

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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

THANKSGIVING 2013



“Oh, Give Thanks to the LORD...!”

Pastor Mark Gullerud · Bowdle, South Dakota



“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever!”

is a familiar prayer expressing our thankfulness to God for the food with which He has blessed us and reminding us to give thanks to God.



Such reminders are always in place because, quite frankly, we don't always remember to return thanks to God. I am not just talking about thanking Him for food, but also for the countless blessings He graciously pours out upon us every day. Because of our forgetfulness and our tendency to take things for granted, we are apt to be like the nine lepers who, after being healed by Jesus, did not return to thank Him (see Luke 17:12-19). LORD, have mercy upon us for not thanking You as often as we ought!

The prayer “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” is found in a number of psalms (see psalms 106, 107, 118, and 136). Please take your Bible and read Psalm 136. Do you notice how many times the psalmist encourages his readers to give thanks to the LORD? Why is this? Is it perhaps because we need to be repeatedly reminded to give thanks to the LORD for all His goodness towards us?

A striking feature about this psalm is the refrain at the end of each verse. The worship leader would speak the first part of the verse, and the congregation would respond with “For His mercy endures forever.”

God the Holy Spirit's decision to repeat this refrain so often was no doubt intended to drive home to the worshippers—and to us—that all our blessings from God are due to His undeserved lovingkindness.





**I am not just talking about thanking Him for food,
but also for the countless blessings He graciously
pours out upon us every day.**

The psalmist's recounting of God's merciful hand at work from the beginning of the world up to the time of Israel's taking possession of the promised land helped Old Testament believers be mindful of the LORD's great power, wisdom, love, and faithfulness in attending to their every need in both good times and trying times.

How helpful to keep in mind that God not only created the world and everything in it, but that He is ruling over all things for the benefit of mankind. Contrary to what many suppose these days, it is not a fickle "mother nature" but the Creator who is governing nature. God blesses us with favorable conditions for a bountiful harvest or He sends weather that can have a devastating effect. In both cases God in His infinite wisdom knows what is best for us, for we often need the chastening hand of God to humble us and draw us ever closer to Him.

Let us keep these things in mind as we make our way through the wilderness of this world. God is faithful in attending to all our needs of body and soul until, by His grace and mercy in Christ Jesus, we cross over into the promised land of heaven.

*"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever!"*



Readiness for Christ’s Return in Glory

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt, Mankato, Minnesota



A large percentage of Christians today are Millennialists, eagerly waiting for Christ to return to establish a thousand-year reign on the Earth. This expectation also includes false teachings such as a “rapture” of believers and a “battle of Armageddon” (to name but two).

This millennial outlook concerning the end of time is not supported by Holy Scripture. As all other false teachings, millennialism robs Christ of His glory and His believers of comfort and peace.

Which glorifies God and gives believers comfort—anxiously watching the Middle East as one looks for signs to indicate Christ’s return to the region, OR simply trusting the eternal Son of God’s promises that He will come without signs or warnings?

Which glorifies God and gives believers comfort—waiting for a Savior to establish a temporary reign on the Earth, OR waiting for a Savior who teaches that His kingdom is not of this world (cf. John 18:36)?

Which glorifies God and gives believers comfort—a series of circumstances dependent upon earthly events, OR the simple messages of our Savior in Scripture in which He teaches that He’s coming again, that we should be always looking and ready for Him, and that His return will usher in eternal life?

Bible truth concerning the End Times is really quite simple and straightforward. Jesus said, “*I go to prepare a place...I will come again and receive you to myself*” (John 14:2-3). After Jesus’ ascension the angels said: “*This same Jesus...will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:11).

Since all of the events foretold in Scripture that precede Jesus' return have been fulfilled, Jesus could return at any time. Jesus said He will come without warning—like a thief in the night (cf. Matthew 24:36, 1 Peter 3:10). In contrast, a “rapture” [snatching away] of believers off the Earth would provide a warning to all who were left behind.

The Apostle Paul, by God's inspiration, provides an account of how events will unfold on the Last Day: *“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ [His believers] will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17), after which Jesus will separate believers and unbelievers and declare their standing with God and eternal judgment (cf. Matthew 25:31ff).

As believing children of God we encourage one another to be prepared for Jesus' return. But what exactly does “being ready” involve?

Readiness for Christ's return means standing fast against the skeptics who say, “Where is the promise of His coming?” As encouragement against such doubt and skepticism, Peter reminds us that while we are creatures bound to—and often slaves of—time, God is not. *“...With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”* Peter also tells us why Jesus seems to delay His Second Coming: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:4ff).

Readiness for Christ's return means ongoing repentance—recognizing the seriousness of our sins, having a godly sorrow over them, and trusting that Jesus has redeemed us and set us free from our sins. *“...Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts...put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”* (Ephesians 4:22ff).

Readiness for Christ's return is being watchful, expecting that He could return at any moment of any day. He could come before you finish reading this devotion. Similarly, our death could come at any moment of any day. So whether we die in the Lord first, or Jesus returns

first, readiness means expecting it any time. “*You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night... Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober... putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation*” (1 Thessalonians 5:2ff).

Readiness for Christ’s return means being good stewards of what Christ has given us, using the various talents and resources

for the work of His kingdom, doing all things to the glory of God.

“*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1). “*Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

We are living in the last days of this Earth, and those days aren’t attractive: “*...In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power*” (1 Timothy 3:1-5).

Yet, children of God, rejoice! Find comfort in the truths of God concerning the End Times. Yes, as the hymn says, “The world is very evil, the times are waxing late” (TLH #605:1), but Jesus, your Redeemer, Lord, and Savior, has all power in heaven and on Earth.

His promises stand, and He is coming back. Be ready! “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*” (Revelation 22:20)

*O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God’s elect!*

*O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!*

*Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest,*

*Who art with God the Father
And Spirit ever blest.*

(TLH #605:5)



Appreciating, With Thanksgiving, the Gifts We Have

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer · Oakdale, Minnesota

As children of God we have been richly blessed. If we have to ask how we have been blessed or how richly, that indicates we are taking those gifts for granted.

Above all, we thank God the Father for His love in Christ Jesus. The precious gospel of salvation in Jesus is our greatest blessing, the most secure and enduring. Our salvation is rooted in Christ and His cross; it is sealed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We have the promise that not one of His sheep shall be snatched from Him (John 10:28), and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

However, the love of God does not insulate us from the trials and afflictions of this life. Our Lord Jesus has opened the way to the Father so that we can pray, *“I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your Word”* (Psalm 119:107). In times of trial God’s grace and the love of Jesus our Savior give us hope and sustain us.

The salvation-love of our Father is the foundation of all His promises and blessings. The same Father sends sunshine and rain and causes the fruits of the earth to grow. It is He who gives the ability to study, learn, invent, and prosper. The gifts of the Creator God are *“...richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all my property and all I need to support this body and life...”* (Luther’s explanation of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed).

For all this we give thanks as we confess, *“God gives daily bread without our asking, even to unbelievers....”* Since He clothes the flowers, feeds the beasts of the field, and cares for the birds, *“Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows”* (Luke 12:7).

Do we appreciate how blessed we are? Shall we complain when things seem to be against us? The great hymnwriter, Paul Gerhardt, understood:

**God oft gives me days of gladness;
Shall I grieve If He give Seasons, too, of sadness?**

**God is good and tempers ever All my ill, And He will
Wholly leave me never. (TLH #523:3)**

When is the last time you or I were thankful for something so mundane as new undergarments or even for the darkness in which to sleep in one's own bed? In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, when survivors were sheltered in a large open "dormitory" in a coliseum under the continual glare of lights, a little girl asked for help to find a school lunch bucket; one man came looking for a Bible Concordance; another man came specifically to give an emotional "thank you" to the volunteers who had helped him. When he left, he laid his hand on my arm and said, "God bless you." One lady who was loading her things into a car said, "God has His reasons for things. One day we will know. God is good."

The Lord does work according to His plan and for our good. When we forget or take things for granted, He gives reminders of how richly blessed we are. "Natural" disasters give us the opportunity to help people who have lost all their belongings. The Word of God is true: "*One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses*" (Luke 12:15). Nevertheless, the Lord gives us what we need for our sustenance and maintenance.

As Luther puts it, let us "receive with thanksgiving our daily bread" (Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer). Let us appreciate the Lord's advice when He says, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:19-21).

All are blessed and may be at peace who—having received all blessings from the Father with thanksgiving—in faith count the blessing of eternal life in Christ the best of all. Although Paul Gerhardt lived under great afflictions, he appreciated his great blessings:

**In yonder home doth flourish My heritage, my lot;
Though here I die and perish, My heaven shall fail me not.
Though care my life oft saddens And causeth tears to flow,
The light of Jesus gladdens And sweetens every woe. (TLH #528:10)**

Help us, O Lord, to be thankful Christians. Amen!



“Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

(DEUTERONOMY 8:3, ESV)

“Please Pass...the Word!”

Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer · Spokane, Washington

**It’s just not Thanksgiving without football?
While it might be missed, we could enjoy the festival
without watching a game.**

**What about celebrating Thanksgiving Day
without family around?**

**Or what about a Thanksgiving observance
without the smell of cooking turkey?**

Fellow Christians, let’s be real.

**The one thing we truly need for Thanksgiving
is the Word of God!**

Moses reminded God’s Old Testament people, the children of Israel, of this very thing as they were poised to enter the promised land of Canaan. For forty years every Sunday through Friday morning the Israelites would step out of their tents to find their daily bread right there on the ground in the form of manna. This was not bread for which they had labored, but was provided every day *“that [God] might make known to [them] that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”* (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Though we don’t step outside our front door every morning to pick up a basketful of manna for the day, we are just as dependent on the LORD as were the Israelites.

What if God failed to keep even one of the following promises: *“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease”* (Genesis 8:22)? *“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Matthew 5:45)? *“He...*

supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food..." (2 Corinthians 9:10)?

If God did not keep His Word, the annual seasons with sunshine and early and latter rains would cease—and there would not be even one crescent roll on our dining room tables. Without the Word of God and His promise to provide for all, there would be no Thanksgiving—and there would be no us. Therefore, let us give thanks for the promises of God's Word which assure us that He supplies everything included in our "daily bread"!

But it is not only our physical bodies which are fed through the Word of God. Our faith in Jesus Christ and the certain hope of an eternal feast with Him in heaven are nourished with every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17). *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"* (John 5:24).

Faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin is the result of God the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through His Word. We have the hope of eternal life in heaven because God has revealed Jesus to us as *"the Way..."* (John 14:6).

Therefore, as part of our thanksgiving celebration we give thanks for the Word of God, but we also will want to FEAST on that Word!

Jesus is the divine Word made flesh (John 1). As we observe Thanksgiving, let's keep in mind that we have something more beneficial than mere "manna." Jesus says, *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world"* (John 6:51). By faith we have Jesus, the Bread from heaven, which gives us life eternal!

Thanks be to God for His Word which provides daily bread for both body and soul! Amen!

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THE EPISTLE OF PHILEMON

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, 2 to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, 5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, 6 that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. 7 For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. 8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— 10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, 11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. 12 I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. 14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. 15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. 20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. 25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

TENT MAKER / HOME BUILDER

(First of three: Philemon 1-7)

Pastor Emeritus Warren Fanning • Sun City, Arizona

The apostle Paul who wrote this brief epistle was a tentmaker by trade. He might have been trained by his father in the family circle. He probably went through the training stages—of apprentice, journeyman, then master—having served under a master himself, perhaps his father. Paul would have agreed with Luther's comment on the Fourth Commandment: "...that we do not despise our parents and

masters...but give them honor...serve and obey them...and hold them in love and esteem.” We know those words well, and also realize that we have been in servitude to masters all through our lives. Think “schoolmaster” and “homework.”

His work involved making portable canvass shelters, also possibly portable enclosures for animals and shops for tradesmen.

This seems to have been the apostle’s main business, though a sideline business (so to speak) of persecuting Christians began to occupy much of his time. A member of the Jewish Council in Jerusalem, Saul (who would become Paul) had been a strict Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin. He had no love for Christians.

That was the case until he met Jesus, who led him to take up another business. It had to do with homes, but it was mainly that of meeting in homes to talk to people about Jesus Christ, building them up in Him by conducting instruction classes and Communion services. In that way the apostle was “building” dwellings for God and believers, with the Word of God being his tools and building materials.

Paul seems to have met Philemon in Ephesus. Philemon later on moved to the city of Colosse with his family and servants and established a church in his home there.

The reason for this particular epistle (letter) is that one of the servants (Onesimus) had stolen some money or goods from Philemon’s house and ran away. He ended up in Rome—in the company of Paul in prison—and was there converted by Paul.

In this special letter Paul doesn’t jump right into the delicate matter of returning the slave, in spite of a sense of urgency. Rather, he begins with factors that will mean so much to a converted Onesimus; he refers back to the warm and generous spirit of Philemon and his family; he speaks of their love for the Lord Jesus, and His for them, and their willing service to Christ and to fellow-believers. They were homebuilders themselves!

It is this atmosphere which Onesimus needed. Paul felt he must send him back and dearly wished that Philemon would accept his return.

Paul doesn’t come across as a harsh taskmaster, but as a good master of his Christian profession. And we see that Philemon has somewhat of a reputation for being a kind and warm man—that’s what the name “Philemon” means—to all the believers in his area.

This name, and that home, will be the perfect tarp [tarpaulin, a durable protective covering] for Onesimus.



*"As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household."
(Martin Luther)*

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Prof. Joseph Lau • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Our local newspaper has a regular feature which uses symbols on a city map to indicate where crimes have been committed. This allows the public to “see” what crimes have been committed in different neighborhoods. It is not uncommon that certain neighborhoods have many symbols, but others have few.

If God were to have such a crime map, what would it look like? Let's explore that question in connection with the Seventh Commandment, which is part of the second table of God's holy law and deals with our responsibilities toward all our fellow human beings, our “neighbors.” The purpose of the commandment is to protect both our own and our neighbor's property.

In reality, we are only stewards of the things we possess, for God as the Creator owns everything. *“The earth is the LORD's and all its fullness...”* (Psalm 24:1), yet God allows us to possess things here on Earth. Through employment He allows us to earn money to buy things. *“And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...”* (Deuteronomy 8:18). Sometimes we acquire possessions through inheritance or through gifts. These too are gifts from God.

How often have we stolen from God by not making use of His many gifts to us? How often have we used our gifts of money, time, and talents to bring glory to ourselves rather than to God? In other words—what does our neighborhood crime map look like? *“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

One reason God gives us gifts is that we can help the needy

The Seventh Commandment

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, nor get them in a dishonest way; but we should help him to improve and protect his property and way of making a living.

(especially those in need of the message of the gospel). What does self-examination reveal in this regard? Have modern-day con-artists made us cynical towards the poor? Have we become weary of being taken advantage of? *“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* (1 John 3:17). Again—what does that neighborhood map look like?

What about cheating? I try to get the students in my class to think of cheating on schoolwork or on taxes as stealing. Using another person’s answer is stealing God’s gift to them and not using God’s gift to you. Allowing someone to cheat off of your work is stealing as well—stealing the opportunity of another to learn.

There may be excuses for not wanting to pay taxes, and it’s easy to rationalize cheating on our tax returns. Remember that Jesus was speaking of the wicked Roman government when He said, *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...”* (Matthew 22:21); so what about that neighborhood map where you live?

When it comes to employers and employees, have we ever succumbed to the temptation to steal from them? Have we ever failed to truly earn the wage that our employer has paid us—either by slacking off or by taking advantage of them? Please refer to Ephesians 6:5-9.

With this self-examination, I trust you would agree that theft is an ongoing problem in our “neighborhood,” whether in our homes, schools, or places of work. We ourselves are guilty of disobedience to this Commandment, for our often discontented hearts have desired what is not our own, and our hands have taken them.

**How often have we
stolen from God by
not making use of His
many gifts to us?**

Let us daily give thanks to God that through His Son, our Savior, we have come to know that life here does not consist in the abundance of the things we possess (Luke 12:15). We are also blessed to know that it is only because of Jesus’ perfect fulfillment of God’s holy Law—and His atoning sacrificial death for our sins!—that we poor sinners can look forward to heavenly riches in the “crime-free neighborhood” that is our heavenly fatherland.

"...The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me."
(John 10:25)

The Widow's Son at Nain

Pastor Thomas Schuetze • Coloma, Michigan

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. (LUKE 7:11-17)

While wandering around the grounds of a state fair recently, I came upon a small tent decorated with blinking lights where an old man was speaking into a microphone: "Five dollars...for just five dollars you can see the most rare and amazing sight in all of nature...a two-headed turtle."

I doubt that many people came from far and wide to see that turtle.

When people heard about the truly amazing things done by Jesus of Nazareth, they came from far and wide to see Him. But Jesus didn't call upon His disciples to set up a tent; neither did they prepare miracle-worker signs in hopes of drawing crowds. After all, the eternal Son of God did not enter the human race to be a sideshow. He came to redeem sinful humankind.

Jesus performed miracles both publicly and privately. Those miraculous deeds were not intended to convert those who witnessed them but rather to bear witness to Christ's divine Person and Word.

This particular miracle is recorded only in the Gospel of Luke.

**...the eternal Son of
God did not enter the
human race to be a
sideshow.**

As Jesus and His disciples approached the city of Nain with a large crowd in tow, they met another multitude making its way out of the city—the funeral procession of a young man, the only son of a widow.

There is no evidence that this widow had ever seen Jesus or even knew anything about Him. Nothing is said about her faith or about the faith of anyone in the procession. We are simply told that Jesus saw the widow and had compassion on her.

Neither the widow nor her deceased son merited this intervention by the Christ. This miracle would happen because Jesus had compassion on the widow and her son.

In fact, Jesus controlled the entire encounter; He urged the widow to stop weeping; He stopped the funeral procession by touching the coffin; He spoke to the corpse, urging the young son to rise up.

Who can speak to a corpse and get results? Jesus, the Son of God, can!

The no-longer-dead man was the next to speak, though what he said is not revealed. Then it is reported that Jesus simply presented the revived youth to his mother. We aren't told her reaction, but she most likely reacted with amazement and great joy.

How did this miracle affect those who saw it? The Spirit of God tells us that "*fear came upon all.*" Although everyone was impressed, it seems that there were two different reactions to the miracle. On the one hand, some concluded that Jesus was a great prophet raised up by God. On the other hand, others saw the miracle as evidence that God had "*visited His people.*"

This miracle confirmed that Jesus is the Son of God. It also shows vividly that Jesus came to have compassion on all sinners, both on those who have already heard His Word and on those yet to hear it.

This miracle also serves to comfort us in the face of death. Jesus has the power to raise the dead. He promised before His own death and resurrection that because He lives, we will live also (see John 14:19). The same Jesus who spoke to a dead man outside the city of Nain will one day call you and me forth from our graves.

When we are raised, however, we will not resume living in this sinful world; instead, we will be raised and glorified forever with the Lord! Hallelujah!



GOD'S OBSCURE SAINTS

(Third in a Series)

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

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (ACTS 6:1-7)

I come to you in Jesus' name, and I bring to you God's Word:

In order to help prepare our hearts and minds for meeting five of God's obscure saints, I ask you to picture a Christian congregation with thousands of communicant members, dozens of adult instruction classes going on, served by twelve senior associate pastors. Adult conversions and baptisms are so numerous that it is hard to keep track of each new member, many of whom are foreign-born and don't speak your language. Some recent converts live in the ghetto or a slum; they have no income, decent housing, or grocery money.

Back at the mission compound, people arrive in droves for Bible study and worship, while the kitchen turns out hundreds of meals every day, with more meals-on-wheels going out on routes around the city for those who could well starve if not for the love of their generous brethren.

That's the picture in Jerusalem in 37 A.D., and even at this distance we are thrilled to hear of it—except for one scene that strikes a sour note: *And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a*

murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

What happened was this: Greek-speaking members, particularly widows, were being overlooked on the food-mobile routes. Nobody had intended to bypass these widows, it's just that in such a large congregation even twelve pastors could not keep on top of every potential problem. This particular problem needed to get solved, for how Christians treat one another inside a congregation is crucial; how we conduct ourselves toward our fellow-Christians is fully as important as how we conduct ourselves in the world at large.

The Jerusalem pastors and elders came to realize that a loving adjustment had to be made—so *“the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”*

Evidently it happened that when the pastors came to the communal dining hall to visit with their brothers and sisters in Christ, they were sidetracked into waiting on tables—which is OK if nothing else suffers. In this case, however, the pastors were falling behind on their house-calls to new members in the suburbs.

Now, waiting on tables and doing secretarial duties and office functions are important, as are handling business and financial matters and technical support. But loading all that on the pastor can be detrimental to the well-being of the congregation. He should be using his special training in areas that the average church member can hardly be expert at—the ministry of the Word in serving as spiritual shepherd.

The Jerusalem congregation realized what their options were and what the Lord wanted them to do: *“And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Simon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.”* They picked men who spoke Greek (note their names) and would have no language barrier in reaching and helping those Gentile widows; that was a smart move, and we have every reason to believe it proved effective.

They nominated seven, but take away Stephen and Philip and that still leaves five of God's saints; they were capable men, dedicated, fully qualified both at to their spiritual and mental abilities, but from here on they fade into the obscurity of congregational life.

Does God have obscure saints nowadays, and are they found today in our own congregations? We bear in mind that a Christian congregation is a family of men, women, and children who pool their talents so as to do the best job they can in carrying out their heartfelt desire to serve Christ. That means lending a helping hand to free the pastor from the physical jobs that go along with maintaining the congregation.

Prochorus, Nicanor, Simon, Parmenas, and Nicolas are still with us, though now they have English names. They serve on congregational boards and committees; they are our delegates to conventions; they step up and volunteer for the menial and often unthanked jobs of scrubbing, shoveling, washing, mowing, painting and decorating; they stop by to visit the widow or widower, the aged and infirm; they take time to listen and counsel one-on-one; they are our friends.

Today their names may be Jerry and Tim and Greg, for they are you! With you saints on the job, your pastors won't be overburdened and be nudged into neglecting their primary calling. With you members in the pews and behind the scenes, the blessed and holy work that your hands can handle will get accomplished.

God bless you one and all as you prepare for and perform the labors of love (in our congregations and synod) that are lovingly and thoughtfully delegated to God's obscure saints. Amen!



Calvary Lutheran, Marquette, Michigan, hosted the Great Lakes Pastoral Conference October 1-3, 2013. Aboard the Isle Royale Queen III on Lake Superior are (front) Pastors Thomas Schuetze, Michael Wilke, Neil Radichel, Lawrence Bade; (back) David Schaller, Joel Fleischer, Walter Schaller, David Pfeiffer, Mark Bernthal, Paul Krause, Bruce Naumann, Michael Eichstadt, Richard Kanzenbach.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In our Reformation issue last month we took a look at three of the people who preceded the Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546). This month we share three more vignettes of those who might be called "forerunners" of the Reformation, for through them the stage was set for the gospel of Jesus Christ to break free from a cold and corrupt church, once again taking its rightful place at the center of Christian teaching. These vignettes are adapted from the CLC webpage with daily devotions available at www.redeemerclc.info/devotional.html.)

Forerunners of the Reformation

The Death of John Huss (1369-1415)

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them" (Luke 21:12-13, NIV84).

Like Christ, His apostles would also be abused, arrested, and falsely accused before civil authorities. But in the end, even the shameful treatment of Christ's men would serve to bring the gospel to more people.

After being excommunicated for opposing the Roman Catholic Church's selling of salvation by way of indulgences, John Huss went into hiding. But Huss genuinely wanted the conflict to be healed and the truth of God's Word to be taught.

Therefore, when Emperor Sigismund asked Huss to appear at the Council of Constance, Huss said he would be there. The emperor had convinced Pope John XXIII to call this council to end the papal schism which had resulted in three popes, each claiming supreme authority in the church.

Huss traveled to Constance trusting the emperor's promise of safe conduct to and from the city and hoping to speak to reasonable men. He would be disappointed in both points.

After arriving in Constance, Huss was detained by representatives of the church and held in the dungeon of a Dominican monastery. Though the emperor was furious at how the church had ignored his promise of safe conduct, he chose not to act on Huss' behalf, fearing that the council would break up and leave other issues unresolved.

After a mock trial, Huss was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake.

Remarkably, Huss told his judges that he was willing to change if corrected by the Bible. Like the Apostles, Huss was blessed with the honor of proclaiming God's truth before men of high authority.

Even while dying, Huss continued to proclaim the name of his Savior. Before the wind shifted and the flames enveloped him completely, Huss was heard repeating this prayer:

"O Christ, Thou Son of God, have mercy on me."



Jerome of Prague (1379-1416)

"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother...first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (John 1:40-42).

Andrew seems a quiet fellow. With a brother like Peter, we don't wonder why. Yet Andrew was given a job to do in God's Kingdom work, as are all followers of Christ.

Peter would play a huge role in the establishment of the New Testament church. But it was quiet Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus in the beginning. I would imagine that most of the great figures of church history had their "Andrews" too. Huss certainly did.

Years after the corrupt church burned John Huss as a heretic, Martin Luther would read his work "On the Church." Upon completion Luther exclaimed, "Without being aware of it, I have hitherto proclaimed and contended for all the doctrines of Huss...we are all Hussites without knowing it; in the end Paul and Augustine, too, are Hussites to the letter."

So what about Jerome of Prague? He introduced John Huss to the writings of an earlier student of the Bible, John Wycliffe. Though he would never know the man, Huss would be greatly influenced by the teachings of Wycliffe. But it was Jerome of Prague who introduced Huss to Wycliffe's teachings in the beginning.

Jerome would eventually face the same death as Huss. Imprisoned, abused, and condemned by the church, Jerome of Prague was burned to death on the same spot of ground where Huss had left this world.

Jerome was little remembered outside of his time. He is still little appreciated by the children of the Reformation. But this "Andrew" was greatly loved by Christ and given a role to play in preparing the world for the Reformation.

Are you a Peter or an Andrew? A Huss or a Jerome? Either way, dear Christian, your Savior has a role for you to play too. What is your role?



Peter Waldo (d. 1218)

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people”
(Revelation 14:6).

Lutheranism has traditionally seen Martin Luther as a fulfillment of this angel. Of course, Martin is not the only fulfillment of this image. The vision of God's messenger hovering out of harm's way and continually proclaiming the Good News is fulfilled whenever the gospel is spoken by God's people.

Peter Waldo and his followers remind us that the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ will prevail, being preached and proclaimed in every age until we see our Savior's face on the day of judgment and salvation.

Peter Waldo was a merchant who worked in Lyon (France). He learned of the gospel and cherished its message greatly. He had the New Testament translated into the language of the people and began to distribute copies of the New Testament. He also began preaching the pure gospel of Christ to his fellowmen. He organized a society to further the gospel and broaden the distribution of God's Word.

Waldo's mistake came when he asked the Pope to confirm the Bible society that he had established. In 1179, Pope Alexander III confirmed Waldo's vow of poverty but forbade him to preach. Needless to say, Waldo continued to proclaim the eternal gospel of Christ.

Eventually Waldo and his followers were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church for their "heresy" and persecuted greatly. The blood of the Waldensians fell heavily on the ground as many thousands were burned or slaughtered for preaching salvation through Christ. But this only caused more "angels" of God to be scattered throughout Europe, bearing the eternal light of the gospel.

My fellow "angels," by the grace of God, we bear that same light of salvation through Christ. Let us cherish it as Waldo did, and gift its light to our neighbors also.



Let Your Beauty Be

FROM THE BOOK:

AND THEN, ETERNITY — POEMS FROM A PILGRIM
ON THE NARROW WAY.

BY CDS TEACHER, CHAD SEYBT, OKABENA, MINNESOTA

Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

— 1 Peter 3:3-4 —

Let your beauty be
for Him who formed you
for Him who saved you
for Him who made you
His own.

Let your beauty be
for Him who sees you
for Him who loves you
for Him who knows you
as no one else has known.

Let your beauty be
for Him who won you
for Him who keeps you
for Him who prepares you
for your eternal home.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Installation

In accord with our usage and order, Josh Ohlmann, who was called as principal and teacher at the Christian Day School of Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, Phoenix, Arizona, was installed on August 4, 2013.

—Pastor Michael Gurath

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—Benno Sydow, Business Manager

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

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