

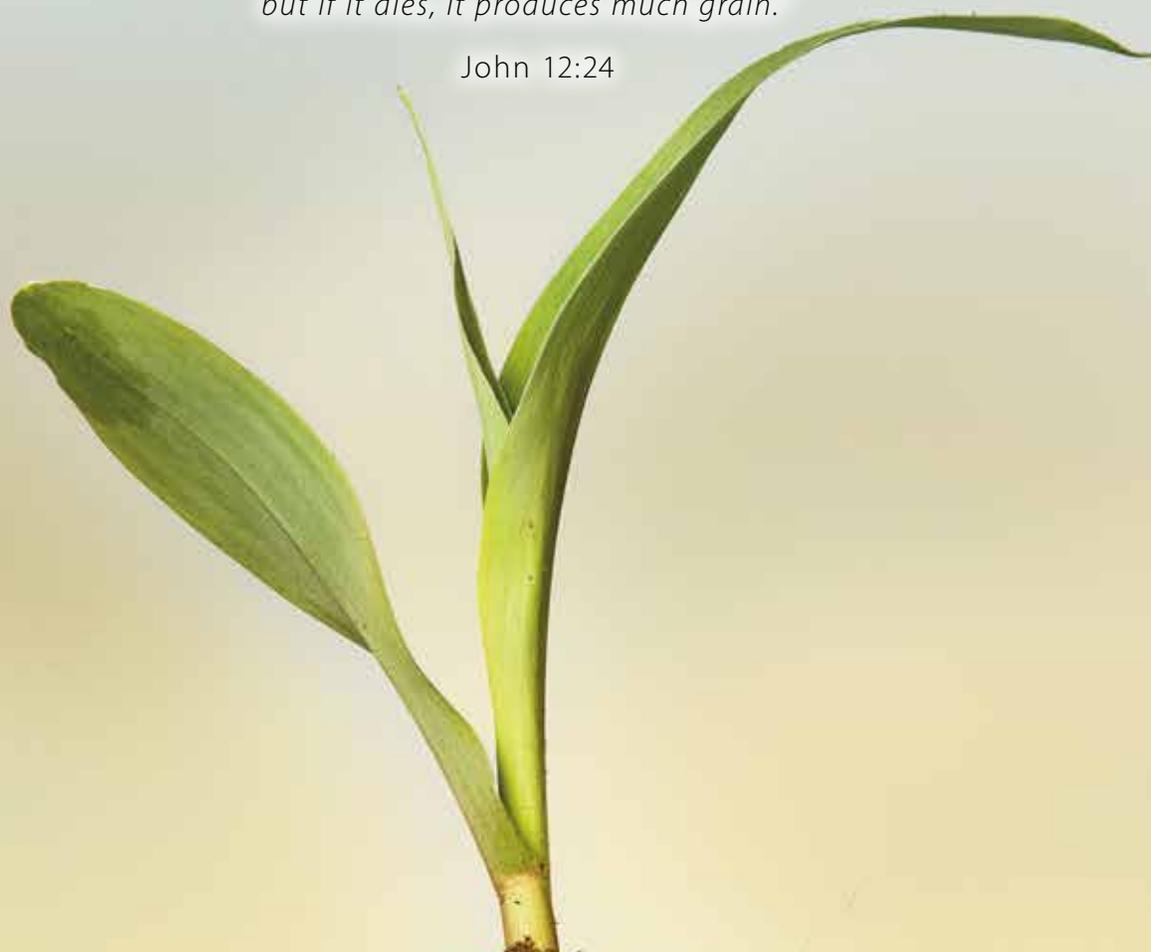
March 2018 VOL 60 NO. 9

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

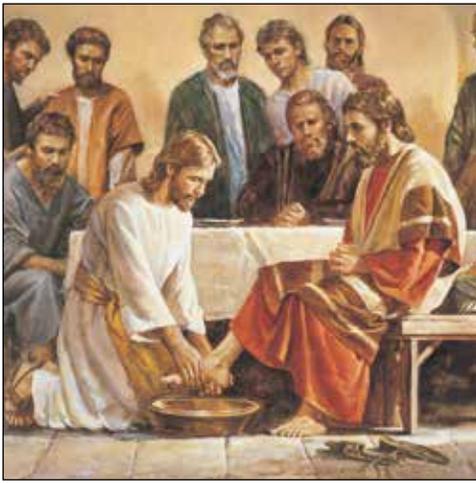
“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” (John 10:35)

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat
falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone;
but if it dies, it produces much grain.”*

John 12:24



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Mr. Benno Sydow, Business Manager
2750 Oxford Street North
Roseville, MN 55113



Postmaster: Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN 55113 and additional offices (825-580). ISSN#0024-7537. Send address corrections (Form 3579) to *Lutheran Spokesman*, 2750 Oxford Street North, Roseville MN 55113

The *Lutheran Spokesman* is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Website address: www.clclutheran.org.

Editor: Paul Naumann, 3732 Claymore Lane, Eau Claire, WI, 54701, E-mail to paul.naumann@ilc.edu; Assistant Editor: Craig Owings; Art Director, Graphic Designer, Print Production: Matthew Schaser; Proofreaders: David Lau and Paula Naumann; Staff: James Albrecht, Theodore Barthels, David Bernthal, Timothy Daub, Wayne Eichstadt, David Fuerstenau, Frank Gantt, Norman Greve, Mark Gullerud, John Klatt, Ross Kok, Joseph Lau, Delwyn Maas, Bruce Naumann, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, John Reim, Michael Roehl, Robert Sauers, Thomas Schuetze, Chad Seybt, Mark Weis.

Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Naumann three months before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Naumann. Business Manager: Benno Sydow, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113. E-mail to BennoSydow@yahoo.com. Individual subscriptions {foreign-U.S. currency only}: \$18.00 {\$22.00} for one year; \$34.00 {\$42.00} for two years; \$50.00 {\$62.00} for three years; sent in bulk to congregations: \$15.00.

Spokesman Online Version at: www.lutheranspokesman.org
 Printed in U.S.A.

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Time to Think About Seed-Sowing

“But Jesus answered them, saying, ‘The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.’”

(John 12:23-24)

As you read this article, the weather is probably not looking very springlike. If you live in a northern region of our country, the temperature outside may be downright frigid. Snowflakes may be floating in the air. Even if you live in a region that enjoys warmer temperatures, you’re probably not thinking about engaging in outdoor gardening activities like planting flowers or sowing vegetable seeds. The time for doing such things is spring, and spring is a long way off.

It’s interesting, though, that the church year season we recently entered (Lent) comes from the Old English word, *lencten*, which means “spring.” And though it is true that we aren’t thinking about outdoor gardening work now, there is a seed-sowing that we love to think about *especially* at this time of year: the seed-sowing that Jesus speaks about in the Bible verse above.

It was Tuesday of Holy Week. Two disciples had just placed before the Savior the request of some Greeks to see Him. Apparently these Greeks had heard about Jesus’ reputation as a prophet and were looking forward to meeting Him. When Jesus heard about their request, His mind turned immediately to the work of redeeming mankind that He was soon to bring to completion. In three days He would be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, condemned, crucified, and His body buried in a grave. The result of it all would be that souls out of every nation (Greece and countless others!) would be saved for eternity, a thought that filled His heart with joy.

The story is told of a Christian man, born and raised in a log house, who visited his boyhood home after being away for forty years. As he walked into the front yard, he remembered how he had planted some walnuts next to a stream that ran through the family farm. When he walked down to the stream, his eyes were met by a row of stately walnut trees, the product of the seeds he had sown there many years before. He also recalled how he had hidden some nuts in the attic. Curious to see if they were still there, he climbed up to check it out.

Sure enough, lying in the corner was the same pile of nuts he’d stowed there when he was a boy. “What a difference,” he thought, “between these dry, dusty walnuts and the ones I planted down by the stream!” He then also remembered the Savior’s words about the kernel of wheat that produces no fruit when it is left unplanted; but if it is planted, it produces a rich harvest.

This Lenten season, set aside time to ponder on, and praise God for, the bountiful harvest that has resulted from Jesus’ Passion. Think what a glorious difference it makes for you that He allowed His lifeblood to be drained from Him and His body buried in a tomb. May your heart brim over with joy to think of the willing sacrifice of Jesus’ sinless life for you and His resurrection from the grave three days later. For it is because of these that you enjoy the blessing of forgiveness for your sins, a loving relationship with Him now, and eternal salvation at His side in heaven when the brief season of your life on earth ends.

*Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross we spend,*

*Life and health and peace possessing
From the sinner’s dying Friend.*

*Here we rest in wonder, viewing
All our sins on Jesus laid;*

*Here we see redemption flowing
From the sacrifice He made.*

*Lord, in loving contemplation
Fix our hearts and eyes on Thee*

*Till we taste Thy full salvation
And Thine unveiled glory see.*

(TLH #155:1-2,5)



Thomas Schuetze is pastor of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lakewood, Colorado.

Mandatum Novum

The New Commandment

It takes conviction and effort to be willing to do the up-close and dirty work of washing a fellow sinner with God's Word of grace.

Our annual commemoration of the night before Jesus' crucifixion is known as "Maundy Thursday." Though it is difficult to be certain, most church historians think that the word *maundy* is derived from the Latin translation of Jesus' words, spoken that night, as found in John 13:34: "A *new commandment* [mandatum novum] I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

What could be "new" about this commandment? Jesus had often instructed His disciples to love their neighbors as themselves, and even to love their enemies. At this time, however, Jesus raised the bar considerably. Each believer is to love his fellow Christian "as I have loved you." In other words, the depth of our love for one another is to be measured by Jesus' own humble, self-sacrificial love shown to us.

That same night the Lord gave a very practical lesson in how to demonstrate this kind of love. In the upper room, when none of the disciples were willing to perform the servant's task of washing the feet of the others, Jesus Himself wrapped a towel around His waist and proceeded to do so. Peter was aghast, but Jesus' reply to him looked beyond the simple chore at hand. His focus was on a greater need, and a greater truth.

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me. . . . He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." (John 13:8, 10)

Jesus was using a visual aid to impart a lesson about the forgiveness of sins. The disciples (except for Judas) were already clean, through their God-given faith in Christ. On their daily walk through this sinful world, their "feet" would never be untouched by faults, failures, and broken commandments. They had the same privilege that we enjoy of bringing these sins to Jesus for daily cleansing, through repentance and reliance on His atoning grace. The trusting heart gladly accepts the free gift that Jesus daily offers, marveling that the Son of God is willing to do this "dirty work" for us sinners.

But this dirty work is not only a humble service that each Christian *needs*. It is also a humble service that each Christian *owes*, for Jesus said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I

have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:14-15).

Don't feel obligated to grab a bowl of water and kneel before your dinner guests to bathe their feet—that is no longer our custom. Do, however, make it your aim to love your fellow Christians as Jesus loved you, by extending forgiveness—yours and the Lord's—to your fellow sinners.

PROACTIVE

Make your forgiving love *proactive*, without waiting for another to make the first move.

HUMBLE

Make your forgiving love *humble*, without thought for your own image or self-interest.

PERSONAL

Make your forgiving love *personal*, with face-to-face and heart-to-heart compassion.

UNCONDITIONAL

Make your forgiving love *unconditional*, without the expectation of repayment or favor.

Loving as Jesus did is never easy. Because of sin that remains in us, it's rarely our first impulse to take the initiative to go to people "where they are." It takes conviction and effort to be willing to do the up-close and dirty work of washing a fellow sinner with God's Word of grace. But remember that Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7), and that He always lives to make intercession for us with the Father (Hebrews 7:25). Knowing that, we can be confident that we have not only been bathed, but are also daily washed by the Lord Himself.

Our hearts will then be filled with the love that is inspired by Jesus' humble service to us, and His "new commandment" will be one that is a joy to fulfill!

Bruce Naumann is associate pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.



TLH HYMN 310

“Thy Table I Approach”

To “take it for granted” is a shorthand way of saying that frequency and abundance of blessings can breed a lack of appreciation for those blessings. That lack of appreciation then hinders thankfulness. That which is part of our usual routine tends to have diminished value in our estimation because we soon see it as “normal” and may then begin to “take it for granted.”

I was reminded of that truth recently when our Florida home was without power for ten days as a result of Hurricane Irma. I normally don't think about—much less feel specific thankfulness for—the blessings of being able to refrigerate and freeze food, control the temperature of our house, have lights at night, and even enjoy electronic entertainment almost effortlessly. I seldom thanked God for those blessings when they were my “normal,” but how thankful I was for them when the power came back on!

Because God's abundant blessings to us are so constant in our lives, it is easy for us to soon “take them for granted.” Rightly considered, however, our appreciation of and thankfulness for a blessing should not be affected by that blessing's frequency, but rather should be simply a product of the magnitude of the blessing coupled with a recognition of our unworthiness.

Sadly, “taking it for granted” can sometimes become the case with our attitude toward the Lord's Supper. How woefully easy it is for us to have this holy event become little more than normal routine! We look in the bulletin and think, “Oh, that's right. Today is Communion Sunday,” and then we may give some more-or-less perfunctory thought to confession and repentance of our sins as we walk to the altar. We don't *intend* to lightly esteem the sacrament, but do we appreciate that blessing as we ought? Do we feel properly thankful for what is expressed by the words “*given for you,*” “*shed for you,*” and “*for the remission of sins*”? (see Mathew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:17-20)

**What a great blessing we
receive in Communion!
We approach the altar in
contrition and repentance;
we leave with the assurance
of God's Word that we
are fully forgiven.**

In “Thy Table I Approach,” Gerhard W. Molanus (1633-1722) expresses a Christian's proper attitude toward Holy Communion when he writes, “**Oh, may I never fail/ To thank Thee day and night/ For Thy true body and true blood,/ O God, my Peace and Light!**” (v. 6) The value of this blessing is of infinite magnitude: the forgiveness of sins; and

our thankfulness is heightened as verse 3 reminds us of the price Jesus paid for this forgiveness: “**Thy body and Thy blood,/ Once slain and shed for me,/ Are taken here with mouth and soul,/ In blest reality.**”

“Thy body and Thy blood”—the Doctrine of the Real Presence (the biblical teaching that in Holy Communion we receive not only bread and wine, but also the true body and blood of Jesus)—is denied by some Christian denominations. It's easy to understand why. After all, this doctrine doesn't seem reasonable to us; it teaches

something that we cannot perceive by means of our five senses. However, in this matter, we submit our reason to the clear Word of God, and simply accept in faith what He says. As Molanus writes, “**Search not how this takes place,/ This wondrous mystery;/ God can accomplish vastly more/ Than seemeth plain to thee.// Vouchsafe, O blessed Lord,/ That earth and hell combined/ May ne'er about this Sacrament/ Raise doubt within my mind.**” (vv. 4&5)

What a great blessing we receive in Communion! We approach the altar in contrition and repentance; we leave with the assurance of God's Word that we are fully forgiven. “**Lo, I confess my sins/ And mourn their wretched bands;/ A contrite heart is sure to find/ Forgiveness at Thy hands.**”

May God grant that we never begin to “take for granted” the blessing of this wondrous sacrament.

Craig Owings is a retired teacher and serves as assistant editor of the *Lutheran Spokesman*. He lives in Cape Coral, Florida.



“Is Anything Too Hard for the LORD?”

“And the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord?’”

(Genesis 18:13-14a)

Outside the tent the men were talking. Inside the tent, near the entrance, Sarah was listening. When she heard one of the visitors tell Abraham, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son” (Genesis 18:10), Sarah laughed. A silent, skeptical laugh. Yet, God heard her laughter and rebuked her, asking, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

God asks us this same question, not only when times are good, but also amid times of pain, suffering, failure, and loss. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Well, is it?

No Promise Is Too Hard for the Lord to Fulfill

By the time the visitors arrived at Abraham’s tent, Abraham and Sarah had been waiting for a promised son for twenty-five years. Abraham was now one hundred; Sarah was ninety. Both were decades beyond the age of childbearing. Besides this, Sarah was barren and unable to have children. No wonder she laughed skeptically. Yet, through all the years of waiting and all the impossible circumstances, God was teaching Abraham and Sarah a powerful lesson: Nothing is too hard for the Lord. God kept His promise. Sarah had a son.

God has made many promises to us as well. He has promised to love us eternally, to provide for us daily, to forgive our sins when we turn to Him in repentance and faith, and to bring us safely from grace to glory. And He will keep each of these promises. If the history of Abraham and Sarah is not enough to convince us of that, remember, God also promised to send a Savior, and He did. The fulfillment of this greatest of promises, the coming of Christ, is the guarantee that God will keep all His other promises. As Paul reminded the

Corinthians, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:20 NIV)

No Problem Is Too Hard for the Lord to Solve

Sarah was elderly and barren. Was this problem too hard for the Lord? No. As promised, Sarah became pregnant and nine months later was nursing Isaac and changing diapers.

When the Israelites were stranded at the Red Sea, pursued by Pharaoh’s army, was this problem too hard for the Lord? No. God parted the Red Sea and the Israelites passed through on dry ground. And later, when the Israelites complained about having no food and no water in the wilderness, was this problem too hard for the Lord? No. God rained bread from heaven and provided water from a rock.

When the world was lost and condemned through the fall into sin, was even this problem too hard for the Lord? No. God sent His Son to be our Savior. God punished Jesus to save us.

God has said, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” (Psalm 50:15) Is this passage true or not? Is God all-powerful or not? If we think

any problem in life is too hard for the Lord, perhaps we’ve forgotten how God gave Abraham and Sarah a son, how God changed Saul the Persecutor into Paul the Apostle, and how

God in grace saved each one of us. To quote Jesus, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26)

Mark Weis is pastor of St. Luke’s Lutheran Church in Lemmon, South Dakota.



Does My Name Belong on This List?

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

(Hebrews 11:32-34)

It takes only so many examples to make a point; ordinarily two or three are enough. So far in his catalogue of men and women of faith in the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews has named ten examples to make his point that faith is the substance of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen. All of the persons on his list lived and acted on the basis of words and promises of God.

There is no need for more examples, he says, nor is there time for them. But he wants us to know that there were many more names he could have included. He mentions just a few of them without going into any detail about them individually. Instead he speaks generally about the victories that they won by the power of God because they walked by faith rather than by sight.

The list of their victories makes us think of familiar lessons from Old Testament Bible history. Gideon, one of the judges, defeated the superior forces of the Midianites. Samson won victories over the Philistines. Samuel “*worked righteousness*,” meaning that he faithfully administered justice as a judge. Barak, one of the judges, “*obtained promises*”: he routed Sisera and his fearsome iron chariots in fulfillment of a divine promise spoken to him by Deborah the prophetess. David successfully fought a lion that was attacking one of his sheep. “*The violence of fire*” brings to our minds the three men in the fiery furnace. Anyone familiar with Bible history could come up with other names that match the victories listed here.

But need we stop with names from Bible history? The whole idea of this list of people of faith in Hebrews 11 is to encourage all who read it—including you and me as we read it today—

Bible history is not a record of superheroes. It is a record of ordinary people whom God called to do great things.

to live our lives trusting in God’s Word and acting on it. Might our names also be included in the list of those who live lives of faith? Though God has not called us to go out against Midianites or Philistines, He has called us to resist the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh—spiritual enemies that are fierce and dangerous.

One characteristic of the figures from Bible history mentioned here ought to be especially encouraging to us all. It is that “*out of weakness [they] were made strong.*” (verse 34) Bible history is not a record of superheroes. It is a record of ordinary people whom God called to do great things with the strength and courage that He gave them. The history of men such as Gideon and Barak especially teach this. Both were reluctant to step into the role that God had laid out for them, but they did so when assured that God would be with them and give them the victory.

Another encouraging thing said of Old Testament people of faith is that they “*obtained promises.*” All of us New Testament believers in Jesus Christ are called to this very thing. By His death for us by which He took away our sins, and by His resurrection, we have the promise of eternal life. We have it in God’s Word. We do not yet see it, but the examples that we have in Bible history encourage us to believe the promise and order our whole life according to it. And like the people whose names are recorded here in Hebrews, we too will obtain the promises.

John Klatt is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado.



“Living as a Christian leads to earthly wealth and prosperity.”

Prosperity theology teaches that believers are entitled to financial blessing and physical well-being. Followers are taught that faith, positive speech, and donations will increase wealth. Conversely, if you aren't rich and prosperous, your faith must be weak and incomplete.

Some of the most “successful” televangelists, including Joel Osteen, proclaim a prosperity gospel. On his website, Osteen writes, “There are many things that money cannot buy . . . but having monetary provision is also a part of prosperity. You'll never find one place in the Scripture where we are supposed to drag around . . . not able to afford what we want. . . . Jesus came that we might live an abundant life!”

The message of a prosperity gospel can be very appealing. Its preachers are engaging. It is served in a bowl of positive thinking, sprinkled with feel-good self-empowerment, along with a side of good works, and a main course of guaranteed prosperity as long as you can believe.

In reality, this so-called gospel is spiritual junk food that appeals to the worldly appetite of the flesh. *“Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”* (Galatians 1:8)

If you speak to those influenced by the prosperity gospel, share true spiritual food. Start with a clear presentation of the genuine Gospel such as John 3:16. It's familiar to you, but will be new and refreshing to them. Share God's truth about prosperity and material wealth. Offer Bible passages and let Christ—the Bread of Life—fill their hungry souls.

“One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:15)

Jesus said this after He was asked to be an arbitrator in an inheritance dispute. Jesus did not come to provide material prosperity to his followers; rather, He warned of covetousness. Prosperity preachers define life in terms of material gain. Want wealth? Have enough faith. Goal of faith? Earthly wealth. This is not what Jesus preached.

“[Men of corrupt minds] suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain. . . . But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare.” (1 Timothy 6:5-9)

Corrupt minds view godliness as a means of gain. In contrast, godliness with contentment actually *is* great gain.

Prosperity preachers are fond of saying there is no passage in Scripture that tells us to go through life without material blessings. Such a comment presupposes that God commands us to live with or without wealth. God commands neither. Rather, He seeks a content and humble submission to His will whether He gives wealth or allows poverty.

Instead of promising wealth, God warns against spiritual difficulties that wealth can create (Matthew 19:24) and the real danger of love for the world and all that it seductively offers (1 John 2:15).

Prosperity preachers encourage giving with the “Law of Compensation,” teaching that Christians should give generously because when they do, God will give back more in return.

A number of churches have begun offering money-back guarantees for those who give 10% of their income but, in a three-month period, don't feel that God has prospered them. Supposedly, this takes away the fear of giving. Truthfully, it takes away the *love* of giving and a proper concept of Christian stewardship.

God does offer a promise in Malachi, but it's not a promise to encourage giving for the sake of more getting. It is a promise to tentative hearts to reassure them that when they follow God's Word, He will not forsake them, but will bless them abundantly according to His will and in the way He chooses.

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse . . . And try Me now in this,’ Says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10)

A prosperity gospel replaces spiritual life and abundance with material gain. It makes the Bible into a contract. It lures the sinner's heart with a strong sense of self and earthly blessing couched in words from Scripture. But in the end, it is shallow, empty, and life-destroying. What a blessing it is to share instead the genuine Word of Life!



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

THE ROAD TO REFORMATION

In observation of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are presenting a brief survey of the life of Martin Luther. The series continues with major events in the life of the Reformer that took place after 1517.

Life of Luther—1525

Marriage is Honorable Among All

For many hundreds of years, the Roman Catholic Church had exalted celibacy above marriage, and had even prohibited its priests, monks, and nuns from marrying. Martin Luther, however, taught from Scripture that bishops or pastors could be married (see I Timothy 3:2). In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote that “it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” (I Corinthians 7:9)

Nevertheless, Luther himself did not intend to get married. Because he had been declared a heretic, he posed a danger to those who kept company with him. In 1521 he said, “They will never force a wife upon me.” But in 1523 a group of nuns became aware of Luther’s criticism of required celibacy and monasticism. Luther helped arrange for their escape from a convent. The nuns hid in fish barrels on the back of a cart and escaped to Wittenberg. Within months Luther was able to find husbands or employment for all of them except one—Katherine von Bora.

Katherine von Bora

Very little is known of Katherine’s birth (1499) and early life. She entered a cloister at age five and became a nun in 1515. After her escape from the nunnery, Luther tried without success to arrange for her marriage. She stated that she would marry only Luther or a friend of his, Nicholas von Amsdorf. Although reluctant at first, Luther (42) married Katherine (26) on June 13, 1525. Philip Melancthon spoke out against the union, thinking it would distract from the goals of the Reformation, but Luther said that “his marriage would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep.” Luther wanted to show that Protestant clergy could and should get married if they chose to.



Bildnis der Katharina von Bora by Lucas Cranach



The Luther Home

Somewhat unusually for that time, Luther allowed Katherine to share in the managing of the household. Their home in Wittenberg was a three-story former monastery, the “Black Cloister,” a wedding gift from Elector John Frederick. Katherine soon managed a large staff, operated a brewery, gardened, raised pigs and cows, and conducted much of the daily business. In addition to the six children of their own, they took in four orphans and often housed university students and extended family. During times of widespread illness, Katherine cared for the sick, using their home as a hospital. Luther had several nicknames for his wife, including “Lord Katie,” the “Boss of Zulusdorf,” and the “Morning Star of Wittenberg,” because she was often up by 4:00 A.M. to tend to her many duties. Because of her great competence, Luther could spend much of his time studying, writing, teaching, and preaching. In this respect, she set a good example for pastors’ wives today, working behind the scenes to enable their husbands to devote more time and energy to ministry with the Word.

But Katherine also contributed to the many theological conversations around the dinner table. She was a true companion in every way. The Luther home was filled with love, laughter, and music. No doubt it was because of her that Luther wrote, “There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage.”

After Luther’s death in 1546, Katherine had a difficult life. She outlived him by only six years, dying from complications caused by a carriage accident in 1552. On her deathbed she is reported to have said, “I will stick to Christ as a burr to cloth.”



Joe Lau is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Word of God Evangelical Lutheran Church

Pana, Illinois

When God redeveloped the world after the Genesis Flood, He placed probably the most productive farm land in the world in what would become central Illinois. It contains an almost ideal combination of soil and weather, with level prairies that today comprise fields that stretch to the horizon in all directions. Traveling through central Illinois in the spring, summer, and fall is like traveling through a vast, lush garden. It is no wonder that Howard Buffett, the son of famous financier Warren Buffett, chose to live near Pana, Illinois when he wanted to go into farming.



Here the average price of land is \$12,000 per acre, and it yields 240 bushels of corn and 70 bushels of soybeans on average per acre. But God sows a far more important seed with a far more important harvest here in central Illinois: His Word, at Word of God Lutheran Church in Pana.

Pana (pronounced *pay'nah*) lies in the heart of the Land of Lincoln. Here Word of God congregation was founded in 1983, as a group of LC-MS members split off from the Missouri Synod for the same reasons of conscience and confession that caused others to leave Missouri in the 1950's and 60's. The group chose the name "Word of God" for their church because the Bible is the only source and authority of what is believed, taught and preached here. Another reason is that Jesus Christ—the heart and center of the whole Bible, the One to Whom all of God's Word points us as *"the Lamb*



of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"(John 1:29 KJV)—is called in Scripture *"the Word"* of God. (John 1:1).

For the first year of its existence, Word of God congregation met for worship, Sunday school and Bible classes at the Pana Senior Citizens Center. During this time, the congregation purchased a lot in a residential neighborhood on the northwest side of town. It was the largest lot on the block, where a house had recently burnt down. From the ashes arose a new church building, built by the members themselves. Upon completion in 1984, the building was dedicated to the service of the Triune God, and all meetings have been held there ever since. A free-standing storage shed was built in 1990. A new narthex was added to the main building in 1996, all work again being donated by the members. The addition included the current steeple, holding high the cross of Christ.

Word of God congregation was affiliated with the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR) from 1983 until 2000. The LCR adopted a legalistic doctrinal change in 1999 that



Pastor Rieken with church members at groundbreaking for Word of God Lutheran Church.

With our gracious Lord's continuous blessing and aid,
Word of God will continue to sow the seed of God's
Word in central Illinois until Jesus returns visibly.



moved the members of Word of God to leave that fellowship at the LCR's convention in 2000. Talks between Word of God and the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) began immediately, and doctrinal unity was verified. Word of God Evangelical Lutheran Church of Pana applied for fellowship with the CLC at the 2002 synod convention, has been a member of the CLC ever since, and thanks and praises God for it! The congregation belongs to the Southeast Region of the CLC, and has hosted two regional pastoral conferences.

Pastor Dennis W. Rieken has been Word of God's only pastor in its 34-year history. He is a 1975 graduate of Concordia Seminary (LC-MS), Springfield (now Fort Wayne). The membership of Word of God has remained fairly constant over the years, numbering about 20 souls. Attendance at worship averages fifteen, and most members live far from Pana—one traveling 350 miles round trip. Currently, its oldest member is one hundred years of age; its youngest is five. The congregation has evangelized every house in Pana and the surrounding area over the years, and for most of its existence has put its sermons

on local radio stations every Sunday morning. It also has utilized billboard advertising, and currently concentrates on internet evangelism. Word of God puts a video of its weekly sermon on its website through YouTube, and an audio version of its weekly Bible class on its website. The church hosted the Traveling Vacation Bible School in July of last year. It also advertises in the local newspaper.

With our gracious Lord's continuous blessing and aid, Word of God will continue to sow the seed of God's Word in central Illinois until Jesus returns visibly. Then, when Christ comes to gather the harvest of His vineyard (Matthew 21:33f), Pana will add to His eternal granaries in heaven (Matthew 13:23) the faithful members of Word of God congregation who over the years kept the faith, in season and out of season, holding fast His faithful Word (Titus 1:9). To Father, Son and Holy Ghost be all the praise, honor, glory and thanksgiving forever and ever!



Dennis Rieken is pastor of Word of God Evangelical Lutheran Church of Pana, Illinois.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

In this series, those involved with CLC foreign missions profile one aspect of our overseas endeavors.

Zambia

“A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9)

The last time I was in Zambia was in July of 2015 with the CLC Mission Helpers. One of the privileges we had on that trip was to meet a group of pastors and evangelists in the Livingstone area who were interested in the work that Pastor Ibrahim and the CLC were doing in Zambia. There were about twenty-four men who were loosely organized and working together to spread the Gospel in the Livingstone area and out in the rural villages. Pastor Ibrahim had met the leader of the group on one of his trips through the area on his way to visit a CLC contact in Zimbabwe. Livingstone is just a couple of kilometers away from the Zambezi River, which forms the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Before independence, these two countries were a British colony called Rhodesia.

Pastor Sait was the one who organized and led this group of pastors. None of these men, other than Pastor Sait, had been given the opportunity and privilege of attending a Bible college or seminary. They all seemed rather eager to learn. So, in 2015 Pastor Ibrahim asked me if we could travel to Livingstone with the Mission Helpers and spend a couple of days meeting with these pastors and spreading the Gospel among the children of the villages where they were working. The first day we had over twenty men in attendance. By the second day we were down to fourteen. These fourteen men expressed their agreement with what had been taught and their desire to continue training in Lutheran doctrine with the goal of becoming faithful preachers and teachers of the truth of God’s saving Word. We were thankful for what the Lord had done in Livingstone, and a recommendation to the CLC Board of Missions for a small amount of funding for travel and meeting expenses was approved. A few months later a new CLC-Zambia pastoral training center in Livingstone was established.



Fast forward about two years and things have changed quite a bit. What we thought was a well-laid plan actually fell apart when Pastor Sait suddenly died in December of 2016. Now there are only three from the original group who have continued to study with Pastor Ibrahim. In addition, five new men have joined in the studies. These eight men are committed to continued study with Pastor Ibrahim and would very much like him to move to Livingstone so that classes could be held more than just four days a month. They have also asked him to serve as the pastor of the local congregation until one of the other men is fully trained. There is definitely a strong desire among these men to dedicate themselves to the study of God’s Word, and to become faithful preachers of it.



The Lutheran congregation in Livingstone, Zambia.



Bible students in Livingstone.

In Pastor Sait's sudden death, mentioned earlier, there was a suspicion of foul play. The evangelism work that Pastor Sait had been doing in rural villages had borne fruit in one particular village that didn't have a Christian congregation. The details of exactly how he died are a bit sketchy, but they include a tribal chief wanting to give land to the CLC-Zambia so that Pastor Sait could build a church for the village. However, in the same village there was also a rather unscrupulous individual spreading lies and rumors about the CLC-Zambia, so that he could start a church of his own. Pastor Sait and the local tribal chief sat down to visit with the man to try to convince him to stop spreading lies about Pastor Sait and the CLC-Zambia. A couple of hours after the meeting Pastor Sait suddenly collapsed. He was taken to the hospital but he died not long after he arrived. It was determined that he died from poison in his system.

Upon the death of Pastor Sait, the group he had led disbanded and stopped meeting for classes. One of the men called Pastor Ibrahim and told him that he and a few others wanted to continue studying the Bible with him. And so, Pastor Ibrahim began making the eight- to ten-hour one-way bus ride twice a month to bring the truth of God's Word to these men and the congregation that Pastor Sait had served. There are now eight men who attend classes with Pastor Ibrahim. These men all serve in different capacities and have a desire to spread the Gospel in Livingstone and especially among the rural villages that don't yet have the truth of God's Word. We don't know exactly what the Lord has in store for this group of dedicated men, women, and children; but we trust that His Word will not return to Him void, just as He

There is definitely a strong desire among these men to dedicate themselves to the study of God's Word, and to become faithful preachers of it.

has promised: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."* (Isaiah 55:8-11)

The group currently meets in a public-school classroom that is made available to them on the weekends. This is not ideal, because every classroom is used by a different church group on Sunday mornings for worship, and it gets very chaotic and noisy as each group tries to out-do the others with the sound level of its speakers. The CLC-Zambia would very much like to buy or build a church building that could serve the congregation and also provide a space for Ibrahim to stay and teach on his semi-monthly visits.

Please pray for this fledgling group of Christians, the men who have been called to serve them with the Gospel, and their evangelism efforts in villages where the Gospel is not present. Pray also for Pastor Ibrahim that the Lord will provide him with the necessary dedication, wisdom, resources, energy, and commitment to continue his training of these men for the Gospel ministry.



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

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS MARCH 2018

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

Date	Verse	Reading	Comments
Mar 1	TLH 29	Isaiah 45:1-13	Judah would go into exile, but God had already planned for their release and chosen the man (Cyrus) who would bring it about.
Mar 2	TLH 609; LSB 337	Matthew 25:1-13	In repentance and faith we stand ready for Jesus' return.
Mar 3	TLH 390	1 Corinthians 1:18-31	Who would have thought the cross could save, but it did! Who would have thought lowly sinners like us could be saved, but we are!
Mar 5	TLH 395; LSB 690	Genesis 39:1-10	Joseph recognized God's loving care for him, and he was not willing to sin against the One who so loved him (v. 9).
Mar 6	WS 745	Ruth 1:1-16	It wasn't for family ties alone that Ruth wanted to stay with her mother-in-law. Israel's God had also won her heart (v. 16).
Mar 7	TLH 456	Psalms 28	We call on the LORD for help—and at the same time recognize that He has heard our cries for mercy.
Mar 8	WS 734	Job 19:13-27	Job's closest friends scorned him on account of his troubles, but his confidence was in the resurrection of the dead.
Mar 9	TLH 153	Isaiah 52:7-15	God comforts and protects His redeemed, for they are cleansed by His suffering Servant Jesus.
Mar 10	WS 722	Matthew 27:45-61	Jesus suffered for our crimes against God. We are set free!
Mar 12	TLH 354	1 Corinthians 3:5-19	Christ and His cross are the foundation upon which all our preaching and teaching rest.
Mar 13	TLH 39	1 Samuel 2:1-10	Hannah's prayer is similar in ways to Mary's (Lk 1:46-55). Both praise God for mercifully raising up the weak and lowly.
Mar 14	TLH 535	Psalms 30	The LORD brings us through our trials and turns our tears into gladness.
Mar 15	TLH 527	Job 21:7-16	"If our troubles are punishment for our sins, then why are other wicked people so prosperous?" Job asks. Trials are to train and strengthen us.
Mar 16	TLH 152	Isaiah 57:14-19	Are you frustrated and troubled by your sins? Then the LORD has words of comfort especially for you!
Mar 17	TLH 328	Mark 1:1-8	John preached what every faithful preacher preaches: repentance for the remission of sins. If this is what you hear at your church, God be praised!
Mar 19	TLH 144; LSB 847	1 Corinthians 6:12-20	Have you heard people say, "It's my body, so I can do what I want with it"? Here is the surprise answer from God: It's not your body. It's His.
Mar 20	TLH 534	Genesis 45:1-10	God makes even the bad times work for good in the lives of His children.
Mar 21	TLH 151; LSB 542	Psalms 34	The LORD uplifts those who are crushed and afflicted. No one is condemned who takes refuge in Him.
Mar 22	TLH 159	Isaiah 63:7-14	Although we have not been faithful, the Lord recalls us and guides us as He did for His people of old.
Mar 23	TLH 510	Mark 4:26-32	We may not always think that our Gospel preaching is working, but the Spirit works even without our realizing it.
Mar 24	TLH 155	1 Corinthians 8:1-13	Always be on the lookout for others, being careful that your actions (even if not sinful in themselves) don't lead them into sin.
Mar 26	TLH 613; LSB 529	Genesis 49:29-50:9	When he died, Jacob wanted his body returned to Canaan, the Promised Land, At the resurrection, our bodies will enter a Promised Land, too!
Mar 27	TLH 34	1 Samuel 12:6-22	When the people acknowledged their sin, Samuel said, "Do not be afraid." Neither do we have to be afraid when we acknowledge ours. Our Savior has covered it.
Mar 28	WS 721; LSB 550	Psalms 38	In the hour that our guilt overwhelms us, the Lord does not rebuke us. He rebuked His own dear Son instead, remember?
Mar 29	TLH 164; LSB 445	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.
Mar 30	TLH 388; LSB 454	Mark 5:35-43	Christ, though He died, was not to remain in the grave—and neither are we.
Mar 31	WS 723	Jeremiah 3:11-18	The LORD always desires that the sinner turn to Him and trust in His merciful forgiveness.

Practice Makes . . . Better.

Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, has the following on its website: “. . . giving young men and women a Christ-centered, Biblical education.” It states, further, that “those who become Christian Day School teachers in the CLC share the Gospel with the children who enroll in their schools.” Only with our Lord’s help can this goal be accomplished, and it is with that confidence that Immanuel has created a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Education program, part of which includes on-the-job training. It’s called “student teaching,” “student internship,” and “practice teaching.” Regardless of what you call it, the goal is the same, namely, to help prepare future teachers of the CLC to be successful when they enter their own classroom for the first time. Education 403 and 404 Teacher Internship are courses in the BS program. Both courses pair our fourth-year education students with veteran CLC teachers across the synod from Florida to California, from Washington to Wisconsin. Those teachers open their classrooms and, in many cases, their homes to our students in an attempt to give them an idea of what teaching in a Christian Day School is like.



Although the education students teach a variety of classes at Messiah Lutheran School in Eau Claire as part of their education methods courses in the BS program, this does not give them a real feel for the classroom for extended periods of time. Ed. 403 and Ed. 404 are designed to get our students into the classroom for prolonged periods of time. An attempt is made to place students in both a smaller school and a larger school so they have experience in both situations.

Ed. 404 has been part of the education program at Immanuel for many years and involves the student teachers spending the third quarter of their senior year in a classroom under the supervision of a veteran teacher in a congregation of the

CLC. This nine-week period will eventually see the student teacher handling all phases of the classroom. For the last few weeks, the supervising teacher is encouraged to take some time off, allowing the student teacher to handle not only the teaching, but also the discipline that is required to make a classroom run smoothly.

Ed. 403 was added several years ago in response to comments from new teachers that their first day of school was very intimidating. Recognizing that it would be beneficial for students to become familiar with the planning that leads up to the start of a school year, Education 403 was developed. This course puts students in contact with supervising teachers early in the summer preceding their senior year so they can experience preparing for a new school year. They are able to take part in many of the things a typical teacher or principal must do to make a school year successful, such as ordering books, developing a discipline plan, and preparing the classroom. The student teacher then teaches classes for the first four weeks of school, handling as many of the classes as the supervising teacher and the student teacher agree on.

Besides learning what it is like to teach in a Christian Day School, the student teachers also make connections that often last for years as the student teachers and supervisors become colleagues for life. Student teachers frequently model the methods and approaches taken by their supervising teachers, making this a serious responsibility on the part of our faithful veteran teachers in the CLC. Immanuel Lutheran College appreciates the willingness of the host schools and teachers to mentor our education students as they prepare to serve their Lord by teaching His ways to our young .



Ross Roehl is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

SEEN IN PASSING

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

FEMA Reverses Rule Excluding Churches.

On January 2, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced a new policy that supporters say will end the agency's discrimination against churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship in regards to receiving immediate and equal access to federal disaster relief funding. FEMA admitted that the agency is required by the Supreme Court's June 2017 decision in *Trinity v. Comer* to give churches equal access to widely available public programs. FEMA announced in its new policy that "houses of worship will not be singled out for disfavored treatment" any longer. Several lawsuits had arisen from FEMA's previous policy of excluding churches from receiving federal aid following natural disasters, even though churches were often among the first responders in such situations, and in some cases were actually utilized by FEMA itself. N.a. "FEMA to Stop Discriminating Against Churches, Synagogues." *U.S. CBN.com*, 2 Jan. 2018. Web. 5 Jan. 2018..

Americans Trust Pastors More than Lawyers But Less than Nurses.

A Gallup poll published in December 2017, surveyed Americans to discover their level of trust in members of about two dozen common professions. Clergy came in ninth on a list of twenty-two professions, with 42% of respondents rating them "high or very high"

in the areas of honesty and ethical standards. Highest in trust were nurses, with 82%, followed by military officers (71%), doctors (65%) and pharmacists (62%). Last on the list, respectively, were members of congress (11%), car salesmen (10%) and lobbyists (8%). Zylstra, Sarah Eekhoff. "The 8 People Americans Trust More Than Their Local Pastor." *Gleanings*. *ChristianityToday.com*, 5 Jan. 2018. Web. 15 Jan. 2015.

Piece of the Temple that Jesus Knew Discovered.

In one of the most important archaeological finds of 2017, diggers in April discovered the capital (decorative top) of one of the columns of the Second Temple. Dr. Gabriel Barkay, the director of the Temple Mount Sifting Project,



The capital that topped one of the columns from Solomon's Porch | Photo: Vladimir Naychin

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Traveling Vacation Bible School (TVBS) has begun planning for this summer's program. If your congregation is interested in hosting a TVBS session, please contact us through our website at www.clctvbs.org.

—Teacher Ross Roehl.

said that "this is a capital in the Doric style, one of the characteristics of the art in the time of the Hasmonean dynasty. This appears to be the capital of a column from part of the eastern colonnade of the Temple Mount, which Josephus and even the New Testament called 'Solomon's Porch.'" The 25-cubit column would have stood 12.5 meters (41 feet) high and been about 30 inches in diameter at its top. Yalon, Yori. "Section of 2nd Temple-era column found at Temple Mount dig." *Newsletter*. *IsraelHalom.com*, 4 Apr. 2017. Web. 5 Jan. 2018.