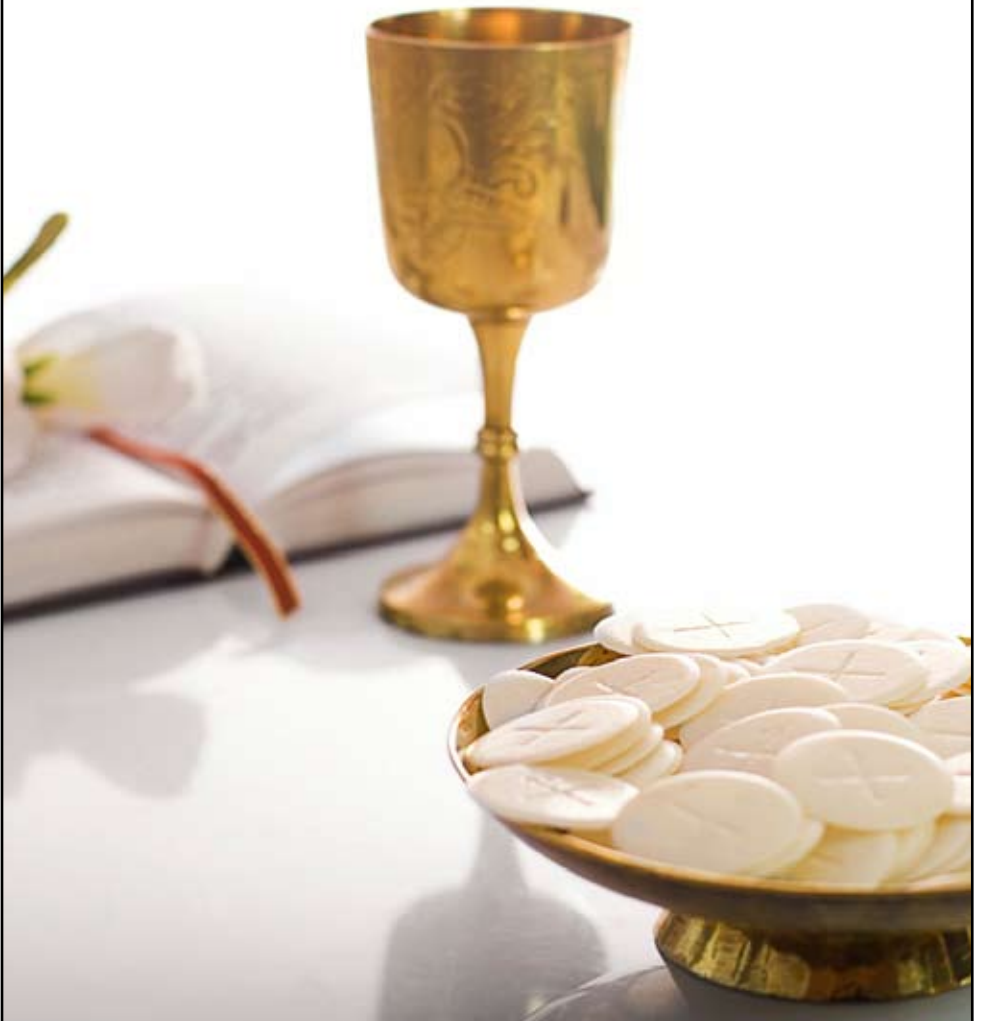


LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN." — JOHN 10:35



THE MEANS OF GRACE

Professor Joseph Lau · Eau Claire, Wisconsin

During the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century an insidious philosophy – namely, rationalism – spread throughout Europe and America.

Rationalism’s proponents asserted that human reason, unaided by divine revelation, is the sole guide to all attainable religious truth.



Human reason became the new god. The idea put forth was that if the human brain could not figure something out, it could not be true.

People began to turn away from the “other-worldly” focus of the Middle Ages toward the more worldly focus so prevalent in our day.

The Bible, however, speaks of a whole different concept of attaining truth.

The “carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). Without God’s Spirit,

people walk in darkness, unable to find truth. “*The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

How then can people come to a knowledge of the truth of God and His Word?

In His perfect wisdom God has chosen to use certain “means” employed by God’s Spirit to bestow His grace on us. We refer to these means as the “means of grace.”

Although the phrase is not found in Holy Scripture, it accurately depicts the means or methods by which God connects with people.

The means of grace are the gospel in the Word of God (both written and spoken) and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper).

The Gospel in Word & Sacrament

These means of grace have long been a focal point of Lutheran teaching. For example, the Lutheran Confessions state, “Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments” (*Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Art. VIII, A.D. 1537, written by Dr. Martin Luther).

Oh, the miracles which take place through the means of grace which cannot be understood by our reason! “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*” (Romans 10:17). It is God’s Word itself that holds the power to create, sustain, and grow faith in the heart.

In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the applying of water in connection with the Word of God can turn what was once dead into something alive in Christ. “*Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16).

Furthermore, there is the miracle of receiving the actual body and

blood of Jesus Christ “in, with, and under” the bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper (doctrine of the Real Presence). Our Savior’s blood was “given and shed for the remission of sins.” By human reasoning this too seems impossible.

There are many who would have us believe that God works apart from the means of grace, or else they add to the “means” beyond what Scripture allows.

For example, though prayer is often put forth as a means of grace, it is not so. True prayer can be offered only by one who is a believer already. Prayer is a fruit of faith, a part of the sanctified life of a Christian.

Simply put, any who would like to add to the invisible church of believers—the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints—cannot do so without the use of the gospel. “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation*” (Romans 1:16).

Therefore, let us thank God for the means of grace through which He made us His own! Let us then remember that our “*faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:5).



I know my faith is founded On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord; And this my faith confessing, Unmoved I stand upon His Word. Man’s reason cannot fathom The truth of God profound; Who trusts her subtle wisdom Relies on shifting ground. God’s Word is all-sufficient, It makes divinely sure, And trusting in its wisdom, My faith shall rest secure.



"Let A Man Examine Himself..."

Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer • Hecla, South Dakota

EXAMINATION!

A word that makes many eighth grade confirmation class students break out in a cold sweat and lose sleep at this time of year.

Those who grew up in the Lutheran Church no doubt remember well their "confirmation examination" when they were publicly questioned on Christian doctrine as summarized in the Catechism. Oh, the racing heart, the pale face, and the sweaty palms!

So why is it that we thus "examine" our young people before they are accepted as communicant members of the congregation?

Most pastors remind their students and the congregation that their examination is not a "pass or fail" test for church membership. Rather, they explain that it is the student's opportunity to share with the congregation what they've learned as they studied the Bible and Catechism with their pastor.

Perhaps it is also explained that their examination provides opportunity to assure the congregation that the young confirmands have been taught and believe the same thing that their fellow members do.

While confirmation examination is a fine church custom, there is an examination that every Christian is obliged to make before participating in the Lord's Supper. The Apostle Paul writes, "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup*" (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Each communicant member is to privately examine his/her heart in

preparation for "eating of the bread and drinking of the cup" of the Lord's Supper.

Preparation for Holy Communion

A "Christian Questions" section in the catechism offers about twenty questions a communicant member should ask himself before partaking of the Lord's Supper—questions such as:

- † Are we sinners?
- † Are we sorry for our sins?
- † What do we deserve for our sins?
- † In whom shall we trust for forgiveness and salvation?
- † What are we receiving in the Lord's Supper?
- † How do we know this?
- † Why is this sacred meal so important to us?

Is such an examination terrifying? Indeed it is when we compare our thoughts, words, and actions to God's holy Law! We find that we have failed miserably to live up to God's standard of perfection ("*You shall be holy; for I am holy*" — Leviticus 11:44). It is terrifying to consider what we deserve for our unholy living ("*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them*" — Galatians 3:10). And we read in the book of Hebrews, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hebrews 10:31).

Yet, when we find in ourselves nothing but sin and death, God wants us also to examine our

Continued on page 19

Two Mothers Beneath the Cross

Pastor David Fuerstenau • Ketchikan, Alaska

In this world we can expect tribulation. So Jesus informed all His followers.

As the world seeks to celebrate Mother's Day with flowers and sweet candy, we remember that troubles and bitter sorrow also come with the job. Blessed are all godly mothers who bear their cross with faithful patience.

If we were to ask, 'Who is the most notable example of this in Scripture?', who would not think of Mary, the mother of Jesus?

Mary's motherhood certainly started in perplexity. How could it even be possible? Yet when the angel explained it, Mary participated in another Christmas miracle — bowing in humble faith to the Lord's will, believing that with Him nothing is impossible. Even the shame of a threatened divorce was removed.

As her Son Jesus grew and began His public ministry, certainly there were wonderful emotions for the mother as she heard His words of life and observed His validating miracles.

But there were difficulties also when on several occasions Mary sought to assume the right of being Jesus' Director of Ministries, only to be rebuked! Then there were those agonizing hours of Holy Week as her Son was arrested, mocked, scourged, condemned, and then crucified. All of that surely brought to fulfillment the prophetic words of Simeon to Mary, "yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35).

Yet out of a mother's heartache

came joy in seeing Jesus risen from the dead, and as she accepted His innocent suffering and death as the price for her and for all mankind's redemption.

Mary is not worthy of our worship (as Luther said), but she is blessed indeed and deserves our attention and celebration over what God made of her.

So also all godly mothers deserve our honor and love!

Is there a mother who perhaps suffered tribulation equal to or greater than Mary's, greater than any other woman in the Bible?

Let's consider one possibility—an Old Testament counterpart to Mary. She was a mother who suffered greatly, loved unreservedly, displayed overwhelming courage and patience in the face of tragedy, and was finally comforted by our Lord's lesser father—King David.

Rizpah and Her Life Story!

Her name was Rizpah, and her story can be read in chapter 21 of Second Samuel.

Rizpah was a concubine of King Saul. Her bitter grief resulted largely because of his sin. Decades before, the Gibeonites had deceived Joshua into signing a non-aggression pact with them. Joshua had sworn by the name of the Lord that Israel would never harm them.

But years later, in his zeal, Saul had tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to annihilate the Gibeonites.

Because of this broken vow, God sent drought upon Israel. In trying to make it right with God, King David asked the Gibeonites what could be done to make

“ALL HISTORY IS GOD’S STORY!”
THE CALL OF MOSES
“Prepared, Called, and Equipped”

Exodus chapters 3 & 4

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt • Mankato, Minnesota

amends for the broken treaty. The Gibeonites wanted neither gold nor silver; what they did want was that seven of Saul’s male descendents be given to them to be hung or crucified. David agreed. Among the seven victims were two sons of Rizpah.

Rizpah could not prevent the fate of her two sons, but she did carry out a last vigil of love, protecting their dead bodies from further dishonor. Donning sackcloth in her mourning, through heat of day and cold of night she stayed close by the sun-scorched, bloated, blackened, decomposing bodies of her sons, chasing from them the birds, dogs, and other scavengers. And she did this day and night for nigh unto six months—hungry, faint with thirst and exhaustion, enduring ridicule and unwanted pity.

No doubt she was convinced that her sons hung there, dead and dishonored,

not for their own sins but for those of another.

David eventually heard of Rizpah’s plight. Together with the heretofore neglected bones of Saul and Jonathan, Rizpah’s two sons were finally given a proper interment. So David comforted this mother. And so also the drought was broken as the rains returned.

If Rizpah and her sons looked for the day of David’s greater Son, Jesus, then they will surely rejoice on the wonderful day of Resurrection.

Bearing the cross is a promised part of this earthly life, and many times mothers bear it in connection with their offspring.

But standing faithfully with Mary at the atoning cross of Jesus brings forgiveness and joy, including the comfort and hope of the resurrection of decayed bodies and dusty bones from mortal dishonor to immortal glory.



Rizpah by Chantal Baros. Oil on canvas

God’s Answer:

“I will certainly be with you.” — Without being asked, God gave Moses a sign that He would bring Moses and the people safely out of Egypt: “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Objection #2:

“When the Children of Israel ask me who is sending me, what do I tell them?”

God’s Answer:

“I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” — This was the definitive answer. The only God who exists, the one eternal God, sent Moses.

God’s Additional Promise:

“They will heed your voice.” — This simple yet powerful statement of God should have set aside any remaining hesitancy on Moses’ part. The great I AM promised categorically that the people of Israel would listen to Moses and follow him.

Though God promised that the people would listen to Moses and they would all leave Egypt safely, there would be days when things wouldn’t look so promising.

Lest Moses would become discouraged, God provided a step-by-step road map to assure Moses that all was going according to God’s plan: “... the king of Egypt will not let you go... so I will

At the age of forty years Moses was ready to solve Israel’s problems his way. He saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating an Israelite and killed the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11ff)... and then had to flee for his life!

At the age of eighty a humbled Moses was a shepherd working for his father-in-law when a day came that would once again change the course of his life.

God caught Moses’ attention with a bush that was burning but did not burn up. God called from the bush, “Moses! ... I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob... I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt... I have come down to deliver them... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (3:4ff).

Forty years earlier Moses had thought it was time to do something. Now was the time that God had chosen. Forty years earlier Moses had appointed himself. Now God was calling Moses to lead. Now Moses didn’t want to go.

In an effort to make his case that he just wasn’t the right man for the job, Moses presented God with a series of objections; but God’s truth and promises dispelled every objection.

Objection I:

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh...” — God, I’m just a simple shepherd “nobody.” How could I possibly be the one to do this?

stretch out My hand and strike Egypt... you shall not go empty-handed... you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

Objection #3:

Despite God’s promise that the people would listen to him, Moses objected: “But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’”

God’s Answer:

He provided Moses with three miracles as a powerful and visible testimony to the authority he had from God—his rod turning into a serpent, his hand becoming covered with leprosy (and then cleansed), and the changing of Egypt’s waters into blood.

Objection #4:

“O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

God’s Answer:

To Moses’ indirect criticism of his Maker, God replies, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?” But in view of Moses’ insecurity regarding his speaking ability, God adds the promise: “Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

Objection #5:

Running out of ideas and objections, Moses finally came out and said what was at the heart of each of his objections in the first place—he just didn’t want to be the person to do it! “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.”

God’s Answer:

The LORD’s anger was kindled against Moses and his unwillingness to serve; but again God answered Moses’ concern and equipped him by providing Aaron as a spokesman for him.

God’s additional Promise:

God assured Moses that the Egyptians who had been seeking his life forty years earlier were all dead.

Finally, Moses submitted to God’s will, sought a peaceful release from the work of his father-in-law, and began the journey to Egypt with his family. Once he arrived in Egypt, all that God had promised came to pass.

The Lord Is Guiding!

God assured Moses that the Egyptians who had been seeking his life forty years earlier were all dead.

The hand of God that brought Moses through eighty years of preparation and equipped him for the task at hand is the same hand guiding and preparing you and me. The truth stands: When the Lord calls, He also equips and enables those whom He calls.

There may be times when God will call us to a certain task or role and like Moses we won’t be particularly interested in going that direction. In such times, let us examine ourselves, not being deceived by excuses; let’s be honest, get to that last excuse first, and then repent for unwillingness while we gain confidence from God’s assurances and promises.

Remember, God won’t call you or me to do or face anything for which He will not equip us.

This is encouragement for called-servants who like Moses may wonder whether they are up for the task.

This is encouragement for the flocks whom the called servants serve—yes, your spiritual leaders are but earthen vessels (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7), but God called them. He will equip them.

This is encouragement in whatever

vocation the Lord calls you. There will be down days, doubts will come, but if the Lord has called you to that vocation, He will equip you and bless your labors.

This is encouragement when God calls upon us to suffer for His sake, when in His wisdom and sufficient grace He determines to allow thorns in our flesh, struggles small or great, many or few.

The path of life which God calls us to walk may prompt every excuse and

complaint from our flesh, but let’s remember—if God called us to this, He has prepared us and is equipping us to serve Him in every condition.

Like Moses, you too have a role to play in God’s work. He has and will continue to call you to those opportunities which He has in store for you. On the way to those callings be assured He will prepare you and will equip you as He continues to accomplish His Story for you and through you.

FOND DU LAC INSTALLATION New Pastor at Luther Memorial Church

Respectfully submitted

Jim Fillmore • Member of Luther Memorial Church

Greetings to my friends in Christ,

It started out like any January Sunday in Wisconsin. It was cold. But it was the first Sunday in the month so that meant that we would share Communion in our morning service. It was January 2, 2011, and we were going to install our new pastor that afternoon.

We here at Luther Memorial had been looking forward to that day for what seemed like forever. It was here and the Lord had provided a beautiful sunny sky with crisp, cold air, temperature about 4 above.

We all gathered at 3:00 p.m. for the installation of Pastor Neal Radichel. The church was warm and full of members, visitors, and family. The sermon that Vacancy Pastor Michael Schierenbeck shared with us was all about God’s love. His text was from Philippians 1:9-10, with the theme of “Send, O Lord, Thy Holy Spirit.” The main points of the sermon were 1) The best love, full of knowledge and insight; 2) The best decisions based on that love; 3) The best results of your work together—the glorification of God.

There were five pastors in attendance from visiting congregations, and the laying on of hands was also very edifying to all.

After the service we shared conversation along with goodies and coffee or juice. It was a wonderful way to start the New Year! If you are in Fond du Lac, please stop in and visit us.



From Left to Right: Pastors Wayne Eichstadt, Paul Krause, Neal Radichel, Michael Schierenbeck, Mark Bernthal, John H. Johannes

Christian Apologetics

SECOND IN A SERIES

James Arndt • Member at Peace Thru Christ Lutheran Church
and School - Middleton, Wisconsin

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...”

1 PETER 3:15



“No reason is so firm that it cannot be overthrown by reason.

There is no counsel, no matter how wise, no thing, no edifice, no matter how magnificent or strong, which cannot be destroyed by human counsel, wisdom, and strength. And this can be seen in all things. Only the Word of God remains to all eternity.”

BECKER, THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD

The Myth of Neutrality

I was in a discussion with an atheist and we both realized that the conversation seemed to be going nowhere. I had my beliefs and he had his.

To further the conversation, he suggested that we should both become neutral to our respective beliefs as our starting point for finding the truth.

That certainly sounded reasonable and fair, but let's consider whether neutrality is an attitude a Christian should take.

We are Christian. This means that God has a claim on us, not only because He is our Creator and we have been created in His image, but also because we are new creations in Him (Ephesians 4:22). As children of God, we desire to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

So a truly biblical apologetic will not “sanctify” (set apart) Christ *from* our hearts, but will rather set Him apart *in* our hearts (1 Peter 3:15).

Can it then make any sense to set aside God's authority as I attempt to defend Him? The answer is a resounding “No”!

While the believer is obligated to rely on God and His Word in all things, can the non-Christian be objective, neutral, and fair to God's Word? The apostle Paul

Unfortunately, some Christian apologists believe that neutrality is an acceptable starting point. They start with reason and logic, working from there to prove that Christianity is correct.

said that unbelievers “*suppress the truth in unrighteousness*” (Romans 1:18), “*they are without excuse*” (v. 20), with the result that “*they became futile in their speculations*” (v. 21), because “*they exchanged the truth of God for a lie*” (v. 25).

Because the fool does not believe in God (Psalm 14:1), his speculations will become useless. This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot reason—in fact, sometimes he can reason better than the believer and in very sophisticated ways. Yet it should be no surprise that the unbelieving mind will always lead the person away from God.

The non-Christian may claim that he will be neutral, even if the Christian cannot be, but that position is self-refuting.

If a non-Christian opponent claims to be neutral, he has taken the position that the Bible's claims—for example, that neutrality is impossible—are wrong... which is hardly a neutral position!

Unfortunately, some Christian apologists believe that neutrality is an acceptable starting point. They start with reason and logic, working from there to prove that Christianity is correct.

Such an approach is like trying to defend God's Word by throwing it away. Dr. Martin Luther put it like this: *No reason is so firm that it cannot be overthrown by reason. There is no counsel, no matter how wise, no thing, no edifice, no matter how magnificent or strong, which cannot be destroyed by human counsel, wisdom, and strength. And this can be seen in all things. Only the Word of God remains to all eternity.* (Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, NPH, Milwaukee, WI, 2009, p.37)

But do not think that there is no room for reason and logic in the Christian apologetic. It was also Martin Luther who mentioned (in his explanation to the First Article) that our mind has been given to us by God.

Yet it is a mind that is encouraged to “*hold fast to the faithful Word*” (Titus 1:9). God's authoritative Word is the beginning of our defense; we have no reason to hide this fact.

How reason and logic can be used in apologetics will be the subject of a future article. But for now there are two important truths to remember about Christians, non-Christians, and neutrality:

- 1) They're not neutral.
- 2) Neither should you be.



FOUNTAIN OF ETERNITY

Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

JUAN PONCE DE LEON

(whether he actually searched for the Fountain of Youth or not) will be forever remembered as the man who went on a futile mission. The search for eternal youth, whether in water or in an elixir of life, can seem pretty silly to us. Even the ancient Egyptians practiced the art of mummification in order to supposedly preserve the body for the after-life.

Today people are surely much more sophisticated and far too educated as to believe that such things could be found or thought to work, aren't they?

On a highway just north of our city there is a billboard which states – 45 going on 35; listed next is information on some laser plastic surgery available. Perhaps you have heard the commercials that have an ecstatic mother stating how often she is mistaken for her daughter's sister. Almost daily one is inundated with ads promising to erase age spots, reduce wrinkles, increase lost vim and vigor, keep one healthier and living longer. While life expectancy appears to be rising slightly these days, it's dwarfed by the 900+ average lifespan of our pre-flood ancestors.

Don't get me wrong, I believe it is important to take care of the gift of our body—we only get one. We should eat right and get plenty of exercise so we can be worthy instruments in the hand of our God.

However, since the fall into sin, we know that our physical journey from

the moment of conception marches relentlessly toward the grave. If then the heartbeat heard and felt in our body is simply mimicking the muffled drumbeats of a funeral march, it isn't difficult to see why so many try desperately to preserve or prolong their lives.

Yet, should our main aim and goal be to preserve and lengthen our lives for this world?

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the Lord in His mercy put them out of the Garden *"lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"* (Genesis 3:22). God did not desire that we live forever in this world in our sin. He had a much bigger and more visionary plan for us—that we live forever with Him in a perfect paradise!

But perfection cannot and will not tolerate imperfection. Since one flaw ruins perfection, how could sinful human beings ever hope to enter such a place of wonder?

Our heavenly Father would *give* us the perfection needed. Jesus, the Christ, our God/Man elder Brother, kept the Law of God for us, living in a perfect harmonious relationship with His Father.

Besides, God demanded payment for mankind's sins. If sinners were to escape hellfire, only blood, innocent blood, could pay the price. Every heinous act, every sinful thought, word, and deed had to be accounted for. Our righteous God unleashed His wrath upon the Lord

But we are born dead in trespasses and sins. How can we come to know and believe this wonderful gospel?

Jesus who hung on the cross in our place. What an act of wonder and love!

The Spirit at Work!

But we are born dead in trespasses and sins. How can we come to know and believe this wonderful gospel?

God the Holy Spirit brings us the good news of Jesus' sacrificial death in the Word of God and in Holy Baptism which is a life-giving water. By itself baptism is not some magical water that can cause our bodies to receive eternal youth, but through simple water used with the powerful Word of God we receive a miraculous rebirth of our spirit!

St. Peter tells us that the flood waters which rescued Noah and his family were saving waters. We in the New Testament have the anti-type (the real thing) *"which now saves us – baptism ... the answer of a good conscience toward God"* (1 Peter 3:21).

Speaking of the power of baptism, St. Paul says, *"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in the newness of life"* (Romans 6:3-4).

Since our baptism has already transported us through death, how could we ever be afraid of death itself? We have died with Christ and through



On January 23, 2011, Erica, Veronica, and Anthony Carter were baptized by Pastor Fleischer at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyo. Parents are Nick and Michelle Oulman who are taking Bible instruction classes.

our baptism we are new creations able to serve our Lord and live with Him forever!

As people of this world scramble about desperately in their attempt to delay the aging process, we know the true cure for the deterioration of body and soul. In fact, as our body ages, vigor leaves, and senses begin to fail, may we all be reminded of our baptismal grace, the covenant sealed to us by our Savior God.

God's grace, mercy, and love are eternal. What a wonder that even now we can start enjoying it while looking forward to the final consummation!

"Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children..." (Acts 2:38-39).

May that Holy Spirit richly bless and comfort each of us with daily remembrance of our baptismal grace.



The Japan Disaster — “What is Man...?”

Pastor Paul Fleischer • Cheyenne, Wyoming

My wife and I were privileged to visit the Hawaiian islands for the first time recently—in fact, just a week or so before the Japan catastrophies. The islands give abundant evidence of volcanic eruptions and lands formed at least to a degree by lava flows (yes, on one calm day a tour-guide warned of the danger of tsunamis!).

But one surely comes away from such a trip with great admiration for the beauty of creation, on the one hand, and with considerable respect for the destruction that “nature” can cause, on the other.

It was less than a week after our safe return (thank You, Lord!), that we witnessed those horrific scenes on our televisions with the earthquake(s) in Japan and resultant tsunamis (some minor ones also on Hawaii and the coasts of Oregon and California). In Japan thousands of people have perished—buildings, houses, cars, even sizeable boats and ships tossed about as toys by the careening waves.

One conservative news commentator was heard to say that witnessing these events makes man “appear insignificant.” We know what he means, don’t we? While the Creator God has given man “*dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*” (Genesis 1:28), these tragic events underscore how limited that dominion is. Simply put, man is far from being in charge or in control of what God has created and

over which He has ever since exercised sovereign control!

With all this, one Scripture that comes to mind is the eighth psalm. After extolling the glory of God on display in His creation, the psalmist goes on to ask: “*What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?...*” (8:3)

Man in his God-given dominion role has done and continues to do great and wonderful things. He has constructed supersonic planes to “touch the face of God” miles above and around the planet; he has built huge ocean-liners (including our cruise ship!) to ride the mighty seas; he has constructed nuclear powerplants, harnessing atomic energy for the use and betterment of society. And the list goes on and on....

Yet in the wake of what happened in Japan, one can only ask, “what is man” in the face of the “acts of



nature”?! And despite all man’s accomplishments, it is clear he is absolutely helpless and powerless when the earth quakes, the winds blow, the ocean waves and tides move.

Why is this so? What happened to mankind’s divinely-given dominion?

Why is this so? What happened to mankind’s divinely-given dominion?

Fore and Aft—A Spiritual Tragedy!

What happened is recorded for all to read in Genesis chapter 3! Mankind’s fall into sin was tragic both for himself (“...in the day that you eat of [the forbidden fruit] you shall surely die”—Genesis 2:17), and also for the whole of God’s perfect creation which (simultaneously with man’s fall into sin) came under the “*bondage of corruption*,” even as it “*groans and labors with birth pangs*” awaiting with mankind its ultimate deliverance (see Romans 8:18ff).

Here’s how one exposition of the eighth psalm puts it:

“Through the fall into sin mankind’s fellowship with God was broken, and their dominion over the universe was diminished. We can still use the intelligence God has given us to gain a partial understanding and control over the world in which we live. But human beings no longer have uncontested dominion over the earth. The peace which ruled in Eden is gone.... We are killed by our own machines and poisoned by our own pollution. Thousands of people perish in earthquakes and other natural disasters. Inevitably the day comes when each of us must return to the ground from which we were created” (The Peoples’ Bible, Psalms, Vol. 1, p. 65f). [To this commentary we could

PSALM 8

- 1 O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens!**
- 2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.**
- 3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,**
- 4 What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?**
- 5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.**
- 6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,**
- 7 All sheep and oxen—Even the beasts of the field,**
- 8 The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas.**
- 9 O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!**

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

add an observation of our own. The line “we are killed by our own machines and poisoned by our own pollution” is prescient of the disasters even now multiplying in Japan due to nuclear power—plants disintegrating and spewing out toxic atomic debris upon her people!]

It is sad—more than that, a spiritual tragedy—that so many (who experience firsthand such natural disasters or, if their life is spared, witness the same secondhand on television or skype screens) are inclined to do the opposite of what the Creator God intends.

What do we mean? This, dear reader: far from being accidental “acts of nature,” the groanings and upheavals within the created world should be recognized for what they indeed are: “acts of God” calling sinners to repentance.

The Creator/Redeemer God unleashes and allows such destructive events upon the human race as preliminary judgments upon a sinful, fallen world. All “acts of nature” are screaming attention-getters. They are precursors to one grand, cataclysmic event at the end of time: that final judgment, when Christ Jesus—who came into this fallen world to rescue and redeem sinners!—shall return to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). “...For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe

“He (God) has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

ACTS 17:31

Consider such Scriptures as: “*He who builds His layers in the sky, and has founded His strata in the earth; who calls forth the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth—the LORD is His name*” (Amos 9:6). At the same time, we find undying (!) comfort in the fact that “*the [same!] LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea*” (Psalm 93:4). The same LORD “*rule[s] the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them*” (Psalm 89:9).

And do consider the eighth psalm (cross-referencing Hebrews chapter two) most carefully. It makes crystal clear that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ of God. As such He was and is the world’s Creator who has “everything under His feet....” He, the eternal God, came into this world for the purpose of saving fallen mankind FROM the sin and evil of this fallen world and FOR the next, the paradise of heaven, where all His believing children live to praise Him for eternity—saying both NOW and THEN: “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

“*Praise the LORD!... Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word.... Praise the LORD!*” (Psalm 148)

is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:17f).

What has happened in Japan is a call to all people on the planet—not just those directly involved!—to repentance and faith in the one true and living God and His Savior—Son.



“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

Strong In Grace We Shall Prevail!

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

PLEASE READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13

In the final letter to his spiritual son and young assistant Timothy, the apostle Paul encouraged: “*Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*” (2 Timothy 1:6).

Such stirring comes from remembrance of the grace of God as well as from the exercise of faith which the Spirit of God has created in the heart. “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind*” (1:7).

It is the Spirit of God who makes one a bold witness to the love of God in the hostile environment in which the Christian is called to serve.

“*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God...*” (1:8). From his youth (1:5) Timothy had been blessed richly with the grace of God that brings salvation.

But with privilege and blessing comes responsibility. First of all, Timothy should hold fast to sound—wholesome—words, “*even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” (1:13). Only then could he “*commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2:2).

Previously Paul had admonished Timothy to “*wage the good warfare...*” (1 Timothy 1:18). Yes, every Christ-believer in general—and most assuredly every servant privileged to serve in the ministry of the gospel—is to exercise

himself in witness to Christ with the single loyalty and commitment of a good soldier.

No more than in apostolic times—but surely as much as then—we are engaged in warfare against the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. Our weapons are not carnal (fleshly), but spiritual. A good and faithful servant of the Lord witnesses to the grace of God as he wears “*the shield of faith*” to “*quench the fiery darts of the wicked one,*” at the same time as he takes “*the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*” (Ephesians 6).

A good soldier knows that—in the heat of the battle and despite many distractions—he must keep his focus on the task at hand. His life as well as the lives of his compatriots depends on it!

When any minister of the Word gives himself to such faithful duty in the Lord’s service, he pleases Him who has enlisted him as a soldier.

Further, the faithful servant of God will exercise “*an athlete’s rigorous self-discipline*” (Franzmann, *Concordia Bible with Notes*, p. 418). He will keep his eyes on the finish line.

The apostle Paul himself was an example of such discipline, even in the face of trials and affliction. He said, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Not by strength of his own but by the grace of God Paul prevailed. He attained the end of faith, which is the goal of every called child of God; upon persevering, he receives “the crown of righteousness” (4:8).

Faithful and Focused!

To this day Satan, world, and flesh strenuously attempt to obliterate the message of the gospel, to destroy the child of God, turning the heart of a called servant from the holy task assigned to him.

However, they who are faithful and focused know the ultimate reality: “A jest and by-word are they grown; God is with us, we are His own; Our victory cannot fail” (TLH #263:3). It cannot fail as one stands “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1)

St. Paul further encourages, “The hardworking farmer must first partake of the crops.” The farmer’s faithful and

strenuous efforts will bear fruit which he himself is the first to enjoy. Even as the seed sown by the farmer and tended by him bears fruit in rich measure, so God’s Word—the gospel message—which is faithfully planted bears fruit under the Spirit’s blessing.

It is a joy to behold as sinners in repentance and faith express confidence in the Lord and His Word. Even more will be the joy as the servant of the Word and those to whom he had brought the message stand together before the throne of God on the great day of salvation in eternity.

Paul said, “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2:10).

The apostle was given assurance of the prevailing grace which sustains the believer and the servant of God in times of personal stress and trouble

(2 Corinthians 12:9). The same all-sufficient grace of God has drawn us to Him. Through that grace those who stand fast in faith are assured: “If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him” (2:11).

As we are faithful to Him unto death, we shall live with Him. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2:12). His grace is sufficient for us!

God forbid that we should deny Him or that we should be faithless and consequently be denied by Him. Shall we sin or be less than faithful that grace may abound? No way! (Romans 6:1) But thank God for the comfort of His grace. “He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2:13).

As was the case with his mentor Paul, even so the personal life of Timothy—as well as his faith and his ability to endure hardship in his ministry—was all a consequence of the grace of God dependent upon the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That message Paul preached faithfully.

Opposition to the Word could still the voice of Paul, but it could not still the voice of the Lord. To this day that voice yet prevails through faithful witnesses who, like Timothy, heed the voice of the apostle and, taking their faith and their responsibility seriously, stand “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:2).



Let a man examine himself...

Continued from Page 4

Savior, Jesus. When we do that, what do we find?

We find a perfect substitute! Jesus was our Substitute under the Law of God and obeyed it perfectly. “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” Jesus asked His unjust accusers (John 8:46). He became our Substitute for sin, for our LORD “laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). For all our unholiness the holy God took out His just wrath on His holy Son. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13).

Yes, when we “examine” Jesus, we find the perfect Lamb of God who by His innocent death on the cross has taken away all our sins!

It is this Savior who invites us to “take and eat” of His body given in the bread and to “take and drink” of His blood given in the wine.

What an amazing gift—our Savior’s very body and blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins!

What comfort and assurance for the trembling sinner!

So then, as we see those confirmation students in our congregation squirming in their seats as they prepare to examine themselves, remember that the Apostle Paul exhorts each communicant to continue to examine him or herself at all times, and particularly in preparation for Holy Communion.

And yes, we may well squirm as we see our sin. But as penitent sinners we can relax and rejoice in the forgiving grace of our Savior who gives us His body and blood in the Sacrament!

In the refrain words of one of our Communion hymns:

**LORD, MAY THY BODY AND
THY BLOOD BE FOR MY SOUL,
THE HIGHEST GOOD!**

TLH #315

Announcements

West Central Delegate Conference • May 24-26, 2011

Grace Lutheran Church, Valentine, Nebraska - **Agenda:**

1. Overview/Review of *The Lutheran Study Bible* (2009) and the ESV translation (pamphlet to hand out) – Pastor James Sandeen
2. Devotional study of a chapter of Isaiah – Pastor Matthew Gurath
3. How members and ministers can assist those struggling with addictions – Lay-Delegate
4. How God’s Word directs us to do mission work – Pastor Mark Gurath
5. Is it God-pleasing to make a vow to God when asking Him for help in times of need and trouble? – Pastor Michael Roehl
6. The role of a pastor and to what extent he serves his membership in the political sphere – Pastor John Klatt
7. Messages and exhortations to today’s Christians from the Minor Prophets – Pastor James Naumann
8. Essayist’s choice – Lay-Delegate

Communion service speaker: Pastor Andrew Schaller • Conference Chaplain: Pastor Mark Gullerud

Great Lakes Delegate Conference • June 6-7, 2011

Messiah Lutheran Church, Hales Corners, Wisconsin - **Agenda:**

1. Review of Romans 13 in regard to a Christian’s place under the government – Pastor Paul Krause
2. Involving the newly confirmed in congregational life – Pastor Bruce Naumann
3. Evaluation of “Tent Ministry” – Prof. Paul Schaller

Conference service speaker – Prof. John Reim • Conference chaplain -- Pastor Michael Eichstadt

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Announcements

CLC GENERAL PASTORAL CONFERENCE

Immanuel Lutheran College

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

June 14-16, 2001

Agenda:

- Update on Current Theological Issues in American Lutheranism, With a Focus on Former Members of the Synodical Conference – Pastor Delwyn Maas
- Attending Religiously “Affiliated” Schools: A Pastoral Perspective – Pastor David Schierenbeck
- New Testament Exegesis (1 Thessalonians 4:13ff) – Pastor Caleb Schaller
- A Study of Forgiveness as it Relates to the Lord’s Supper – Professor Steven Sippert
- Becoming a More Effective Preacher – Pastor Paul Nolting
- Why Young People Are Leaving the CLC (Survey/Study) – Pastor Paul Naumann
- Old Testament Exegesis (Joel 2:28ff) – Pastor Paul Krause

Chaplain: Pastor Richard Kanzenbach

Communion Service Speaker:

Pastor Norman Greve

Communion Service Liturgist:

Pastor David Schaller

Program Committee:

Pastors Edward Starkey & David Baker

Excuse Committee: Pastor Lawrence Bade

Organ Coordinator: Pastor John Klatt

About the Rizpah Painting

The painting was created by Chantal Baros an award winning muralist, teacher and fine art painter. The Rizpah painting is part of her *Women of the Bible* series Thank you, Chantal, for sharing your work with our readers this month.

Send your photos and art (in digital format) to mschaser@sbcglobal.net and we'll consider them for use in future editions of the *Lutheran Spokesman*.



Lutheran Spokesman

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

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