

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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

CONFIRMATION

“...And indeed we thank
and praise God that He
has worked such faith in the
hearts of these young people,
and in our own hearts as
well. It is all to the praise
and glory of the Savior.

We are reminded
repeatedly that none of
this could happen in our
hearts and lives without
the Holy Spirit,
*‘for it is God who works in you both to
will and to do for His good pleasure.’”*

Philippians 2:13

“JOY TO THE WORLD, THE SPIRIT’S COME”

(Text: Pastor Bruce Naumann; sung to the tune of TLH #87; see devotion, p. 9)

I.

Joy to the world, the Spirit’s come!
Thus we receive our Lord.
His pow’rful Word prepares Him room,
For His great gifts outpoured,
For His great gifts outpoured,
For His, for His great gifts outpoured.

2.

Joy to the Earth, our Comforter
Turns darkened hearts to light.
The soul once lost in sin and shame,
In Christ is pure and white,
In Christ is pure and white,
In Christ, in Christ is pure and white.

3.

He works in us the fruits of faith
And marks us as God’s own.
In bless-ed Word and Sacrament
His saving work is done,
His saving work is done,
His saving, saving work is done.

4.

Praise we the Holy Spirit’s Name!
His favors we adore,
With God the Father, and Christ His Son,
Now and forevermore,
Now and forevermore,
Now and, now and forevermore!



Our Spiritual Life Comes From Christ

Pastor Theodore Barthels • Austin, Minnesota

*“I am the vine, you are the branches.
He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit;
for without Me you can do nothing.”*

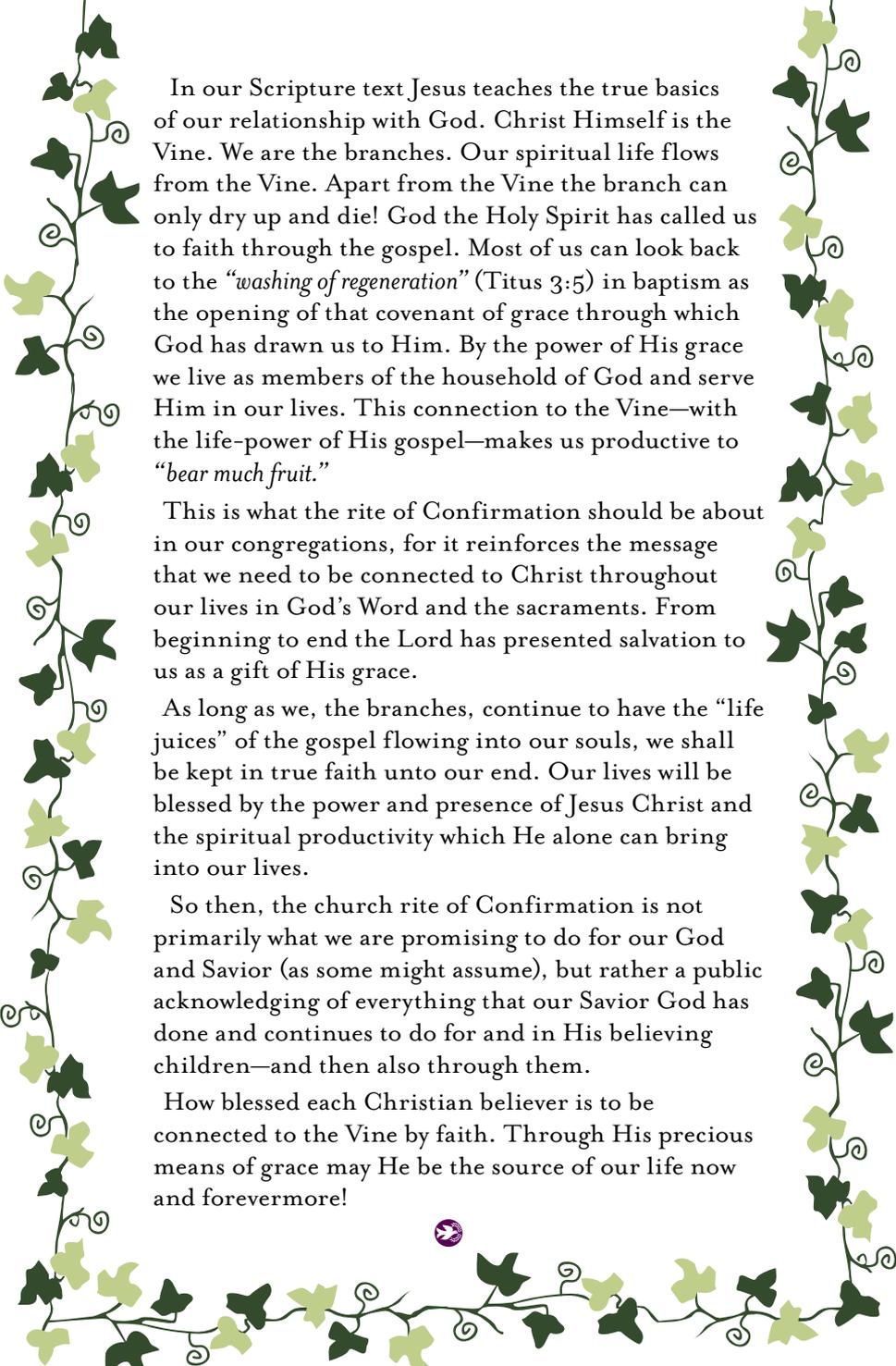
John 15:5

Each spring many of our congregations enjoy the special blessing of observing a new class of confirmands witness to the truth of Christ which abides within their hearts. They join in renewing the baptismal covenant which they entered (most often in infancy).

The Confirmation rite is a blessing for the entire congregation because it leads us all to consider anew the blessed covenant of our salvation leading to eternal life.

However, it is also an excellent opportunity to recall that this is a covenant of grace. We hear the young confirmands state their agreement with the Holy Scriptures, confessing that all the Word is the truth of God. We hear them promise to abide in that truth and not depart from it. We hear them pledge their faithfulness to their Lord and His Word even unto death. One might think, “What marvelous, heartfelt dedication!”

And indeed we thank and praise God that He has worked such faith in the hearts of these young people, and in our own hearts as well. It is all to the praise and glory of the Savior. We are reminded repeatedly that none of this could happen in our hearts and lives without the Holy Spirit, “*for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13).



In our Scripture text Jesus teaches the true basics of our relationship with God. Christ Himself is the Vine. We are the branches. Our spiritual life flows from the Vine. Apart from the Vine the branch can only dry up and die! God the Holy Spirit has called us to faith through the gospel. Most of us can look back to the “*washing of regeneration*” (Titus 3:5) in baptism as the opening of that covenant of grace through which God has drawn us to Him. By the power of His grace we live as members of the household of God and serve Him in our lives. This connection to the Vine—with the life-power of His gospel—makes us productive to “*bear much fruit.*”

This is what the rite of Confirmation should be about in our congregations, for it reinforces the message that we need to be connected to Christ throughout our lives in God’s Word and the sacraments. From beginning to end the Lord has presented salvation to us as a gift of His grace.

As long as we, the branches, continue to have the “life juices” of the gospel flowing into our souls, we shall be kept in true faith unto our end. Our lives will be blessed by the power and presence of Jesus Christ and the spiritual productivity which He alone can bring into our lives.

So then, the church rite of Confirmation is not primarily what we are promising to do for our God and Savior (as some might assume), but rather a public acknowledging of everything that our Savior God has done and continues to do for and in His believing children—and then also through them.

How blessed each Christian believer is to be connected to the Vine by faith. Through His precious means of grace may He be the source of our life now and forevermore!



Where is Heaven?

Pastor Mark Gullerud · Bowdle, South Dakota

Forty days after His resurrection Jesus made His triumphant return to heaven.

At an elevated place on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12) the apostles witnessed the extraordinary, supernatural sight of Jesus being “*carried up into heaven*” (Luke 4:51). They saw Jesus rising bodily from the Earth to disappear from human view as “*a cloud received Him out of their sight*” (Acts 1:9).

According to Holy Scripture and as confessed in the three ecumenical Christian creeds (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian), at Jesus’ ascension He “*sat down at the right hand of God*” (Mark 16:19). Having completed His earthly mission of vanquishing sin, death, and the devil for us, Jesus assumed His exalted position of power, might, and dominion to rule over everything and everyone for the sake of His Church of believers (Ephesians 1:20-22).

This wonderful, governing oversight of the Savior that serves for our spiritual and eternal good includes His preparing a place for His believers in heaven so that where He is, there they may be also (John 14:3).

But where is heaven? We picture heaven as being “upward” because Jesus went upward into the sky. But the sky is not the heaven where God dwells with the angels and the souls of departed believers. That’s just the atmosphere through which the clouds float (Job 38:37), out of which rain and snow descend (Isaiah 55:10), and in which birds fly around (Job 35:11). Another “heaven” is outer space which contains the countless stars and constellations (Isaiah 13:10).

The heaven into which Jesus ascended and where He sat down at the right hand of God the Father is to be found neither in Earth’s atmosphere nor in outer space; in other words, heaven is not part of our finite universe (so man will never be able to use a space probe to discover the place where Jesus and all His believers are).

Where then is our heavenly home? The heaven into which Jesus ascended is not in space at all, but in a spirit realm invisible to human eyes.

Now, when Jesus descends bodily to our planet on Judgment Day (Acts 1:11) for everyone to see (Revelation 2:7), the Lord is going to bring about a glorious change in regard to the heavenly realm and the believers' existence there. After this present Earth and the heavens above have been burned up with a fervent heat, the Lord will bring forth a new Earth and new heavens (2 Peter 3:10-13; Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1).

What will it be like to live on this new Earth? Having been raised with glorified and perfected bodies on Judgment Day (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:43-53), believers will live in a heavenly realm which has none of the sin-caused problems found in this present world. They will dwell in the presence of God where there are pleasures forevermore (Revelation 21:1-7). This new and perfected Earth will be the believers' heavenly home throughout all eternity.

Praise be to the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus who through His work of redemption has made it possible for us to look forward to this new heavenly world yet to come!



PENTECOST DEVOTION

The Age of Miracles

Pastor David Fuerstenau · Ketchikan, Alaska

**Who would not like to see or experience a
no-sham, no-scam miracle?
Or even perform one?**

This longing seems to be part of our human nature. Pharaoh, the unbelieving Jews, and Herod all wanted to see some great sign, and Simon the sorcerer was willing to pay money to be able to exercise the power of God (Acts 8:18).

Christianity is the religion of miracles, and without them it cannot stand. We know Jesus' earthly life involved them (His incarnation, virgin birth, transfiguration, resurrection); during His earthly ministry He did many miraculous signs—all providing proof that He is the Son of God and the Christ, with the power both to heal bodies and to forgive sins.

Likewise, power was given to Jesus' disciples to heal (some even before Pentecost). After Pentecost, the Book of *The Acts of the Apostles* is filled with accounts of miracles done by those who walked the Jesus Way. Peter and John healed a cripple in the name of Jesus Christ, even as "*through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people*" (Acts 5:12). Philip performed miracles among the Samaritans. The apostle Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, struck Elymas the sorcerer blind for "*perverting the straight ways of the Lord*" (Acts 13:8). In Acts chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas healed a cripple and were acclaimed as gods; but the apostle begged the people to turn to the Living God, the Creator of all, and not to them as mere men. Later, the congregation at Jerusalem heard Paul's report on the "*many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles*" (Acts 15:12). Some were not spectacular, as when articles of clothing that had touched Paul's body were taken to the sick, after which "*the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them*" (Acts 19:12).

Truly, the time after the event of Pentecost was the age of miracles. We might think, "If only we could have lived during that golden age!"

There seems little doubt that these physical miracles tapered off dramatically after the days of the apostles. If they were done to establish the early Christian Church by substantiating God's Word and showing the power of Christ Jesus—dead, but now arisen!—then we can understand why such miracles are no longer needed. We have Holy Scripture as power and proof enough.

But hold on. This is still the New Testament age of Pentecost! And did not Jesus promise that the person who believes in Him will do greater works than He Himself did? Indeed He did! "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the work that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father*" (John 14:12).

It's important to keep in mind that these "*greater works*" done by any Christian are miracles done in the realm of the spiritual. Lazarus being physically raised from the dead by Jesus was a great miracle, but all people are by nature spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, and to be brought to life and fellowship with God, to be reborn a new creature by the Holy Spirit is a "great work" for sure,

a flat-out miracle! And the Savior said Christian believers can do them—even more than He Himself did while He walked on Earth.

Proof? After Peter preached one Pentecost sermon, 3,000 souls were brought to faith by the power and grace of God (see Acts 2). The other apostles and evangelists likewise proclaimed the gospel of the living and exalted Savior, and the Christian Church spread among the Gentiles like an unstoppable prairie fire.

Yes, it is still the age of Pentecost. The gospel is still the power of God unto conversion and salvation, for it is the tool of the Holy Spirit. Christian friend, proclaim the gospel and then stand back—ready for a miracle of grace, for God’s Word never returns empty to Him but always accomplishes His purposes (see Isaiah 55:11). All it takes is Christian people eagerly wanting to be involved in bringing sinners to Christ—in seeing hard hearts of stone turned into repentant hearts—redeemed, justified, and alive in Christ Jesus to the glory of God.

But let’s take care not to get caught up in ourselves. Have you ever seen self-proclaimed miracle workers do their stuff on TV? With great fanfare they shout at the sick, sometimes pushing and punching them with such force that they fall backward to the floor. It seems that the “miracle-worker” is willing to receive credit for some claimed healing.

Remember how Moses did that one time (see Numbers 20)? He shouted and struck a rock twice when God had told him to simply speak to the rock. Water came forth. Yet because Moses did not give all the credit to God but claimed some for himself, he was not allowed to set foot inside the promised land of Canaan.

So we are instructed to simply speak the Word and to give God all honor and glory; then be prepared to see how the Holy Spirit sends the water of life flowing from Jesus, the Rock of our salvation, into thirsty souls.

Fellow Christians, let’s be about this blessed work. After all, it is Pentecost, the age for such miracles!



**But let’s take care
not to get caught up
in ourselves.
Have you ever seen
self-proclaimed
miracle workers do
their stuff on TV?**



The Holy Spirit's Christmas

Pastor Bruce Naumann • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Wouldn't it be nice to have Christmas twice each year? We all love the traditional food, carols, and decorations that go with the season. Giving and receiving gifts is nice too, and remind us of the greatest Gift which God gave when the Christ Child was born.

Still, even if the Father had given His Son to us, and Jesus had given Himself for us on the cross, but if all this had been hidden from us, we would never come to know and believe in Him. In that case, all would be for nothing.

Pentecost is typically as far away from Christmas as we can get on the annual calendar. Yet we have a wonderful reason to celebrate on this day—the day on which the gifts of faith and eternal life were delivered in a special, personal way to Jesus' Church.

In fact, Pentecost could rightly be called “The Holy Spirit's Christmas.”

People sometimes ask: “But wasn't the Holy Spirit always there?” Of course He was; He was present at creation and throughout Old Testament times. But then, so was Jesus—as the pre-incarnate Christ. And just as Jesus was given in a special, personal way to the world at the first Christmas, so the Holy Spirit came in a special, personal way to believers on the first Christian Pentecost. [The Jewish Feast of Weeks/Pentecost was chosen for the “outpouring”—when many people from foreign lands would be in Jerusalem to witness the Holy Spirit's Christmas. – Editor]

There are many parallels between these two holy days. Just as the prophets announced the coming of God's Son in Old Testament times, so the arrival of the Holy Spirit was foretold. In Joel chapter 2 the Lord announced “*I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.*” And as with

the arrival of God the Son, so the arrival of the Holy Spirit came with astounding miracles.

The festival of Pentecost did not come with a star rising in the east, but rather it came with tongues of flame and the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. Though there was no chorus of angels over the fields of Bethlehem on Pentecost, we do hear of the apostles proclaiming the wonderful works of God in languages they had never studied. Their “*gloria in excelsis Deo*” (“Glory to God in the Highest”) was the great Good News of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

What would a holiday celebration be without gifts? With the birth of Jesus, God gave us a Child of hope, a Keeper of commandments on our behalf, and a Sacrifice that fully paid for all our sin-guilt, as well as a resurrection that guarantees our own.

With the special arrival of God’s Holy Spirit, these precious gifts are delivered to each one of us and made our own by faith.

Who was it, after all, who caused the Bible writers to pen the words of Scripture so we can believe?

Who was it that was sent to be our Comforter, a deposit and guarantee that we belong to the true God?

Who is it that sets us apart from the unbelieving, sinful world by bringing light to our dark hearts?

Who is it that works and strengthens faith in us through God’s Word and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper?

The answer to each of our questions is God’s Holy Spirit, whose special day we celebrate fifty days after Easter each spring. We depend on Him to make God’s grace our own, for “*No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Yes, we are quite a few months away from the Christmas season. Yet this day of the outpouring of the Spirit is no less joyful, for it is through Him that Jesus and all the gifts He brings are personally delivered to us.

And so a very blessed Pentecost, the “Holy Spirit’s Christmas,” to you!



The festival of Pentecost did not come with a star rising in the east, but rather it came with tongues of flame and the sound of a mighty, rushing wind.

Thank You, Father, for Mother

CDS Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

“Respect Your Mother” is a very nice sentiment—until it appears on a bumper sticker next to a graphic of planet Earth!

(I don't mean to suggest we shouldn't appreciate the wonderful gift planet Earth is, but to respect it as my Mother? No way!)

Mothers are God's instruments to produce life. While males of our species make a genetic contribution to their offspring, it is the women who have been divinely ordained to be carriers of life. They nurture life within their bodies during pregnancy. They have the ability to feed their young after they are born. Is it any wonder that throughout the ages mankind has marveled at and even deified this miraculous production of life? (“Mother Earth,” for instance, has been worshiped and revered in many forms from antiquity. Mother goddesses are prevalent, if not universal, in man-made religions and cults.)

Early societies of human beings saw such goddesses as sources of the “life-force,” fertility, and maternal instincts. Many today continue this idea, even returning to the worship of Gaia—“Mother Earth.” Although once thought of as an actual personal entity, she is now respected by many as the Gaia Hypothesis—the idea that the Earth is an integrated whole, a living being—and that the forces of nature, as well as the creatures of nature, must work in harmony to achieve an equilibrium that all can live with.

In Romans chapter one, the apostle Paul by divine inspiration has something to say about all this. He warns of the coming wrath of God on those who suppress the truth and give glory and credit to the creature rather than to the Creator. He teaches that those who have rejected the knowledge of the true God are futile in their thoughts, their hearts are darkened, and God has given them over to vile passions and debased minds.

Is it any wonder, then, that in the minds of many “saving the planet” starts to replace the protection and rights of the individual? Is it surprising that along with “equal rights” for women has come the denigrating of Motherhood to “just a housewife” or “just a mother”?

With the blurring of gender lines and rejection of the headship principle, the door has been opened for same-sex marriage (whereas traditional marriage is regarded as an outmoded human tradition). Even the children of our next generation are being sacrificed on the altar of self-indulgence through abortion.

Adam—as the first man, created by God—knew his life began as a creation of our heavenly Father, the LORD Jehovah God. Adam also knew his wife was created from himself, declaring, “*This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.*” And Adam knew that God's promise to “*be fruitful and multiply*” would be accomplished through his wife; thus he gave her the name Eve, “*because she was the mother of all living*” (See Genesis chapters 2-3).

When we want to honor and revere something, we should be sure about the object of our reverence. We also want to be sure to give credit to whom credit is due. Mothers and motherhood ought to be honored and respected, and we hold these in esteem because we understand the true source of these blessings.

Motherhood is not simply a natural evolutionary result of biological processes.

Being a wife and mother is not the result of man's desire, design, or proposition.

God instituted marriage.

God designed motherhood.

God creates mothers—and gives them children.

What a joy and privilege to respect and thank not only our mothers for their selfless service and sacrifice, but also the Giver of these blessed ones—our heavenly Father!

Listen to a portion of the Lord's own description of the virtuous wife and mother. “*She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her...Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised*” (Proverbs 31:27-28,30).

Take time this Mother's Day to thank your mother.

Be sure to thank and praise the blessed mother of your own children as well.

And remember to thank the Giver of all life, our heavenly Father!

Being a wife and mother is not the result of man's desire, design, or proposition.

“For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught...” (TITUS 1:7FF)

Life In the Gap

Pastor Emeritus Warren Fanning • Sun City, Arizona

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 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. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you. (TITUS 2:11-15)

After their fall into sin Adam and Eve were unable to think about any grace from God. In fear they ran and hid from Him (Genesis chapter 3). Yet notice how Adam quickly thought of himself as some sort of "god"—even developing his own theory of "justification" (but not by grace through faith alone!).

Conscience does that—it causes one's sin(s) to require a scapegoat. And Adam made not just one but two, putting the blame on both God and his wife, saying in effect: "The woman You gave me, she caused me to sin!"

Conscience causes that in all of us. In order to get some sense of absolution and peace, we blame someone or something else, all the time, every day!

God actually already had a scapegoat in mind—His own dear Son! Completely undeserved by mankind, and beyond mankind's wildest imagination, Jesus would be the embodiment of divine grace.

We find the grace of God in many passages in the Old Testament. And then in the New Testament He appears in Person, bringing salvation to all mankind. Born of Mary, Jesus goes to the cross as the Scapegoat—the blame—for all our sins. Then He rises, ascends, rules now over all of us, and will come again—in a "*blessed hope and glorious appearing.*"

We now live in the gap between Jesus' first appearing and His final appearing. We realize that His first gracious appearing has taught us many things. It's a long list: how to believe; how to worship, pray, and sing; how to attend the Sacrament properly; how to read and understand the Bible; how to have a generous spirit; how to live purified lives; how to see our future in heaven; how to die.

And much more!

In all those things we are passive participants, God working them in us. His grace trained us, and still trains us. He takes us by the hand and leads us.

And in between weekly worship services He leads and trains us in other things. The passive existence becomes active: how to deal with the nasty world around us; how to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; how actually to do good works; how to act as God's own dear children; how not to accuse others for our own sins; how to be zealous to please God; how to do mission work in our own town and neighborhood as well as overseas; how to speak the truth in love with directness and tenderness; how to rebuke with kindness; how to organize our life and help our congregation do things in an orderly way; how to dispel fuzziness and muddled thinking as we make plans and carry them out.

The list goes on.

There should be no reason why living in the gap means the gap cannot be filled with things we actively and actually do as believers in our Savior, from Sunday to Sunday.

So, in this gap let's stop kidding ourselves. Let's stay in God's gracious training! And fill the gap!

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

"As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household."

(Martin Luther)

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

By way of introduction, isn't it a remarkable privilege that you were born into a Christian family? From the moment of conception you were swaddled in warm love; for nine months your mother protected you from carcinogens and pathogens; she nourished you with her own blood. God used your mother

The Fourth Commandment

You shall honor your father and your mother that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not despise nor anger our parents or superiors; but we should honor, serve, and obey them, and give them love and respect.

and father to splice together your unique genome sequence, making you an individual never before seen on Earth.

Mom and Dad appreciated that you were a special gift from God to them; they welcomed you into the human family—and when you entered God’s family through Baptism-adoption, He turned you over to Mom and Dad’s tender, loving care.

How were you brought to appreciate God—if not through your parents? How were you brought to understand that your childish anger or envy or other sinful passion was due to your natural, human sinfulness? Who then helped you in your need for Jesus by laying Him into your repentant heart? Who watched over your spiritual ups-and-downs, steering you around the pitfalls of childish ignorance and hovering over you during your turbulent teenage years? Who deserves your thanks for both gentle and tough love?

You get the point.

Your Christian parents have earned whatever thanks you can find in your heart to give them. That’s why the commandment, “*You should honor your father and your mother*” is not a cliché but half of a contract. Since your parents have kept their part of the contract, have you kept your part by honoring them? God is giving you a wonderful privilege; don’t let your opportunity languish.

Note: In the Fourth Commandment God shifts from the vertical dimension of our relationship with Him to the horizontal dimension of our relationships with humans.

Did you also note that in this commandment the tone shifts from threat to promise? In contrast to the appalling threat that “*the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain*” (Exodus 20:7), in this commandment our heavenly Father offers an appealing incentive.

For the first time in the roster of the Ten Commandments God offers a generous incentive for our compliant obedience. Following directly upon our marching orders comes this stimulus: “*that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth*” (Ephesians 6:1-4). As much as to say: “When you honor and obey your parents, I will see to it that you get loaded with high-quality personal and national blessings for your earthly pilgrimage.”

God is so generous! Besides asserting that compliance is *right* in a qualitative way, God adds His promise to reward compliance in a quantitative way.

What does this mean? It means that God intends to load His dear children with layers upon layers of physical, emotional, moral, and social benefits during our lifetime on Earth—largely dependent on the way we treat our parents. God uses the Christian home to nurture the next generation to Christian maturity.

Conversely, our country is in a mess because of the demise of the Christian home. When parents defect from God, their sinful lifestyle is absorbed as normal by their children, and then each succeeding generation becomes more habituated to living in unrepented sins. Sodom and Gomorrah didn't get that way by happenstance—but rather by children learning a lifestyle from their parents.

“What goes around comes around” reflects the sobering reality that God is “*a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me*” (Exodus 20:5). Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind, indeed (cf. Hosea 8:7)! And that's really scary.

What's to be done for our nation? Since God is not finished with humanity yet, we are banking on His promise to show “*mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments*” (Deuteronomy 5:10). The way we figure it, His remedy will start in Christian homes as godly parents raise godly children.

And that, in turn, depends on godly attitudes between spouses. “*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them*” (Colossians 3:18-19).

This godly commitment of spouses to one another will be carried over into the way they treat their God-given children: “*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged*” (Colossians 3:21); “*but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4).

It comes full circle; when spouses love and serve each other and love their children, then the children are brought to love and honor their parents as God's representatives, and then God rewards with blessings during their tour of duty.

Dear Father in heaven, we pray that Your will be done with us (and through us) in the Christian family that You have given us; through Jesus, Your Son and our Savior. Amen.

“The Works That I Do In My Father’s Name, They Bear Witness Of Me.” (John 10:25)

Jesus Cares For Body and Soul!

Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer • Spokane, Washington

Please have your Bible open to the Gospel of John chapter 5:1-16.

Imagine for a moment that back in in the year 1975 you took sick with some debilitating illness and for the last thirty-eight years you have been unable to find any relief. What would make your desperate situation even more discouraging is the knowledge that there is a specialist at the hospital right down the street who has an opening on his schedule—but you can’t find anyone to take you to see him.

What a helpless and depressing situation!

Imagining such a situation might help us understand what the man in our text had been going through. The evangelist John reports that for thirty-eight years “a certain man” suffered from a debilitating “infirmity” of some kind. And then consider that this poor man was within reach of relief from his illness, but he had no way of grasping it.

You see, in the city of Jerusalem a sort of hospital or infirmary had been set up at the pool of Bethesda. Many sick people were brought there to lie in the shelter of five porches built near the pool. Whenever the waters bubbled up, the sick were placed in the water, and God caused them to be healed.

Having been sick for thirty-eight years, the man did not have the strength to get his weak body off his mat and into the water. And what had to be even more disheartening is that no one there would help him into God’s healing waters at Bethesda.

No one, that is, until Jesus arrived. Jesus helped the man in a way no one else ever had or could. *“Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.”*

In just an instant Jesus, the Great Physician, overcame what had been plaguing the body of this man for almost four decades! His withered and weakened body was immediately restored so that not only did he have the strength to walk, but he also had the strength to carry the very bed to which he had been confined for so many years.

This was truly a miracle—that is, something that doesn’t occur naturally

but requires the divine power of Almighty God. Such power Jesus as the Son of God possessed.

But there is more! As is often the case, the Great Physician was interested in more than caring for physical or bodily needs. He cared for both body and soul. Having taken care of the man's physical infirmity, Jesus later found the man in the temple and told him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (v. 14).

"Worse...?" What could possibly be worse than suffering from a crippling illness for so many years? Well, what about the everlasting "infirmity" of hell?! In that place of torment there will be found no patio awnings to give shade from the wrath of God nor pools of water to give relief from hell's scorching fire!

The Lord Jesus did not want a "worse thing" to come upon this man, nor does He wish such a thing to come upon us. Therefore He warns about the reality of sin and calls one and all to repentance.

But, dear reader, Jesus does more than warn us—much more! Quoting from the book of the prophet Isaiah, Matthew writes of Jesus, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). The holy Son of God took our sin upon Himself, in His body, and suffered that "worse thing" on account of our sin. On Calvary's cross Jesus suffered the wrath of God and the pains of hell in order to redeem and rescue us from sin and its consequences!

Fellow Christians, Jesus' healing of this sick man proves both that He is God and that He has the power to take away the spiritual infirmity of sin! As the Great Physician of body and soul He provides instant and immediate healing also to our souls through His word of forgiveness.

Hear the crucified and risen Lord say also to you, "See, you have been made well...!"

*Jesus, grant that balm and healing
In Thy holy wounds I find,
Every hour that I am feeling
Pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil thought within
Tempt my treacherous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning
Keep me ere its first beginning. Amen.*
(TLH #144:1)

The Beauty and Joy of Christian Fellowship

Pastor Emeritus David Lau • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

(Last of eight installments)

We have seen how believers in the Messiah in Old Testament times experienced **the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship.**

Of course, we find such moments of beauty and joy in Christian fellowship in the New Testament also. We have already mentioned the fellowship enjoyed by the post-Pentecost congregation at Jerusalem. The same unity in the fellowship was enjoyed in Antioch of Syria where the followers of Jesus were called Christians for the first time. The congregation at Antioch was not begun by the apostles but by scattered Christians who had fled to that city to escape the persecution in Jerusalem that had brought about the death of Stephen. *“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). Some of them, *“when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number*



believed and turned to the Lord”
(Acts II:20-21).

This was something new: a congregation made up of both Jews and Hellenists (Greeks). The congregation in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help the congregation, and Barnabas soon found Saul of Tarsus (Paul) to help him. The congregation grew rapidly, and they had five pastors.

What a great picture we have of Christian fellowship here! Jews and Greeks together, freely talking about Jesus Christ to their

neighbors and friends, listening to God's Word as expounded to them by such pastors as Paul and Barnabas, and the Holy Spirit blessing their testimony by adding more persons to their number. The book of Acts goes on to show how this Antioch congregation sent Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to places that had not yet heard of Christ. When they returned, the congregation in Antioch gathered to hear their report. *"They reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles"* (Acts 14:27).

Nothing gives Christians more joy than bringing the good news of Christ to others and observing the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing others into the flock. For the circle of Christians gathered around the Word of God is not a closed circle, seeking to keep others away, but in the spirit of Christ wanting to have others experience what God has given them—the **beauty and joy of Christian fellowship**. Therefore they keep sowing the seed of the Word and watering the soil, trusting that God will give the increase, as He has promised.

As an example of the mutual love and friendship exhibited by the early Christians, consider the scene at Miletus when Paul said farewell to the leaders of the Ephesian congregation. *"And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed*

with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him" (Acts 20:36-37). A similar incident took place in Tyre a few days later. Luke, Paul's companion, described it this way: *"When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our peace of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home"* (Acts 21:5-6).

It is true that there were internal problems among the early Christians because of sin. Even Paul and Barnabas had a serious falling-out when they disagreed in their judgment concerning John Mark. Was Mark qualified to be an associate missionary or not? Barnabas said he was, and Paul said he was not, and so the two went their separate ways, but this disagreement did not terminate their Christian fellowship. Paul continued to consider Barnabas his fellow-missionary, and later he even changed his mind about Mark, writing to Timothy: *"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry"* (2 Timothy 4:11).

As long as Jesus, their Savior from sin, remained their Head and His Word their infallible guide, their problems could be resolved. When Christians together confess their sins and are willing to bow together to the Word of God in everything

that it says, they can and they will experience **the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship**.

All of us who trust in Christ as our Savior are in the fellowship with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and with the Holy Spirit who lives and works within us. This remains true regardless of outward circumstances, whether we are all alone or together with thousands of others. Having fully completed His work of redeeming mankind and having risen from the dead, our Savior ascended to heaven while lifting His hands in blessing. As believers in Christ we are on the receiving end of this blessing, which is ours now and will be ours until we enjoy that perfect bliss with our God in the new Paradise.

It is an added blessing when we are enabled to sit together with other Christians on the hillside of life and as Jesus' true disciples listen together to the words of our Master: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are*

you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:3-12).

There was perfect joy and beauty in Eden. We praise God for the momentary glimpses we have of what the new Paradise will be like in **the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship** that our gracious Lord already now permits us to experience, though imperfectly. We look forward to the perfect joy and beauty in the new heavens and the new earth that God is preparing for His people.

For *“thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, My servants shall eat. ... My servants shall drink. ... My servants shall rejoice. ... My servants shall sing for joy of heart. ... For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people”* (Isaiah 65:13-19).



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: As this series has now concluded, we thank David Lau for an edifying review of the biblical doctrine of Church Fellowship, particularly as we have been helped to see again how the doctrine “plays itself out in a practical way” within God’s family of Christian believers. To Him all praise and glory!

IMMANUEL — GOD WITH US

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer · Oakdale, Minnesota (written after graduation 2012)

Recently we enjoyed one of the highlights of each year—the closing concert of our CLC’s Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire was filled to capacity with worshipers who had the distinct privilege to hear both the student body choir and the tour choir lift up in harmonic cadence hearts and voices that proclaimed the love of God. There is no greater music than that lifted in praise to the God of our salvation.

Over the years this writer has been an unabashed and unapologetic supporter of Christian education in the home, the church, and at Immanuel. The concert simply verified the blessings of an education that has the Word of God at its center and Jesus Christ at its core. The well-presented concert speaks well to the dedication of director and students, but the beauty of each concert lies in the message.

In one of the highlights of the spring concert, the alumni are invited to join with the student body in a long-standing tradition. Across the large chancel area students and former students rose to sing the stirring hymn, *Christ is our Cornerstone*—grandparents, parents,

and children together singing praise to the Savior!

The next day, graduation day, the campus fieldhouse was filled front to back and side to side. Graduates who completed their respective courses of study were recognized and applauded. They are the magnet that draws the throng.

Again, the beauty of the graduation is that God’s grace is proclaimed in spoken word and song. The assembly praised the Lord who by His Word has given the children a new birth in baptism and nurtured them for heaven through His Spirit.

We recognize the blessing of God who has taken young children and fashioned them into mature Christian adults during their years on campus. The students were sent forth, but not with pious platitudes, for Immanuel graduates were addressed from Scripture which speaks realistically to the human condition, to the grace of God as well as to the challenges that lie before them—particularly challenges to the faith as they live and work in a deteriorating and godless society. They were reminded that they are not alone in their walk, for the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will lead them, and they will be blessed as they heed His voice and follow Him.

He leads them through this life,
seeks them out when they fall, and
ultimately leads them to the life
that transcends anything else that
people find precious in this life!

We who are one in faith and
hope are one fellowship in Christ.
May our gracious God preserve
it among us! The gathering at
Immanuel is one happy family
reunion of former graduates and
families from across the country.
It is a family reunion of friends
who are bound in common faith
with common purpose and hope.
What a treasure the Lord has given
us in our school where so many
friendships have been fashioned!

We wish and pray that every
parent in the CLC would
appreciate the privilege and
the blessings an education at
Immanuel provides for their
children. We wish that every
parent and child of the CLC
would share the emotion of
being able to sing as do they who
have experienced the blessings
acknowledged in Immanuel's *Alma
Mater* tribute:

*Nestled in the quiet beauty
Of the tall green pines
God has set our Alma Mater
Guiding hearts and minds.
Built on Jesus' words of promise
O Lord, bless her well.
Thus may e'er our Alma Mater
Be Immanuel.*



ANNOUNCEMENTS

West Central Delegate Conference May 28-30, 2013—St. Luke's Lutheran Church Lemmon, South Dakota

Agenda Items:

- + Examining the Distinction Between Outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Regeneration – Pastor James Sandeen
 - + Comparing the Two “Givings” of the Holy Spirit with the Reformed’s Two Baptisms – Pastor Mark Gurath
 - + The Advent of Social Networking: How to Witness Effectively – Lay Delegate from St. Paul, Lakewood, Colo.
 - + Why Young People are Leaving the Church and What can be Done to Address This? – Lay Delegate from Valentine, Nebr.
 - + Exploring the Modern Doctrine of “Tolerance” and How It is a Danger to the Christian – Pastor Michael Roehl
 - + A Review of the Doctrine of the Divine Call – Pastor James Naumann
 - + When, if at all, does the Sin of Despising the Means of Grace become a Matter of Public Church Discipline – Pastor Mark Gullerud
 - + The Work of the Board of Elders (Helpful Ideas on Handling Church Issues Today) – Pastor John Klatt
 - + Encouragement for Small Congregations and their Pastor as their Membership Declines and Some of the Pastors Need to Find Supplemental Employment – Pastor Frank Gantt
 - + Devotional Study of a Section of Scripture (essayist’s choice) – Pastor Paul Fleischer
- Communion Service Speaker: Pastor Luke Bernthal
Conference Chaplain: Pastor Rick Grams
—Pastor Frank Gantt, Secretary

Minnesota Delegate Conference

June 16, 2013 (3:00 p.m.)

Immanuel Lutheran Church Mankato, Minnesota

Agenda Items:

- + CLC Board Reports
- + Evangelism—a Biblical Perspective
- + Evangelism—a Congregational Approach
- + Discussion of Memorial on Lay Participation in Conferences and Conventions
—CDS Teacher Chad Seybt, Secretary

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLC General Pastoral Conference

June 11-13, 2013

Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wis.
Study Papers:

- + Communicating to Our Members that We Live in a State of Grace – Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer
- + Appreciating and Using the Blessings of Church Fellowship (not the separation principle) – Pastor Vance Fossum
- + Review of Koehler's essay: Legalism Among Us – Pastor James Sandeen
- + "Sexual Abuse" – Pastor Paul Nolting
- + New Testament Exegesis: 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff – Pastor Aaron Ude
- + Visitors' study paper: Purchase of Goods at Fundraisers
- + Listening to God's Word, Listening to Our Families, Listening to our Members – Pastor David Reim
- + Old Testament Exegesis: Joel 3:1ff – Pastor Norman Greve

Chaplain: Pastor Matthew Ude

Service Liturgist: Pastor Mark Tiefel

Service Speaker: Pastor James Albrecht

Music Coordinator: Pastor Paul Schaller

Program Committee: Pastors Paul Krause, Caleb Schaller, David Schierenbeck

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