it makes sense that He would provide for us. The birds are God's creatures, though they have no knowledge of Him. But we are His children, "*of more value than they.*"

It is when we lose sight of God as the source of food and clothing that we begin to worry about such things. We imagine that we ourselves are the source of our food and clothing, and then we start to worry that we won't always be able to provide for ourselves. We worry that we might be injured or get sick. We worry that we will grow old and infirm and won't be able to continue working. If we think of our employer as the source, we start to worry because we might be laid off. If we think of ourselves as dependent on a monthly pension, we may worry about how we will survive if it fails.

God is the only provider that never fails.

Our God is even more than a provider of things to feed and clothe us. He is the source of our very life and the creator of our body. Our life is more than food. God has greater plans for us than to feed us for a few years until we die. He has given us eternal life through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Our body is more than clothing. He has greater plans for us than to give us clothing to cover us here (in our sinful condition). He has redeemed our bodies and made them the temples of the Holy Spirit. He promises to raise our bodies on the Last Day and make them new like the glorious resurrection body of Jesus.

So Jesus tells us not to act like the unbelieving. We shouldn't be reacting to our needs by asking questions as if we had no God upon whom to depend. We have a heavenly Father who knows our needs and is able to supply them.

Instead of worrying about the things we need for this life, Jesus invites us to look to the Source. He offers us something higher than mere food and clothing: "*the kingdom of God and His righteousness*". To have these blessings is to be freed from the domination of sin and the devil and to live forever as God's children cleansed from all sin. We have God's kingdom and righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. We seek these things in the Means of Grace, God's Word and the Sacraments.

So let us seek God's kingdom and righteousness, making that our highest priority. Living one day at a time and trusting in God, He will see to it that we have just what we need.



CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS DIVISIVE?

(First of two)

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

In Ireland in June of 2013 the American president said, “If towns remain divided—if Catholics have their schools and buildings and Protestants have theirs, if we can’t see ourselves in one another and fear or resentment are allowed to harden—that too encourages division and discourages cooperation” (emphasis added).

Frequently politicians make veiled comments overseas which are intended to be heard also in their home country. Whatever the purpose of the visit to Ireland, and of this particular statement, it is a loaded statement not lost on people whose religion is important to them.

American Catholics for Religious Freedom responded, “Secular progressives like President Obama ignore the truth that faith-based education is a component of the Religious Freedom guaranteed by the Constitution.” As Lutherans who place emphasis on the spiritual education of our children and therefore promote and establish Christian schools, we cannot ignore any suggestion by someone in authority that Christian schools contribute to divisiveness. We share the concern of others who value their own parochial educational system.

This commonality of concern has nothing to do with supporting or promoting each other’s religion. It has to do with the right of each citizen under the law, and indeed of every religion, to worship and teach as they choose. Although we cannot respect the substance of any teaching that is contrary to Scripture, we grant that all citizens have the constitutional right to practice their own brand of religion. To deny that right to anyone is to deny the right under the law to all to practice their religion. To deny that right to anyone denies our right to practice our faith as well as to educate our children in our own schools.

Not too many decades ago, Catholics and Protestants in Ireland resorted to violence to promote their religious/political agendas. The defense of and promotion of religion by violence and at the point of

a gun finds no support in Scripture.

Scripture teaches us that our weapons are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4).

The suggestion that the mere existence of Catholic and Protestant parochial schools causes division is not true. In purely secular matters, people of different religious persuasions can work and have worked together for the country's common good. The notion that schools of different religious persuasions are divisive suggests one of two things. One is that such schools should be eradicated, and all the children should be enrolled in schools where the government dictates how children should eat, socialize, think, and believe. As we are entitled to our opinion, we suggest that such is the intent of the comment made in Ireland.

The second implication is that all churches, regardless of what they teach, should get together for the greater good of what the world sees as the mission of the church. This idea promoted by many Protestants, including apostate Lutherans, is contrary to the Scriptures which teach that we are to be of the same mind and same judgment in matters of faith (1 Corinthians 1:10), and that if we are not of such a unified mind and judgment, God binds us to remain separate and apart in the exercise of our religion (Romans 16:17-18).

It has been suggested that the Ireland statement reveals an anti-Christian bias. Given the times in which we live of which Scripture speaks (2 Timothy 3), and given the evidence of *official* approval of homosexuality, abortion, and the general deterioration of morals in our society, the anti-Christian charge bears consideration.

It is interesting that with the world-wide ascendancy of Islam there is fear of attacking the Muslim faith while anything "Christian" (whether in teaching or in life) appears to be fair game.

This commonality of concern has nothing to do with supporting or promoting each other's religion. It has to do with the right of each citizen under the law, and indeed of every religion, to worship and teach as they choose.

Missionary David Koenig

The Willing Inquirer Attracted by Something

(Third of a Series)

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” But after that no one dared question Him.

(MARK 12:28-34)

Saint Mark records how after Jesus had answered the Pharisees and Herodians who were sent to entrap Him, the Savior then answered some Sadducees. The scribe who came upon Jesus’ refutation of the Sadducees was pleased at Jesus’ answers. Undoubtedly the scribe also disagreed with the Sadducees’ teachings and attitude, for he saw in Jesus a kindred spirit—not just the wisdom of the Lord’s answers but the content. He then put a question to Jesus. After the Lord answered the scribe’s question, the scribe acknowledged their agreement, and that there was common ground between them.

In our witnessing it is important to have a base upon which to build both our witness and our relationship with the prospect so that he is willing to listen. This scribe knew the law but as yet he did not know the gospel.

SERIES Backdrop

With examples from Holy Scripture we are trying to learn ways and attitudes which will better enable us to witness to our Lord. These examples, drawn from the four Gospels and from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, are by no means exhaustive.

As with the basketball strategy of one-on-one, we are looking at examples of one Christian witnessing to another individual. We are not considering what was said to individuals already in the faith, though that is also applicable. We are not considering what was said to groups, though that also is applicable as a witnessing technique. We will be considering various situations where it was one-on-one, and the one being witnessed to was living in unbelief...

The ultimate goal in all witnessing is to be like John the baptizer and point to Christ as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. While we want to try earnestly to develop our skills in this area, we don't want to forget John's motto, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30).

No matter what spiritual gifts we have and how we develop them, we are not looking for glory for ourselves. We are looking to have another soul join us in glorifying our Savior-God.

In this case, the scribe was attracted to Jesus by our Lord's wise answers. Yet other things may also attract an inquirer.

For instance, are our good deeds visible (or in other words are we doing them)? Is our moral character such that our life is a principled one? Do we show with our life that we are not willing to compromise the high standard of God's Word? If this is the case, this may attract an inquirer. One thing is certain, and that is that wickedness not only does not draw inquirers but even repels them. Why should anyone want to inquire after evil? After all, we all know how to do that already. Why should anyone want to inquire after compromising a principle? That too is the ever present, pragmatic way of the world around us.

There is no question but that we see in this text the importance of having some things in common—having common ground on which to build the witness and relationship. We should even try to establish some things in common. For example, I noticed a fine rose garden as I approached a door during a neighborhood canvass. I let the person know that we were both admirers of fine roses. That put my visit in a favorable, neighborly light, which would advantage me if I would ever approach his door again. While it seems like a little thing, it can go a long way in establishing a relationship, avoiding the 'icy' attitude of stranger to stranger.

In our selfish, self-centered day not many people have a real interest in others. As Christians we should be genuinely interested in people for whom Christ died. Isn't that part of true Christian love?

It is also noteworthy that this encounter ends on a positive note, though not with conversion. Jesus said, *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."* The scribe had understanding up to a point. With this encounter you can imagine a later meeting of our Lord with the scribe and a good discussion ensuing.

On our part, we should want to leave our witnessing encounter on a positive note. This scribe did not show any such reaction, so that our Lord spoke as He did. However, if the scribe had exhibited impenitence, it would have been false to imply that all was fine with him just as he was.

Another thing to note is that in the encounter there is nothing wrong with complimenting a prospect if he is correct on something. Why not give credit where credit is due? We will just guard against any fawning. An honest statement or appraisal as given by our Lord here is in order.

So then, in order for an encounter like this to take place, seek to speak, do, and live each day according to God's will. And pray that others may see your good works and speak to you, with the result that they may join you in glorifying the Lord for His grace and mercy.



High school graduates of Mankato ILHS—Back: Colleen Matzke, Stacy Lentz, Greer Dauer, Kylia Irwin; Front: Jessica Schreyer, Joel Heinze, Shaun Nason, Courtney Anderson

ILHS-Mankato Graduation 2013

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt • Reporter

There are milestones, course-changing events, and other momentous days that define our personal histories. These pivotal points may be filled with great joy or great sorrow, significant success or monumental failure, or anything in between. In all cases, these events are how we mark time and blessing.

Viewing these events with Scripture's light shining upon them, the child of God will be able to see the merciful hand of God—if not with physical eyes, then with the eyes of faith.

Very often the first response of a child of God in such times is one of thanksgiving to God. So it was that, when Immanuel Lutheran High School-Mankato [Minnesota] graduated eight seniors in a worship service on June 9th, thanksgiving, praise, and honor resounded to the LORD our God.

The ILHS choir began the day by giving praise to our Savior who is “*above all*” principality and power and might and dominion (cf. Ephesians 1:21). The choir reminded the assembly of “How Deep the Father's Love for Us” as He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins; the prayer was then offered that “God be in My Head” and infiltrate every part of our being with His Word and Spirit.

The graduating class conveyed rich scriptural truth through its class verse. As Moses' successor, Joshua had a monumental task in front of him—a large nation to lead in the conquest of Canaan. To Joshua God promised: “*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go*” (Joshua 1:9).

The worshipping assembly joined the graduates in singing their class hymn. In the poet's words they confessed the awe of coming to know that the Lord of heaven and earth would save sinners such as us. The chorus rang out: “Not because of who I am, but because of what You've done. Not because of what I've done, but because of who You are.”

Mr. Kyle Ochsner, ILHS math and science teacher, addressed the class on the basis of 1 Corinthians 2:1-9. He asked the graduates: “What will you remember from your time at Immanuel?” As we get farther and farther removed from an event—such as high school—less is remembered (even things we thought we'd never forget). The “*excellence of speech*” and “*persuasive words of human wisdom*” are quickly laid aside, but the “*wisdom of God*,” “*Jesus Christ crucified*” and “*preaching [teaching] in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power*” has lasting power and value.

The assembly joined to sing, “Wisdom’s highest, noblest treasure, Jesus is revealed in You. Let me find in You my pleasure...If I learn from Jesus this knowledge divine, the blessing of heavenly wisdom is mine” (cf. TLH #366:5).

Speaking for the graduating class, Jessica Schreyer reflected on the blessings her class had received throughout thirteen years of christian education. In expressing thanks to the Lord, the congregation, its teachers, and parents, Jessica provided answer to the question of what the graduates would remember from their time at Immanuel.

The Graduation Day 2013 milestone will one day be eclipsed by future milestones and notable days in each graduate’s life. However, all can go forward with hearts overflowing in thanksgiving to God, while also being confident and courageous in God’s promises.

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of Heaven, Feed me till I want no more. Amen. (TLH #54:1)*



NEW SERIES

GOD’S OBSCURE SAINTS

(First in a Series)

Prof. Emeritus Paul R. Koch

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(HEBREWS 12:1-2)

Dear fellow saints in Christ Jesus, our Savior:

God has been served by a multitude of obscure saints about whom we know little. One Bible writer noted that “*time would fail me to tell*” about them (Hebrews 11:32); another felt there wasn’t enough paper to do the job properly (John 21:25). Yet we intend to take the time (and use the paper) to research the New Testament for a closer familiarity with God’s obscure saints, who look a lot like folks in the next pew.

We are struck by the number of God's obscure saints whose names are recorded; in the closing verses of the Romans Epistle, for example, no less than thirty-two such saints are greeted by name; ten more at the close of the Colossians letter.

Those folks were tried and true supporters of the gospel ministry. Rank upon rank of good and faithful helpers kept close to the apostles especially during times of trial as they nourished one another with warm spiritual companionship. Those obscure saints meant a lot to Paul; he loved each and every one.

Many such names are tucked in here-and-there along the way as we travel through the New Testament, and as we get better acquainted with them, we acquire a better appreciation of the obscure saints in our own congregations and our wider fellowship.

We might expect to find obscure saints among Jesus' friends and relatives, folks who learned the Bible forwards and backwards and were regular at church and Temple. Our heavenly Father applied His love to Jesus' half-brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas, besides His unnamed sisters (Matthew 13:55)—all younger than He, of course.

Were these among God's obscure saints in Nazareth? Sad to say, they were not—at least not during the years Jesus lived at home with them, for the sacred record (John 7:5) tells us the sad fact that they did not believe in Him as their promised Messiah.

It happens that way in other Christian families—and how difficult life must be in such a household! How it must have pained Mary to see her own children react against her son Jesus with disbelief, and we sense the deep sorrow behind His complaint, "*A prophet is not without honor except...in his own house.*" And because His family members did not honor Him, "*He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief*" (Matthew 13:57-58).

If that were the end of the story, it would be a tragedy.

We must fast-forward to the days after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to see how wonderful are the ways of God with mankind! Apparently the Holy Spirit brought testimonies to Jesus' siblings, and together with Mary's good example and her simple faith had accomplished the miracle, for the sacred record tells us that after the Ascension, when the disciples were back home in Jerusalem in the company of those who "*continued with one accord in prayer and supplication,*" we find not only Mary, the mother of Jesus, but also His brothers (Acts 1:14).

Yes, His four brothers were converted! Converted from disbelief to conviction that Jesus was indeed more than a brother—He was their Messiah and Savior! That loving testimony, those prayers and encouragements had worked, and Jesus had His little family together again! How grand and wonderful!

And that's not yet the end of it. One brother, James, went on from obscurity to the chairmanship of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem, about the highest status short of being one of the chosen twelve apostles. This same James is probably the author of the New Testament epistle bearing his name—so he didn't stay obscure.

We sense that James spoke from personal experience when he affirmed that God deals in love with sinners by sending Christian friends to bring testimony. Perhaps some of his own biography is latent in the words, "*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*" (James 4:19-20).

It worked that way for James, John, Joses, and Judas—none of whom started out as believers, but all of whom became fellow-saints, members of the household of faith and joint heirs of salvation, for their big Brother and friends did not give up on them.

The motive behind all that is outlined in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians: love is patient; love suffers long and is kind; love never quits (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) in doing what can be done to bring the wandering soul back to the Good Shepherd, to turn the sinner from the error of his ways and thus save a soul from eternal death.

By most standards, you and I fall into the category of being God's obscure saints in this part of the world, and let us never forget that God uses obscure saints such as you and me to save souls from hellfire by leading them to find Jesus as their Savior.

May God warm our hearts so as to spark us into being the kind of witnesses that He will use to bless our family, our congregation, and our neighborhood! Glory be to Jesus! Amen!



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: This begins a new series of articles which were originally delivered as chapel meditations by Prof. Paul R. Koch while he served on the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran High School/College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Now retired, Prof. Koch continues to serve his Lord as Assistant Editor of the *Lutheran Spokesman*. God bless us all as we ponder the rich contents of these Bible-based messages!

PART FOUR OF A SERIES

“This is most certainly true!”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

God is my Protector

CDS Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Absolutes—weren't we taught to never use absolutes?

Generally speaking, the use of absolutes make for sticky statements. A child may complain to its parent, “We never get to eat ice cream!” ‘Never’—really!? A church member may disagree with another, “But we always do it this way!” ‘Always’—really!? When a person uses an absolute, he better be sure the facts back up his claim under every and all circumstances.

In our continuing study of the First Article from the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther states emphatically that our Heavenly Father protects us from all danger and from every evil—‘all’ and ‘every’!? Is it true in every situation that ‘This is most certainly true!’?

Sometimes it appears we have been beset by evil and not ‘always’ been protected from danger. Cancer rates are not lower among Christians, and God's children suffer in car accidents. Sad to say, divorce, teen pregnancy, and chemical dependency are often found among Christians too.

The Five Installments:

- 1) God is my Father Almighty;
- 2) God is Maker of Heaven and Earth;
- 3) God is my Preserver and Provider;
- 4) God is my Protector;**
- 5) God does all this for me by His grace.

Where then is the protecting hand of God versus the 'evil' in our lives?

It is difficult to imagine a world such as Adam and Eve enjoyed in the beginning. Satan's lie to Eve—“...you will be like God knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5)—proved to be more than they had bargained for. God knew evil as the polar opposite of Himself. He knew evil as Satan's world, to be rejected, spurned, shunned, and done away with.

Ever since our first parents' steps into rebellion, mankind has known evil. But human knowledge of evil is very different from God's, for humans wallow and revel in evil. Is it then any wonder that unconverted sinners have a complete disconnect from God's concept of evil (as well as His concept of good)?

God knows our lives as a tale already told. God knows what our days will amount to even before they come to pass (Psalm 139:16). God desires that each of us be with Him in eternity (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore, the good and gracious Lord is willing and able to use any means necessary to see that we reach our heavenly goal. Backing up that statement is the fact that God sent His only Son Jesus into this world as our Savior. Jesus paid in full our sin-debt and has given us His robe of righteousness to cover our unworthiness. Heaven is now ours! “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life*” [already now] (John 6:47).

From that standpoint things look pretty good for us. We have been redeemed and sanctified by our holy God. You would think people could pick us out of the crowd—our lives being full of nothing but goodness and blessing, all evil and trouble kept at bay. Yet it just isn't so, is it? How then do we justify our claim about God's complete protection of His own?

We could think of it like this: our Savior-God and our arch-enemy

It is difficult to imagine a world such as Adam and Eve enjoyed in the beginning.

Satan's lie to Eve...

...proved to be more than they had bargained for.

God knew evil as the polar opposite of Himself.

He knew evil as Satan's world, to be rejected, spurned, shunned, and done away with.

THE FIRST ARTICLE

(About Creation)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me and all creatures. He has given me my body and life, eyes, ears, and all my bodily members, my mind, and all my senses and still keeps them for me. God also preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all my property and all I need to support this body and life. He protects me from all danger. He guards and defends me from every evil. God does all this because He is my good and gracious Father in heaven, not because of anything I have done to earn or deserve it. For all of this it is my duty to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

(Martin Luther's SMALL CATECHISM, Sydow edition, 2000)

Satan often use the same tools while working for different results.

Satan on his part prowls about, peddling his deceptive lies. The devil uses cares and worries in our personal lives because he is seeking to cause us to despair. The old evil foe may entice us to focus on financial loss or the loss of a loved one as evidence that we serve an uncaring deity. Please remember, dear believers, that when Satan attacks us, it is for the express purpose of displacing our holy Christian faith, if not destroying it altogether.

By contrast, to accomplish His saving purposes for us, our gracious Creator God and Heavenly Father may send hardship and tribulation into our lives. His motivation and goal, however, is the eternal salvation of our blood-bought souls. Problems and troubles which come into our lives serve to teach us that His holy and saving Word is the only sure and true balm for our souls. Financial troubles may be used by God to remind us that He Himself is the Source of all blessings. If we suffer the loss of loved ones, we are reminded that the death of the Lord's saints is precious in His sight (Psalm 116:15), for it leads to life eternal.

What a blessing to be children of such a good and gracious Heavenly Father who always protects us from all danger and every evil by turning troubles in our lives into His servants intended to aid in our salvation! *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those*

who are the called according to His purpose”
(Romans 8:28).

‘This is most certainly true’—absolutely!

*“When thro' the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.”*

*“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.”*

(TLH #427:4-5)

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“ . . . THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN . ” — JOHN 10 : 35

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