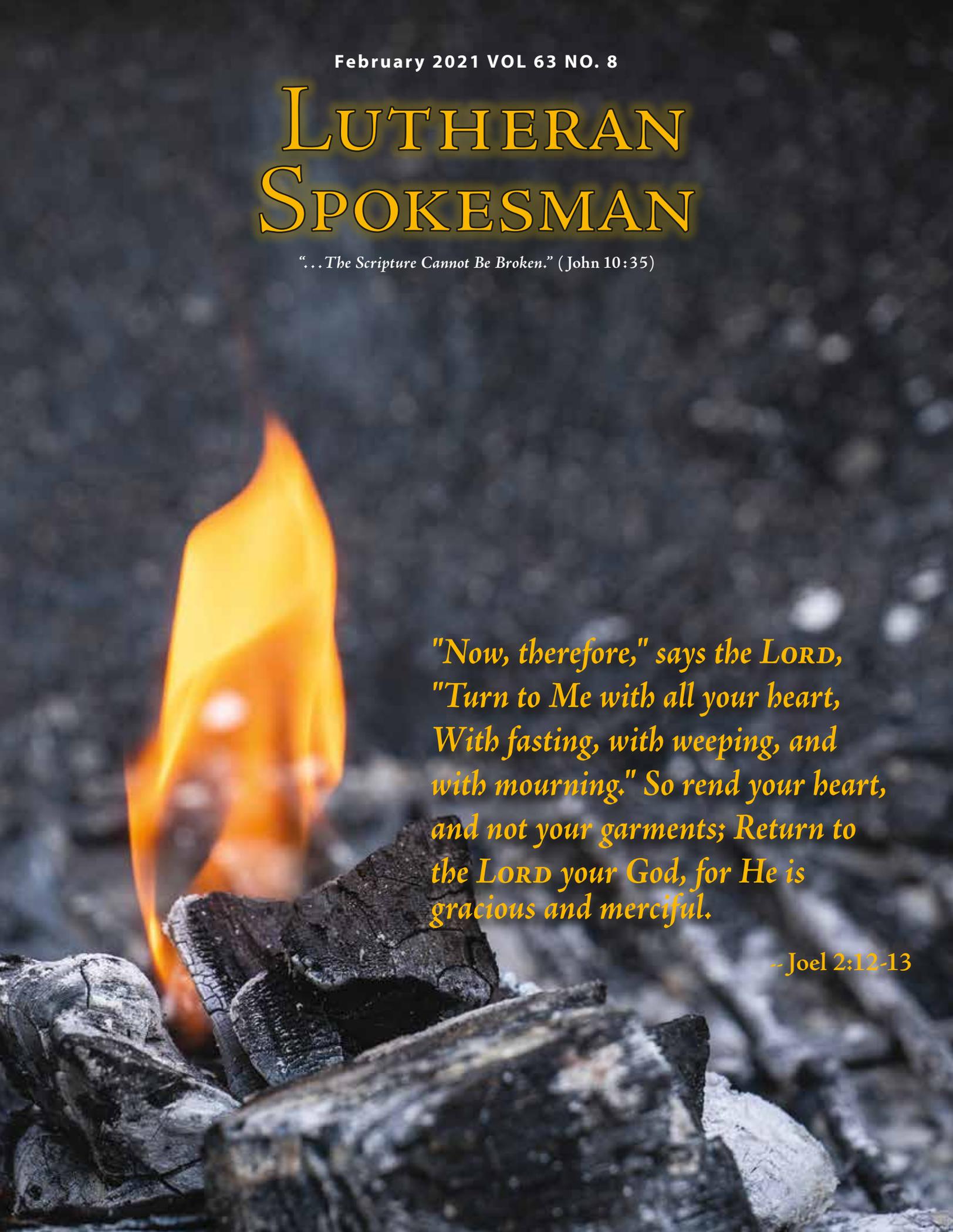


February 2021 VOL 63 NO. 8

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken." (John 10:35)



*"Now, therefore," says the LORD,
"Turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and
with mourning." So rend your heart,
and not your garments; Return to
the LORD your God, for He is
gracious and merciful.*

- Joel 2:12-13



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The Ashes of Repentance

The custom of observing a time of fasting, prayer, and repentance leading up to the celebration of Christ's resurrection began very early in the Christian church, but practices and customs varied among congregations in different areas. The First Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) unified the Christian church in observing Lent as a period of forty days of fasting and prayer.

In A.D. 601, Gregory the Great decreed that there should be no fasting on Sunday, which was considered a day of celebration of Christ's resurrection. So in order to maintain the forty days of fasting, he changed the beginning of Lent to Wednesday. Some sources suggest that he was also the one who initiated the practice of smearing ashes on the forehead of worshipers, saying, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (see Genesis 3:19). Thus the first day of Lent became known as Ash Wednesday.

From the most ancient of times in the Bible, ashes have been used to express sorrow and grief. Ashes were used in times of grief over some injustice or loss (2 Samuel 13:19, Esther 4:1), or as a way of humbling oneself before God in prayer (Daniel 9:3, Genesis 18:27), and—perhaps most of all—to express sorrow for sins (Job 42:3–6, Jeremiah 6:26, Matthew 11:21). For these reasons people would sit in ashes, roll in them, or sprinkle them over their head.

The use of ashes can be a vivid reminder that we ourselves are nothing but dust and ashes. They remind us of our sin, one consequence of which is the inevitable prospect of being reduced to dust and ashes again. Fasting can be a very concrete reminder of our repentance over sin. If you remember that your fasting is a sign of repentance, the relentless hunger pains can help keep you mindful of repentance throughout the day.

However, God also warns about the human propensity to corrupt these signs of repentance. On the one hand, we might feel superior and holier for fasting or displaying the ashes on our forehead. On the other hand, it can simply become an empty action that has no corresponding repentance in the heart.

God rebukes His people for that very thing in Isaiah 58:3-5, "Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard

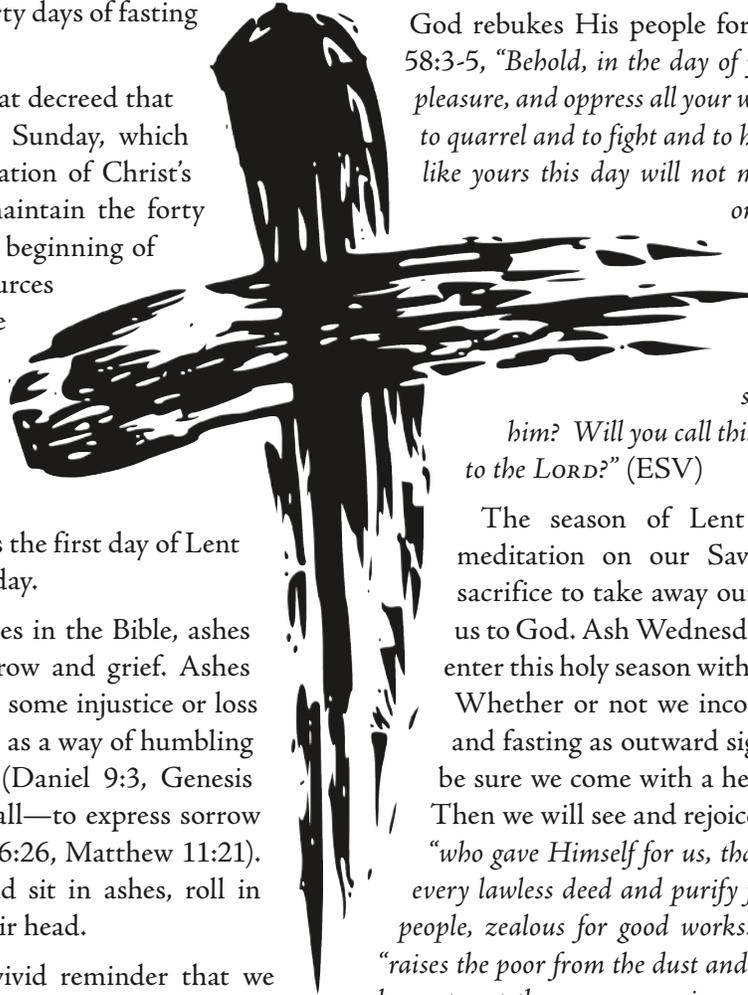
on high. Is such the fast that

I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it

to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under

him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?" (ESV)

The season of Lent is a time of prayerful meditation on our Savior's great love and His sacrifice to take away our sins in order to reconcile us to God. Ash Wednesday is meant to remind us to enter this holy season with true, heartfelt repentance. Whether or not we incorporate some use of ashes and fasting as outward signs of our repentance, let's be sure we come with a heart of genuine repentance. Then we will see and rejoice in the glory of our Savior "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." (Titus 2:14) Then God "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory." (1 Samuel 2:8)



David Reim is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Vernon, British Columbia.

Where You Go, I Go

At the beginning of the book of Ruth, we're introduced to three widows: Ruth, Orpah, and their mother-in-law, Naomi. Naomi bids her daughters-in-law to go and find new husbands. Orpah does, "But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.'" (Ruth 1:16) Ruth swore an oath that she would stay with Naomi. Ruth didn't choose to stay because of a legal requirement, but because of her love for her mother-in-law and for her God. She showed trust that Naomi would not lead her to destruction and that God would keep them both in His loving-kindness. Ruth went with Naomi and found another husband, Boaz, and Ruth and Boaz were the great-grandparents of King David.

As we turn our hearts to Christ's passion in the season of Lent, we see a Savior Who also chose to stay with His people because of love. He put on flesh and blood for each one of us. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. . . . Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:14-15, 17-18)

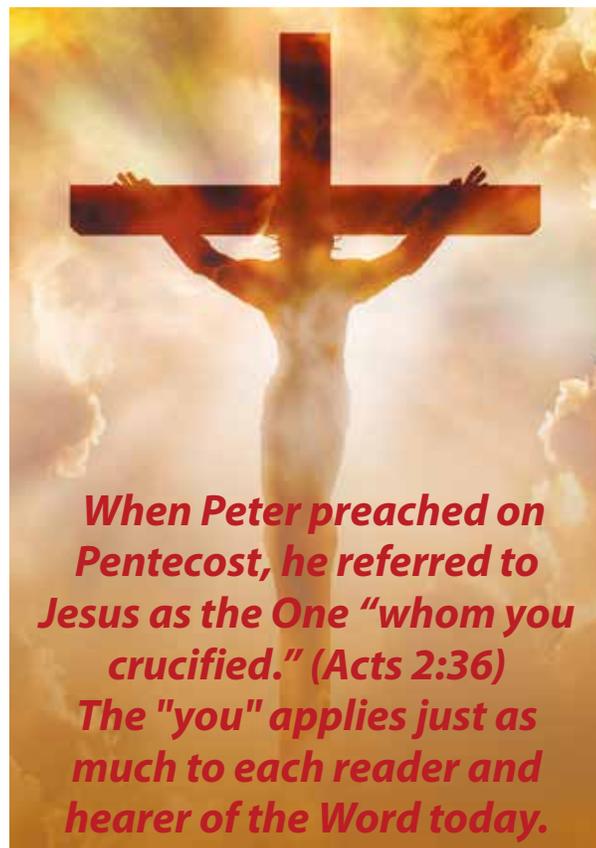
Though He was tempted, Christ did not follow our lead into committing any sins. Instead, He suffered and died for each and every one of our sins. When Peter preached on Pentecost, he referred to Jesus as the One "whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36) The "you" applies just as much to each reader and hearer of the Word today as it did to those assembled in Jerusalem. The fault of Christ's crucifixion lies on each sinner. Our actions directly led to our Savior's death.

Thankfully, Jesus takes the lead in our lives. Having fulfilled the Law perfectly and paid for the sins of the world, He now says to His people, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." (John 14:1-4)

In Christ, we have a leader Who will never mislead us. We may stray from the path, but Christ's sacrifice preserves us and guarantees us a place with our Savior in heaven. Let us say to our Savior with perfect confidence, "Where You go, Jesus, I go."



Ross Kok is a teacher at Holy Cross Lutheran School in Phoenix, Arizona.



WS 723, LSB 543

“What Wondrous Love Is This”

Folk music is noteworthy for its repetitive, straightforward lyrics and its easily remembered tunes. *What Wondrous Love Is This* has these characteristics and is rightly called an American folk hymn. As is usually the case with songs passed down through oral tradition, the original author or authors are unknown. The first printed version of the text can be traced back to an 1811 hymnal bearing the lengthy title *A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. The melody now associated with the hymn was an early 18th century English ballad and first appeared alongside in the 1835 edition of the famous American hymnal *Southern Harmony*. The tune “Wondrous Love” is especially suited to playing on folk instruments such as fiddles, flutes, guitars, and harps.

The words of the four stanzas are easily divided by their themes. The first two stanzas speak of Christ’s wondrous love in laying down His life for us on the cross. The second two stanzas return thanks to the Father and the Son for this tremendous sacrifice.

Jesus once told His disciples that the greatest act of love is to give up one’s life for a friend (John 15:13). He Himself went even further, as Paul tells us in Romans 5:8, “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (NIV84) He died not only for His friends, but for all. Christ’s death truly reveals His wondrous love, a love which did **bear the dreadful curse for my soul** (stanza one). He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), cursed in our place on account of our sins.

If it had not been Jesus, it would have been us. **When I was sinking down / Beneath God’s righteous frown . . .** (stanza two) These words remind us that we were “lost and

condemned creatures” as Luther puts it in his catechism. We were headed for condemnation in hell, subject to the just and proper punishment of God that we deserved for breaking His holy Law. Yet while we were **sinking down**, **sinking down** our Savior Jesus reached down and rescued us. **Christ laid aside His crown for my soul, for my soul.**

Another hymn writer, Anne Steele, said it this way: “He left His radiant throne on high, Left realms of heav’nly bliss, And came to earth to bleed and die— Was ever love like this?” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 363:3)

With Christ’s wondrous love in mind, stanza three replies, **To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing; / To God and to the Lamb, Who is the great I AM, / While millions join the theme, I will sing.** Here we have a doxology, a song of praise. To the Father and to the Lamb Who was slain, our voices combine with those of the whole Christian Church. Can you hear it? Listen: “*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne*

and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” (Revelation 5:13 NIV84)

The voices of praise to our Savior for His death and resurrection will never die away: **And when from death I’m free, I’ll sing on. / I’ll sing His love for me, / And through eternity I’ll sing on** (stanza four). More specifically, *your* voices will never cease, for you will live on in heaven to glorify Him forever and ever! Amen!



David Schaller is pastor of Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sister Lakes, Michigan. He also prepares the “Bread of Life” devotions for the Lutheran Spokesman.

The Lord is My Shepherd

(Read Psalm 23)

Before David was the king of Israel, he was a shepherd who tended the flocks of his father Jesse, and as such, he clearly understood the importance of leading sheep to green pastures and quiet waters, keeping them on the right paths, protecting them from enemies, and bringing them safely home.

Yet, as meaningful as these activities were to David as a shepherd, they were even more meaningful to David as one of the sheep—a man who had been shepherded by the Lord through every step and stage of his life: youth and age, health and sickness, peaks and valleys.

However, Psalm 23 isn't just about David's life; it is also about the way in which the Lord shepherds us through life. David wrote the words, but we too can claim the promises: "My shepherd." "I shall not want." "He leads me." "He restores my soul." "Though I walk through the valley, I will fear no evil." "I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

And it's this personal nature of Psalm 23 that leads us to cherish it so. A personal psalm. A personalized message. And most of all, a Savior Who personally shepherds us through life. Indeed, of all the images of Jesus in Christian art, what image is more endearing than that of the Good Shepherd with a lost sheep in His arms, close to His heart? Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah wrote of Him, "He tends His flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart." (Isaiah 40:11 NIV84)

The beautiful images in Psalm 23 reflect many of the blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ: rest, restoration, safety, endurance, salvation, and eternal life. Yet, the first verse of the psalm is the most important verse, because

every other verse and blessing in this psalm flow from its promise. Only when the LORD is our shepherd can we truly say "I shall not want." Only when the LORD leads the way are goodness and mercy certain to follow. Everything depends on having the right shepherd, and that right shepherd is Jesus Christ.

Scripture contains many names for God. Each name describes some aspect of His divine nature. The name for

God in Psalm 23 is YAVEH in Hebrew—or as it came to be pronounced, Jehovah. YAVEH is related to a verb that means "I AM." This is the one name of God that, perhaps more than any other, describes the lasting nature of His love, grace, mercy, and promises. He is the only Shepherd Who will never forsake us. He is the only Shepherd Who will always

lead us to green pastures and quiet waters, through peaks and valleys, until we dwell at last in the house of the Lord forever. We have His Word on it: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5 NIV84)

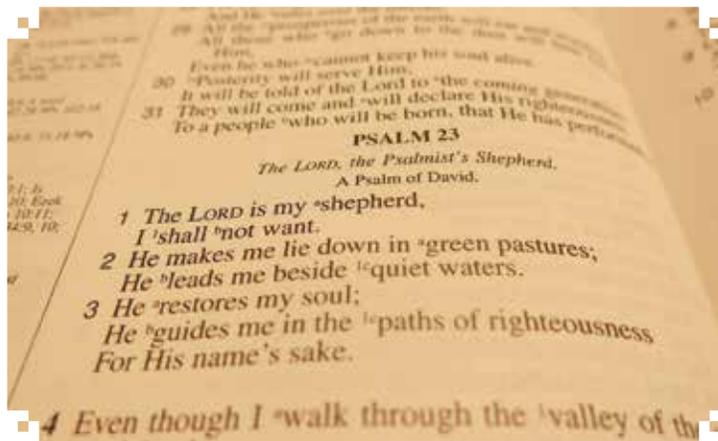
I can think of no better summary of Psalm 23 than the precious hymn verse many of us learned as children:

*I am Jesus' little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my need and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same, Even calls me by my name.*
(TLH 648:1)

Though we teach these words to children, never think of them as childish. To say "I am Jesus' little lamb" is the essence of childlike faith.



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A Fiery Member in our Bodies

“See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (James 3:5b-8)

Wildfires can be very destructive and extensive. California residents know this from experience, as our state recently suffered record-setting wildfires, devastating over four million acres. Across the state, wildfires destroyed forests, homes and businesses, and human lives.

It doesn't take much to start a fiery conflagration. A mere spark from faulty equipment can ignite tinder-dry ground cover, and then windy conditions can fan wildfires out of control.

Our Bible text characterizes the human tongue as a fire that can cause far-reaching harm.

Even though our tongue is a little member in our body, yet like a spark, when an unloving word is spoken, it can set the world around us on fire. Evil tongues have caused contentions and wars, alienation from family and friends. The good names and reputations of people and businesses have been ruined.

Sparks that set fires ablaze are such things as idle gossip and slander, ridicule and insults, and lies and deceit.

When searching for the cause of a fiery tongue, we need look no further than our sin-corrupted hearts. Jesus puts His finger on it when He declares, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Matthew 15:19) The devil, who is an accelerant agent, ever stands ready to help ignite human conflagrations. James writes that the tongue “is set on fire by hell.”

Even though our tongue is a little member in our body, yet like a spark, when an unloving word is spoken, it can set the world around us on fire.

Not only our neighbors are burnt by our evil tongues, but also we ourselves. Jesus reveals that “those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.” (Matthew 15:18) James echoes this revelation, writing, “The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body.” (3:6)

The defilement of our beings by our tongues causes us to be alienated from God. And if we do not repent, our final fate is the fiery pit of hell, where the flames of fire never burn out.

What is the remedy for our fiery tongues so that we don't go around torching others with sinful speech? James writes, “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue.” On the face of it, this revelation doesn't sound very hopeful. While mankind is able to tame wild beasts and bring them under control, we do not possess the inner strength to tame our tongue.

The answer to this problem lies with the Holy Spirit. Through His sanctifying Word He “works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13)

Relying also on prayer, we beseech God in the words of the hymnist:

*“Oh, let me never speak what bounds of truth exceedeth;
Grant that no idle word from out my mouth proceedeth;
And then, when in my place I must and ought to speak,
My words grant pow'r and grace lest I offend the weak.”*
(TLH 395:3)

May the Lord put out the fire of our tongues and help us to control them so that our speech helps, rather than hurts.



Mark Gullerud is retired from the pastoral ministry. He lives in Sunnyvale, California.

One of the hallmarks of the Lutheran Church is its proper understanding and application of the Bible's two main teachings—Law and Gospel. Dr. C.F.W. Walther's seminal work, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, is the basis for this two-year series. Note: page numbers given are accurate for the 1929 and 1986 editions of the book.



Two Principles for Correct Preaching

“Thesis II—Only he is an orthodox teacher who not only presents all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture, but also rightly distinguishes from each other the Law and the Gospel.”

Anyone who stands in front of a Christian congregation or classroom should have two primary concerns on his mind: present the truths of God's Word as God has revealed them to us in His Word, and apply them in such a way that keeps the Law and Gospel in their proper functions. It is a sad statement about the world in general and about Christendom specifically that such a statement must be made. The many denominations within Christianity are in existence because one or the other, and often both, of these principles is abandoned.

Concerning the first principle, God says pointedly, as Dr. Walther reminds us, *“He who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?”* (Jeremiah 23:28) For this reason every preacher should be able to step out of the pulpit having confidently proclaimed God's Word pure and unadulterated.

That alone, however, doesn't guarantee that a preacher preaches rightly, as Dr. Walther also says, *“Of the same building materials furnished two architects, one will construct a magnificent building, while the other, using the same materials, makes a botch of it.”* (page 32) So it happens also in preaching that while no lie was spoken, the entire sermon was wrong. When this is the case it is because the preacher was not careful to rightly divide Law and Gospel, leaving his hearers themselves as confused as the sermon itself was concerning their salvation.

The Holy Spirit impresses upon pastors and preachers,

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) Just as a doctor must prescribe medications that address the specific ailments of his patient, so also a preacher should be careful that those who are comfortable in their sin, remaining impenitent, should hear the Law with its full force; while those who are terrified in their consciences because of their sin should receive *“the sweet voice of the Savior's grace.”* (page 33)

It should be remembered that both the Law and the Gospel are God's Word and effectively accomplish in the hearts of sinners God's intent. Quoting Luther, Walther points out that *“the Law has its goal fixed beyond which it cannot go or accomplish anything, namely, until the point is reached where Christ comes in. It must terrify the impenitent with threats of the wrath and displeasure of God. Likewise the Gospel has its peculiar function and task, viz., to proclaim forgiveness of sin to sorrowing souls. These two may not be commingled, nor the one substituted for the other, without a falsification of doctrine.”* (page 35)

Thus, it is necessary, in every sermon, that the preacher lead his hearers first to Mt. Sinai that they might tremble in the wilderness of their sin before the holy God, knowing for certain that God's wrath is against them for the corruption of sin at work in them. Then, when all hope appears to be gone for the soul that sins, the preacher becomes the travel guide to Golgotha, where the judgment of God against our sin is carried out on His innocent Son. In Him alone is hope. In Him alone is salvation.



Frank Gantt is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Loganville, Georgia.

[To read Walther's The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel for free on-line, and to access related Bible class materials, go to www.ilc.edu/Walther]

ERROR'S ECHO

In this series we take a look back at some of the most notorious errors and heresies that have threatened the church over the centuries, as well as the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which those false teachings continue to haunt 21st century thought and theology.

Monophysitism

Several weeks ago, we journeyed in spirit to a Bethlehem manger to worship the newborn King. In a few more weeks, we will begin a similar journey, but this time it will be with penitential tears to a Jerusalem hill to watch the King breathe His last.

Whether at manger or cross, it is a marvel to see Jesus because of who He is and what He came to do. He is the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:14) Who humbled Himself to be a servant of sinners and to destroy the works of the devil.

The marvel, truth, and salvation are all lost if Jesus is anyone less than true and fully God while at the same time also true and fully man. Human reason cannot comprehend this union of God and man, so it contrives something more “reasonable.” Monophysitism is just such an error. It robs Jesus of His true identity and sweeps away the marvel of the gospel, leaving only worthless crumbs of human reason behind.

The early Church councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) settled disputes concerning Jesus’ divinity. Then new controversy arose and two opposing factions formed. At issue was the person of Christ; both sides agreed that Jesus was divine and human, but they did not agree upon what that meant.

One position asserted Jesus’ divinity, even if it meant compromising His humanity. The other position emphasized the fact that Jesus had to be fully human to be the Savior from sin (true!), but downplayed His divinity so it wouldn’t overshadow the humanity. This disagreement arose in the Eastern Church, centered in Constantinople. The Western Church, centered in Rome, affirmed the truth that there are two natures uniquely joined in one person—the personal union of Christ.

Emperor Theodosius II called for a Council at Ephesus in 449 to address the dispute. Unfortunately, the council was controlled completely by one side, the other side was silenced, and the doctrine of two natures was declared to be

heresy. The council solved nothing.

The status quo changed when Emperor Theodosius suddenly died. He was succeeded by Marcion, whose wife was Theodosius’ sister Pulcheria. Pulcheria had great influence in the church, and she viewed the position of the Western Church more favorably. She called for a new council to be held in Chalcedon in 451. This Fourth Ecumenical Council produced a clarification of what was true concerning Christ’s person. It rejected the extremes of both positions in the Eastern Church and affirmed what had been done in the three previous Councils—Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus.

“We all with one voice teach . . . that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, perfect in divinity, and perfect in humanity, true God and true human, with a rational soul and a body, of one substance with the Father in his divinity, and of one substance with us in his humanity. . . . The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in one person.”

When we turn to Scripture we find the truth concerning Christ’s person in passages such as, “*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (Colossians 2:9), and “*Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.*” (1 Timothy 3:16)

The errors concerning the wondrous union of God and man in one person—one Christ, one Savior—still echo loudly in the world, but the truth of God’s Word drowns them out. This leaves us in awed silence as we stand at the manger and at the cross marveling at the wonder.



Wayne Eichstadt is pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley, Washington.

WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Updates from congregations around the church of the Lutheran Confession

Peace Lutheran Church Mission, South Dakota

Peace on the Prairie

“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23

Just two miles south of Mission, South Dakota, and one hundred yards east of U.S. Highway 83 on a small section of prairie, lies Peace Lutheran Church. 2019 was the Sixtieth anniversary of Peace Lutheran Church’s founding. It was a small parish when it was first established, and it remains a small parish today. Consequently, one might think that after sixty-one years there is really nothing “new” at Peace, but then one would be mistaken, for the Lord’s mercies and compassion fill the lives of the members of Peace congregation with new blessings each day!

Three years ago, after being located for fifty-seven years in the middle of Mission on the main east-west highway running directly through town, the congregation took the step to relocate out to the prairie. The new church—a simple steel-framed structure—is now located next to the congregational graveyard and boasts a scenic view of the area’s ranchland. The exterior building was built by contractors, while the members worked together to complete the entire interior. The sanctuary has remarkable acoustics and has served well as the worship site for both Peace and St. Paul’s of White River congregations three Sundays each month.

Not long after completing the church, a bell tower was constructed. That new bell now fills the prairie each Sunday morning with the announcement that worship is



Top: Peace Lutheran's new building. Above: The prairie view from the new church.

about to begin—that the good news of the Gospel is once again about to be proclaimed!

Donated altar cloths from our former CLC congregation in Lamar, Colorado are currently being refitted to grace the altar, lectern, and pulpit at Peace—to bring a more vibrant symbolism of the various seasons of the church



Above: Peace Lutheran Church Cemetery.
Inset: Cemetery entrance.
Left: Shay DuBray and Tate Jackson were united in marriage this past May 2020.

year to our sanctuary. We so appreciate that gift, as well as the skills of Monica Rahn necessary and willingly used to help advance the truths of our Savior God.

A new family was formed this past May 2020 when Tate Jackson was united in marriage to his high school sweetheart, Shay DuBray, at the family ranch outside the village of Parmelee, South Dakota. The wedding was held under a white tent in the back yard of the Jackson home overlooking miles of picturesque, rolling pastures. The couple was encouraged to have a Christ-centered marriage built on the virtues of joy, gentleness, and thankfulness

found in a Savior Who brings to our individual and collective hearts a peace the world simply does not understand (see Philippians 4:4-7)!

A new communicant member was added to Peace congregation when Cooper Rahn expressed his confirmation vows in August 2020. While a new confirmand, his faith and his vows were anything but new. This third-generation member of Peace stood before the congregation as had his father and grandmother before him, to confess his faith in his Savior Jesus Christ and to pledge his faithfulness to his Savior Jesus Christ. His chosen confirmation verse was the old and the familiar, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16)

Finally, there is a new headstone in our Peace cemetery. One of the founding matriarchs of Peace, Eunice Jones, was taken home to heaven this past March.

For years she served as the congregation’s organist, using her gifts to glorify her Savior. Her passing was quiet in the night—her Savior receiving her soul to Himself. Her funeral and committal service were simple family observances held during the time when regular services had been suspended due to COVID-19. Though simple, the observances were replete with powerful Scripture passages expressing the joy, the hope, the confidence, and the new life we have in Christ: Psalm 23, Matthew 11:28-30, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, John 14:1-3, John 3:16-17, and Ecclesiastes 3:1-4.

Peace on the prairie—a small congregation proclaiming a powerful message of life, hope, joy, peace, and confidence for all to hear and, we pray, to believe!



Paul D. Nolting is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Valentine, Nebraska, as well as St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in White River, South Dakota, and Peace Lutheran Church in Mission, South Dakota.

In Memory of Mary B.

[Editor's note: this article concerns the wife of the Indian pastor who was one of our fellowship's first contacts in southeastern India. Full names of people and places have been withheld because of the growing risk of persecution against Christians in the region.]

Over the past several years I've tried to introduce Lutheran Spokesman readers to the leaders of our sister church bodies around the world. Many have heard the names of pastors and teachers, but often the names of their faithful wives and mothers go unmentioned. Today I would like to tell you about Mary B., a faithful wife, mother, and servant of our Savior Jesus who lived and worked in God's kingdom in Southern India. In October of 2020, the Lord in His mercy delivered Mary from her earthly pilgrimage to the eternal home He prepared for her through His sacrifice on the cross. For this, we praise and thank Him!

We also give thanks for the eighty-nine years that this world was blessed by our Lord through the life of Mary. The Lord was with her from the very beginning, especially as she was brought to baptism early in life by her Christian parents who served the Lord as school teachers. In a land dominated by idol worship, the Lord provided Mary with a Christian education as she attended Lutheran schools during her youth. Because of the gifts that the Lord gave to Mary, she was able to receive several academic scholarships that allowed her to attend and successfully complete further education at a Lutheran teacher-training school. She then began teaching at a Lutheran school in a small village.

It was in this Lutheran school in the same small village that the Lord, in His love and wisdom, provided a life-long partner for Mary. Mary's parents and the parents of V.S., who were also teachers at the same school, arranged for their children to be married.

The Lord blessed Mary and V.S. with six children. Their three sons continue to serve the Lord in the public ministry

as pastors, evangelists, and teachers, training more men to be faithful preachers and teachers of God's saving Word.

Our Savior blessed Mary with a compassionate heart that overflowed with love. This love led her to many works of kindness throughout her life of service as she welcomed hundreds of orphaned and needy children into their home and provided them with a safe and healthy place to live and grow. Most importantly, she provided them the "one thing needful" as she taught them about their Savior, Jesus.

In 1975 V.S. and Mary withdrew from the Lutheran church body they had been a part of their entire lives because of that church body's false teaching. Together, they continued to serve the Lord as independent Lutherans until the Lord directed them to the CLC in 1982.

Her son J., who many remember from his time at ILC in the late 1980's, shared the following about his mother at her passing: "Mary's life was one of terrific self-discipline and dedication mixed with faith and trust in Jesus. She was very humble, had the power of tenderness, and the strength of love. Gentleness, love and compassion always radiated from her eyes. Even though Mary faced many severe health issues, she professed no fear of dying. She always said that 'Death is going home.' She never relaxed, till her death, in witnessing for Christ."

"Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" (Revelation 14:13)



Todd Ohlmann is a full-time visiting missionary for the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

Death of a Faithful Servant in Myanmar, New Construction in Nepal

On Monday, December 28th, the Lord in His grace and mercy delivered His servant Pastor Charles Edwards from his earthly pilgrimage to his home in heaven. Pastor Edwards unexpectedly suffered a massive stroke and passed away later in the day. He was sixty-four years old and is survived by five children, a brother, two sisters, and the many souls he served with the love and Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Edwards was the only theologically trained pastor of the National Lutheran Church of Myanmar in Yangon. Charles founded and supported this confessional Lutheran church body with the pension he received after taking an early retirement from the Myanmar National Railway. The Lord first introduced the CLC to Pastor Edwards in 2009. After a few missionary visits and much correspondence, the CLC declared fellowship with Pastor Edwards and the NLC-Myanmar in 2014. Pastor Edwards served one congregation in Yangon and several rural and urban preaching stations. He also worked with several orphanages to provide Bible instruction, tutoring, and school supplies for more than 300 children. These are sad and uncertain times for the NLC-Myanmar and for Pastor Edwards's family. Please pray for Pastor Edwards's five children: Sam (28), Anna (25), John Mark (21), Hope (19), and Faith (13), along with his brother and sisters, and the many souls that were blessed and nurtured by his faithful preaching and teaching of God's saving word.

"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

Construction Finally Begins in Nepal

Upon graduation from Immanuel Lutheran Seminary in 2015, it was Raju Bhitrakoti's plan to return to Nepal to start a Bible institute to train pastors and teachers to faithfully proclaim the truths of God's saving Word. These plans were delayed by more than a year because of the earthquake that

hit Nepal in April of the same year. After several months of directing recovery efforts, Raju began part-time classes in a temporary facility. Over the past few years, much time has been spent in the search for a suitable building in the Kathmandu valley that could serve as classrooms, worship facility, library, dormitory, and home for Raju and his growing family. With real estate prices in the Kathmandu area just too expensive, it became clear that the Lord had

other plans. Eventually a piece of land was purchased in a more rural area of Nepal where land and construction prices are much more affordable. While all of these plans and apparent setbacks were happening, Raju and his family were evicted from the apartment they were renting. The reason for their eviction was that they were singing Christian songs in their home, and this was forbidden by the

Hindu landlord. For the past eighteen months, Raju and his family have been living in his parents' home along with his brother and the orphaned children they care for. After an earthquake and recovery efforts, years of searching, an eviction, and delays because of COVID and the monsoon season, the Lord has blessed the ground-breaking and early stages of construction. If all goes as planned, they hope to move into the residential portion of the building by August. This will be none too soon, as Raju and his wife are expecting their second child in April. Praise and thank the Lord for His blessing and provision in the construction of this multi-purpose building. This building project is being partially funded through a grant from the CLC Mission Development Fund (MDF).

"Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him." (Psalm 28:6-7)

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Left: Sainted Pastor Charles Edwards.
Above: New pastoral training center in Nepal.



“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS FEBRUARY 2021

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; LSB = Lutheran Service Book, 2006

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
Feb 1	TLH 494	Micah 4:1-5	These prophecies have come to pass, for Jesus has come and His Word has gone out to all lands, the Word of peace and forgiveness.
Feb 2	TLH 383 (LSB 557)	Micah 4:6-13	“In that day” is our day now, the day of the New Testament Church. The Lord Jesus rules over us in love and has redeemed us from the hands of our enemies.
Feb 3	TLH 105 (LSB 389)	John 3:16-21	We are saved by faith in the Son of God, therefore let us live in the light!
Feb 4	TLH 348; LSB 534	John 3:22-36	Jesus was sent from God and was greater than all the prophets. Still today He speaks the Words of God to us.
Feb 5	TLH 559 (LSB 882)	2 Kings 10:17-31	The Lord used King Jehu of Israel to bring final judgment on the family of King Ahab and to put down the worship of Baal. Without such interventions, would there have been any faith left in Israel?
Feb 6	TLH 647 (LSB 361)	Micah 5:1-9	The prophet foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and that He would give us peace with God and victory over the enemies of the Lord.
Feb 8	TLH 30 (LSB 811)	Micah 6:1-8	What types of offerings please the Lord? Only offerings that flow from faith, given out of love for Him.
Feb 9	TLH 451 (LSB 660)	Micah 6:9-16	The Lord had shown Israel abundant grace and mercy, but their lives did not reflect His love. Instead, they were filled with dishonesty and hypocrisy.
Feb 10	TLH 108; LSB 402	John 4:1-26	Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah, willing to forgive sins and also able to teach and explain spiritual truths.
Feb 11	TLH 107; LSB 401	John 4:27-38	Jesus did not regret helping the Samaritan woman. This was just the sort of work He had come to do: to bring people to repentance and faith.
Feb 12	TLH 498	John 4:39-42	The Samaritan woman’s mission efforts prepared others to receive Jesus. May our mission efforts do the same!
Feb 13	WS 717	2 Kings 11:1-21	Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, tried to continue her father’s rule, but the Lord would not have it. When the time was right, the rightful king (who had been hidden) was given the throne.
Feb 15	TLH 442 (LSB 851)	2 Kings 12:1-21	King Joash cared about the things of the Lord. In particular, he repaired the temple and protected the temple treasury. We too show our love for the Lord when we care about the things He cares about.
Feb 16	TLH 396	Micah 7:1-7	Israel was filled with wickedness and misery, but the believers put their hope in the Lord. Likewise when nations today are filled with wickedness and misery, the believers find hope in the Lord.
Feb 17	TLH 147; LSB 404	John 4:43-54	Jesus’ own people in Galilee were the hardest to convince of His deity, but we see these signs and are reassured that He is the Son of God!
Feb 18	TLH 551; LSB 551	John 5:1-15	Jesus healed the thirty-eight-year invalid—but His greater goal was to heal the man’s soul (verse 14).
Feb 19	TLH 410 (LSB 718)	Micah 7:8-17	The repentant heart looks to the Lord for deliverance from troubles. As believers, we enjoy a confident expectation that our sorrows will not last.
Feb 20	TLH 324 (LSB 609)	Micah 7:18-20	There is no God like ours! He is compassionate, forgiving, and faithful. He sent His own Son as a sacrifice for our sin and He shepherds us all our days.
Feb 22	TLH 33	2 Kings 13:1-9	Jehoahaz did not help to turn Israel away from idolatry, but he did turn to the true God when he needed deliverance from Aram. Notice that the Lord never lost interest in helping Israel.
Feb 23	TLH 45	2 Kings 13:10-20	Joash (Jehoash) was disappointed in losing Elisha, but he wasn’t interested in wholeheartedly following Elisha’s God. The Lord invites us to lean on Him fully. Let’s take Him up on it!
Feb 24	TLH 343 (LSB 395)	John 5:16-30	Jesus taught that His authority was equal to the Father’s because He was equal to the Father. “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”
Feb 25	WS 720 (LSB 413)	John 5:31-47	The Jewish leaders would not accept Jesus’ testimony, so He gave them the testimony of John and of the Father too. He desired their repentance even though they hated Him.
Feb 26	TLH 122	2 Kings 14:1-14	King Amaziah of Judah generally did what was right, but he was tripped up by his arrogance thinking he could defeat the kingdom of Israel in battle. Arrogance displaces trust in God.
Feb 27	TLH 12	2 Kings 14:23-29	There was nothing great about King Jeroboam, but there was much great about the Lord Who supported Israel rather than blotting them out from under heaven.

IN THE PIPELINE

Want to meet the person who may be your next pastor or Christian day school teacher? This series profiles the men and women who are in their final year of preparation for the public teaching or preaching ministry at Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Benjamin Hansen

Age: 24

Program: Education

Year in School: Senior

Where were you born?

Markesan, Wisconsin

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Markesan, and attended Faith Lutheran School.

Married? Unmarried? Tell us about your family.

I'm not married. I have one brother, Josh. My parents, Martin and Shawn, live in North Dakota, as do several other relatives.

What hobbies, sports or extracurriculars interest you?

I like video games, talking with friends, and puzzles. I enjoy playing basketball and football.

Tell us one thing about yourself that most people don't know.

I really enjoy talking to people, friends, and family. However, I am a bit of an introvert at the same time, so it often takes a while for me to warm up to people.

Which academic subjects especially interest you?

I especially enjoy religion, math, and science.

How did you first come to consider the public teaching or preaching ministry as a career?

I have always had it in the back of my mind ever since grade



school. However, I decided to try engineering first, since I thought I might like it. I had always been interested in how things work, and in physics specifically. After trying engineering, I decided that teaching would be a better field for me. I really enjoy working with kids and hope to share my interest in how things work with them.

What have you appreciated most about your time at ILC?

Meeting new people is what I enjoyed most about ILC. Getting to find new friends to talk to and interact with is something I have always enjoyed. Living in the dorms was perfect for that. It was enjoyable to meet people from all over, and to discuss topics that people my age are concerned about.

What qualities do you think will most be needed by the future leaders of the church?

Determination . . . there will be many trials ahead in the ministry, and the ability to push forward despite all obstacles will be a great help.

Hard work . . . there is a lot of work needed to be done to combat errors of false doctrine and practice. We need to be willing to expend whatever effort is required to fight all errors.

Empathy . . . too often we see others through the Law and judge them. We need to remember that God judges, and we trust Him to do what is right. We must strive to understand our brethren's troubles and help them as best as we are able.

SEEN IN PASSING

Items of interest from various sources of religious news and opinion, in print and on the web.

More Pro-Life Congresswomen Helping the Cause. “While the incoming Biden administration pledges to reverse some abortion restrictions put in place under President Donald Trump, the US legislature saw an influx in pro-life Christian congresswomen taking office in 2021. The number of Republican women opposed to the legalization of abortion doubled in the House of Representatives, with at least 16 winning in November, including seven who flipped Democratic seats, according to the Susan B. Anthony List.” N.a. “Pro-Life Women Surge in Congress.” Christianity Today Feb. 2021:20. Print.

Mental Health Declines During Pandemic for All Groups -- Except One. Unsurprisingly, Gallup’s annual November Health and Healthcare Survey found that those Americans who rate their own mental health as “excellent” declined sharply across nearly all demographics, including age, gender, income level, marital status and political affiliation. “More than eight months into the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.,” the study concluded, “Americans’ reports of mental health are much worse than a year ago.” The only subgroup who reported an improvement in mental health over the period were people who attended religious services weekly. Brennan, Megan. “Americans’ Mental Health Ratings Sink to New Low.” Wellbeing. Gallup.com, 7 Dec. 2020. Web. 2 Jan. 2021.

California Megachurch Refuses to Follow Mandates Forbidding Worship. In an open letter entitled, “Christ, Not Caesar, Is Head of the Church,” Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California, expressed its intention to continue in-person worship for all who wish to attend. The church is pastored by John MacArthur, widely recognized as influential in evangelical circles. Despite threats of fines and even arrests, Grace Church has insisted on continuing in-person services. This despite California’s restrictions on public worship, which are among the most severe in the U.S. Subtitled “A Biblical Case for the Church’s Duty to Remain Open,” the statement says in part, “As [Christ’s] people, we are subject to His will and commands as revealed in Scripture. Therefore we cannot and will not acquiesce to a government-imposed moratorium on our weekly congregational worship or other regular corporate gatherings. Compliance would be disobedience to our Lord’s clear commands. . . . It has never been the prerogative of civil government to order, modify, forbid, or mandate worship. When, how, and how often the church worships is not subject to Caesar.” This very public stance of such an influential evangelical church has sharpened the difficult debate about whether, and to what extent,

Christian congregations must comply with government incursions into church matters. N.a., “Christ, Not Caesar, Is Head of the Church.” News. GraceChurch.org, 24 Jul. 2020. Web. 2 Jan. 2021.

Could Using Churches as Polling Places Subtly Influence Voting? In an article for TheConversation.com, University of Maine psychology professor Jordan LaBouff claims to find evidence that people vote more conservatively when the polling place is a church. He notes that less than one percent of Americans vote in government polling centers, the rest voting in volunteered community venues, many of them churches. “For example, 22% of polling sites for the 2020 general election in Minneapolis are houses of worship. In St. Louis, 27% of precincts vote in religious spaces and, in one ward, all eight of the polling places are churches. . . . Our recent analysis of 2016 election data from Virginia reveals that, controlling for population, county-level religiosity and other factors, citizens casting their ballots in churches were significantly more likely to vote for Republican candidates than their nearly identical neighbors who were voting in secular venues. This effect was strongest for counties with the highest proportion of religious people. That is, when Christians vote in churches, they seem to be even more likely to vote for conservative candidates than when they vote outside of churches. . . . Although some non-Christian citizens have complained that voting in churches violates their rights, courts have consistently ruled that the availability of alternatives such as absentee voting means that having places of religion serve as polling stations does not represent a violation of the First Amendment of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of religion.” LaBouff, Jordan. “Voting while God is watching – does having churches as polling stations sway the ballot?” Ethics and Religion. TheConversation.com, 22 Sept. 2020. Web. 17 Oct. 2020.

