

THE 

APRIL 2021

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



 HE HAS
RISEN INDEED





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

APRIL 2021
VOL. 59 NO. 4

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

(ISSN 0746-3413) (USPS 588-620)
is published monthly by the
Association of Free Lutheran
Congregations,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441
Phone (763) 545-5631
Periodicals postage paid at
St. Paul, MN and additional
mailing offices.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to
The Lutheran Ambassador,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.

SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
763-545-5631
lasubscriptions@aflc.org

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

\$24 a year, Group, U.S.
\$25 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$27 a year, International

EVERY MOMENT IS A GIFT GRACE

BY RACHEL MATTSON

Monday was as perfect as they get. I got up early and joyfully made my coffee as I sat to read my Bible and talk to God. I exercised and had extra time to make my husband a three-course breakfast. I started the laundry and headed to work where I productively accomplished everything on my to-do list. I patiently waited for a train to pass as I made my way back home again, and I walked into my clean kitchen smelling the delicious stew I had put in the Crock-Pot earlier that morning. My attitude was one of gratitude and joy all day long. I had just lived the perfect day, and it made me smile as I drifted off to sleep.

On Tuesday I awoke to my third alarm going off, which meant I was already behind on the day. I spilled my coffee as I rushed to get ready and handed my husband the cereal box and a burnt piece of toast. I left the dishes piled up and the house messy as I went off to work. I couldn't concentrate or get anything done, nor did I want to talk to anyone or receive help. My attitude was one of anxiety and ungratefulness. I came home hungrier than ever to a fridge that needed to be restocked, and I went to bed feeling like a failure.

On Wednesday I awoke to the stunning realization that, although I felt incredibly more lovable on Monday compared to Tuesday, Jesus loved me the same on both days! It sounds simplistic when I write it down, but in my real-life experience I couldn't quite grasp the enormity of it. His love for me had nothing to do with how much I accomplished or how lovable I felt.

Titus 3:4-6 says, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."

Why is it hard to remember that we aren't saved by anything that we do?

Because we forget to look at the Savior.

Why is it so often we leave behind the truth about God's amazing mercy toward us?

Because we forget to look at the Savior.

Why do we fail when we try so hard to do it on our own?

Because we forget to look at the Savior.

One of my favorite passages is Ephesians 4:4-8, and it speaks of the grace and mercy God gives to us because of His great love. It says that after we are made His children and "seated with Him in the Heavenly places," His desire is to show us the "immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

He didn't show us this grace and mercy so that we could work really hard to have the perfect day and earn love from Him. No, He longs to show us more and more and more and more and more love, as we rest in the finished work He has done for us. This is incredible! It changes the way I live my days, for my eyes are put back on the Savior and every moment becomes a gift of grace to be received instead of a gift of love to be earned.

*Mattson is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran,
Thief River Falls, Minn.*

Sinful heart, in deep contrition, bow before the
Crucified; Contemplate His grievous passion, own
that for thy sins He died.

—Johann Quirafeld

Now, Zion, preach of blood divine, It loosens us from
chains that bind, and opens up salvation's spring,
the free forgiveness of our sins.

—J.K. Vikman

What may I say? Heav'n was His home but mine the
tomb wherein He lay.

—Samuel Crossman

For Thy resurrection morn, Lord, I thank Thee and
extol Thee, and in heaven I shall behold Thee.

—Thomas Kingo

Jesus, may your passion, death and resurrection make me bold in seeking
truth, justice and holiness—especially when I am fearful of looking foolish in
the world's eyes.

—Frederick Buechner

Blest Easter day, what joy is thine! We praise, dear
Lord, Thy Name divine, for Thou has triumphed o'er
the tomb; nor more we need to dread its gloom.

—Olavus Petri

A NEW COVENANT

by Susan Baker

The Upper Room is the place where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover on Thursday evening before Jesus' death on the cross. Embedded into the Passover service, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The theme of the Passover is that God brought the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Holy Land. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ demonstrated that He saves and frees His people from the weight of sin, and He will lead those trusting in Him safely to their eternal home in heaven.

Despite the Upper Room being the location of these two intertwined observances, it is not known where the house was located nor who owned it. When I visited Israel, the group of which I was part was shown a place which may have been the Upper Room, or, at least, it may have been similar to it. The Upper Room is believed to have been the second floor of a house accessible by an outside staircase, which was the typical way that houses were built in those days.

Matthew 26:17–29 can be divided into three main parts. First, preparation for the Passover. Second, the announcement that one of the disciples would betray the Lord. And last, the institution of the Lord's Supper.

First, the disciples asked Jesus where He would have them prepare the Passover meal. Jesus told two of them (Peter and John according to Luke 22:8) to go into the city to a certain man and say to him, "The Teacher says, 'My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" In Mark and Luke's Gospels, there are more details as to how to find this unnamed man. They were to look for a man carrying a water jar and follow him as he went to the owner's house. Bible notes (for Mark 14:13 and Luke 22:10) state that women normally carried water jars; so this man would be noticed. The disciples followed Jesus' instructions, and all was prepared for the Passover. At this point, only Peter and John (and Jesus) knew where the Upper Room was. It would have been revealed at the proper time to the other disciples.

The reason for the secrecy was so Jesus and His disciples could observe the feast without being interrupted by the betrayal that Jesus knew was coming. The betrayer would look for a time when Jesus would not be surrounded by crowds. Jesus was in control of the events that were to occur. What was written in Scripture would be fulfilled at the appointed time.

Second, during the Passover meal while the disciples and Jesus were eating (Matthew 26:21), Jesus startled the group, saying "One of you will betray Me." The disciples were quite sorrowful to hear that, and each began to say, one after the other, "Is it I, Lord?" Jesus replied that he who dipped his hand in the dish with the

Lord would betray Him. This did not mean that the one who dipped his hand into the dish at the same time as Jesus was the betrayer. Rather, it meant that one of them eating the meal with the Lord would betray Him. It was common at that time to have meals at which one dipped bread, etc., into a common dish of sauce or stew. So, it was a more general type of statement. One of the Lord's guests would betray Him. The betrayal was part of God's plan to save mankind, sending the Savior to earth to save men from their sin. Still, Jesus pronounces that this was a heinous sin, and it would have been better if the betrayer had never been born. The perpetrator would end up committing suicide and spend eternity in hell.

At last, Judas says to Jesus, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He does not call Him "Lord" as the other disciples did. This indicates that Judas did



not believe that Jesus was God's Son and the Messiah. "Rabbi" is what outsiders would have called Jesus. Jesus answered Judas, "You have said so," a less direct way of saying yes. Commentaries suggest that Judas left the Passover gathering at this time and was not present for the institution of the Last Supper. In Matthew, we hear no more about Judas until he meets Jesus in Gethsemane with a crowd—including chief priests, officers of the temple, and elders—to hand Jesus over to the authorities.

Third, "as they were eating," Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." He then took the cup of wine, giving thanks, and He said to them, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." In Holy Communion, Jesus's body and blood are given to us, "in, with, and under" the bread and the wine, for the forgiveness of our sins, for our salvation, and for eternal life. Jesus is replacing the old covenant

in which animals—in particular and most directly, the Passover lambs—were sacrificed for people's sins with the new covenant in which His precious blood washes away our sin. Each of the sacrificed animals was a type or a picture of Jesus Christ's perfectly sufficient and lasting sacrifice for sinners. When Jesus said His blood of the covenant is poured out for "many," that includes Christians throughout history. Those who trust completely in Jesus Christ's sacrifice are assured that they are forgiven and will be with Him forever when they leave this earth.

At the end of the passage, Jesus tells the remaining eleven disciples that He will not drink again of this wine until the He drinks it with them in His Father's Kingdom. That will be one day in heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb and His beloved Church.

Baker is a member of Plymouth Apostolic Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn..

What keeps you up at night? We have all had those nights. Perhaps, you are concerned about a rebellious teen or a distant spouse. Maybe there are financial issues, workplace politics, or you are grieving the loss of a loved one. There could even be a worldwide pandemic causing you to lay awake with your eyes fixed on the ceiling wondering, “Oh Lord, how long?”

This was one of those nights, at least for Jesus. A night not fueled by fear or anxiety but by the emotional distress of submitting to the will of God the Father and becoming the object of His wrath as the sin bearer of humanity. It was a pivotal night in redemptive history, indeed, in history itself.

And yet, the disciples slept.

You may ask incredulously, “How did they do that?”

They fell asleep after Jesus, feeling the full weight of his humanity, specifically asked them to “watch and pray with me.” They fell asleep not once, but three times.

Had not Jesus just shared with them over the last several days that he would soon “suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matthew 16:21)? And soon after, He announced that one of them would betray him (26:21).

You would think that this would create a vigilance, an awareness of the disciples’ surroundings, and concern for Jesus, but this does not seem to be the case.

There is speculation that the bodies of the disciples, exhausted by preparation for the Passover, the crowds, and the continual stress of looking over their shoulders for angered religious authorities, caused them to simply give in to the need for rest. This would seem a reasonable explanation, except that it was not like Jesus to request something of His disciples that they were unable to do. He requested that they do difficult things, even miraculous things, but always provided the means for them to act.

After Jesus was arrested, in just a few short hours, their world would be shaken beyond belief and they would be tempted to deny and desert Him. When Jesus asked them to “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41), He was not only inviting them to support Him in His sorrow but to strengthen their faith for the temptations to come.

What can be learned from the shortcomings of the disciples?

Resist the temptation to sleep your way through life.

We sleep when we slip into an identity-driven mentality. We look to our accomplishments, our abilities, and talents or even the leadership of others. We grow

drowsy about the world outside our pews. We may even seek comfort and security instead of obedience.

Elisabeth Elliot writes in her book, *Be Still My Soul*, “We are meant to be chalices, life-bearers. As God’s expression of what He is like, we become broken bread and poured-out wine. There is no greater fullness.”

The disciples had witnessed Jesus’ power to command the wind and His power to heal, but they missed the bigger picture that Jesus was teaching them. Perhaps the disciples were focusing on Jesus’ ministry to them as their rabbi instead of the Redeemer of the world.

Another important lesson we learn from the disciples is that we can close our eyes and miss the blessing of watching and praying. Throughout Scripture God has allowed individuals to see snapshots of His salvation plan. They recognized these revelations because they were watching. They were looking for the fulfillment of His promise.

Here the disciples are in the Garden of Gethsemane with a front row seat to the hours when Jesus submits to the Father’s will and crushes the head of Satan as predicted in the Garden of Eden after the fall. But they were asleep.

What is the blessing in the watching and praying? The blessing comes in the participation in and the witness to the fulfillment. Sometimes we must take God’s promises on faith and sometimes we get to see God’s promises fulfilled right before our eyes as we watch and pray.

The evening between the Passover and Jesus’ arrest might look like a hot mess of betrayal, denial, mutilation, and desertion, but it was never beyond God’s plan or out of His control. And three days later, when the fulfillment of the promise was complete, we see with stark clarity that the ugly events of Gethsemane were part of the plan to save us from ourselves.

God does not leave the disciples to wallow in self condemnation as they reflect on their shortcomings of this night, but instead reveals Himself to them, risen and glorified. He talks and teaches and sends the Holy Spirit to strengthen them. And when they do go out into the world as commanded by Jesus before the ascension, they go boldly knowing they display God’s power and for His glory alone.

“But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” (Micah 7:7).


Molstre, Maple Grove, Minn., attends Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis.



WATCH AND PRAY

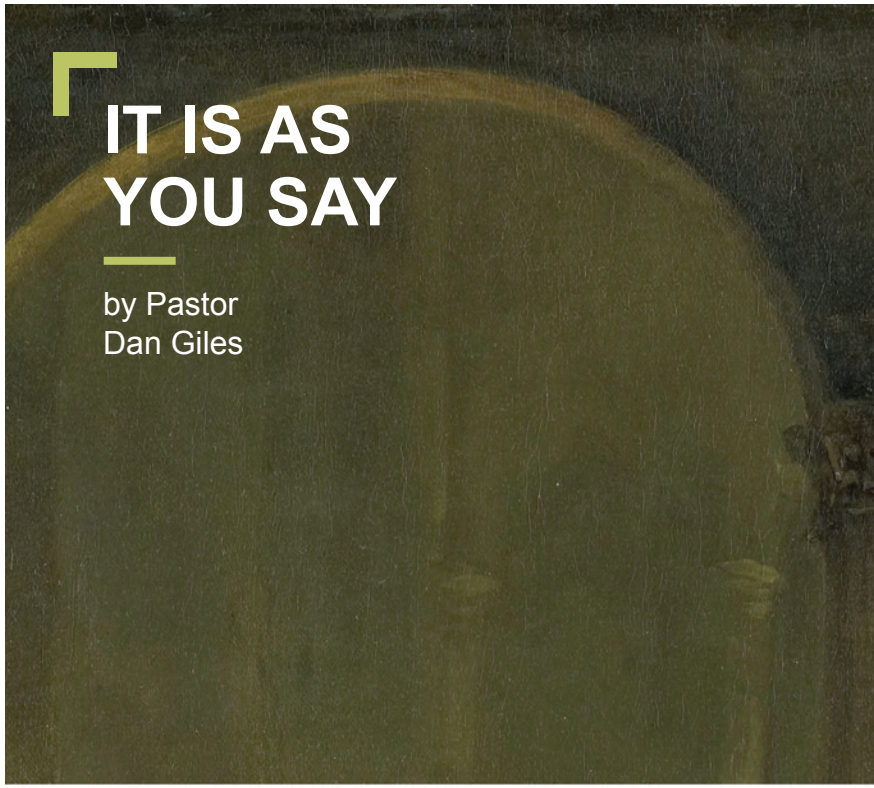
by Kristin
Molstre





IT IS AS YOU SAY

by Pastor
Dan Giles



We call it a trial, but it wasn't, really. In a trial, the accusers state their case, the accused makes a defense, and the judge comes to a conclusion about whether the accused is guilty or innocent of the charges. Then the judge passes sentence accordingly. This panel of judges had already made up its mind to demand the death penalty. Their motive, as Governor Pilate himself observed, was simple jealousy, but they disguised it—even in their own minds—as patriotism, concern for their nation.

These were the leaders of Israel. They knew the history of Judea during the Chaldean, Greek, and now the Roman Empires. They knew that for a small country like Judea to survive in a world dominated by a superpower, they had to tread carefully, keep a low profile, and not poke the bear.

The Emperor had been willing to allow the Jews some limited autonomy, but at the first indication that the local authorities weren't able to keep things quiet, the Roman Legions were ready to step in and "keep the peace." Just a few years prior, when they complained about Herod Archelaus' instability and despotism, Caesar Augustus deposed him and replaced him with a Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who reported directly to Caesar himself.

The Elders were convinced that they alone were keeping Rome from destroying Israel, so anything that might upset the delicate balance that kept them in power had to be opposed. They feared Rome more than God. They loved their position of authority more than God, and they trusted no one but themselves.

Jesus was a threat to their position, and that meant He was a threat to the survival of the nation. Just a week earlier, the party of the Pharisees had requested an extraordinary meeting of the Council to discuss the problem. They said, "What should we do? This man performs many miraculous signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' The high priest, Caiaphas, gave them the answer: 'You don't get it. You have to understand that it's better for you that one man die for the people, so the whole nation won't be destroyed'" (John 11:47-50).

So, the decision was made at that meeting. The verdict was given, and the sentence passed: Jesus had to die. A few days later the opportunity arose when Judas offered to lead them to Him for a fee. Perfect!

The fact that they couldn't find two witnesses to agree

on any single accusation didn't matter, since the sentence had already been passed. Caiaphas decided to cut to the chase. "I'm putting You under oath by the living God,' He said. 'Tell us: Are You are the Messiah, the Son of God?'" (Matthew 26:63).

Now they had Him. If Jesus said, "No," all they had to do was make it known that He had said under oath that He wasn't what everyone believed. But if He said, "Yes, I am the Messiah, the Son of God," they had Him there, too. To claim to be the Son of God was blasphemy—unless, of course, it was true!

Jesus' reply was more than they could have hoped for. "Yes, it is as you say,' He said. 'And let me tell you this: some day you will see me, the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Matthew 26:64).

The appropriate response at that point, of course, would have been for Caiaphas and all the rest to fall to their knees and say, "Lord! What took You so long? We've been waiting for ages for you to come! Please, take over now! What do You want me to do?"

It has always mystified me that these men, many of whom had a more profound knowledge of Scripture than I will ever have, could admit frankly that His many miraculous signs proved that He was indeed exactly Who He said He was, and yet reject Him. They were so convinced that they themselves were the indispensable glue that was keeping Israel safe, that God Himself couldn't do it without them.

It's easy to understand their failure when I understand the background. I am often so easily blinded by what I think should be that I fail to see things as they really are. I find it easy to know what I want, but much more difficult to discern and then accept the will of God, especially when what He wants isn't what I want. The challenges of this world often seem more real to me than the invisible claims of God's Word.

But God's call to you and me is to keep our eyes on His promises, to trust in His Word, and to stake our lives on the unprovable, invisible truth, because we know the One who said it, and we know that we can trust Him.

Giles serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz. "Christ Before Caiaphas," oil on canvas by Aert de Gelder (1700-1727).

WONDROUS LOVE

by Shannon McNear

AS I read Matthew 27:33-56, the words of an old hymn are all that come to mind: “What wondrous love is this, O my soul!”

“And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull ...” We know from the verse prior that Simon of Cyrene was conscripted from the crowd to carry Jesus’ cross. Jesus had already endured unthinkable torture and was beyond weary. And yet we see, in the very next verse, when they offered Him “wine ... mixed with gall”—actually wine vinegar mixed with myrrh, a narcotic-like painkiller, strange mercy in the face of the most horrible death the Roman Empire could devise—He refuses it, refuses to dull even a moment of the agony He is experiencing on our behalf.

“Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments.” His last remaining personal possessions, the only things left to cover whatever lingering dignity He might have, even that they stripped away, and then gambled between them who would get to keep the bloody souvenirs of this latest Judean prize. For this was no ordinary execution. Here on this cross hung, as the sign above His head proclaimed, “King of the Jews.” Not, “He claimed to be the King of the Jews,” as John’s account tells us the chief priests wanted, but written in Pilate’s own hand, in keenest irony. Pilate had wanted nothing to do with Jesus, conceding to the fury of the Jewish leaders only under pressure from the mob at his door. “This is your king,” he seemed to say in response. “And look at what you’ve done with Him.”

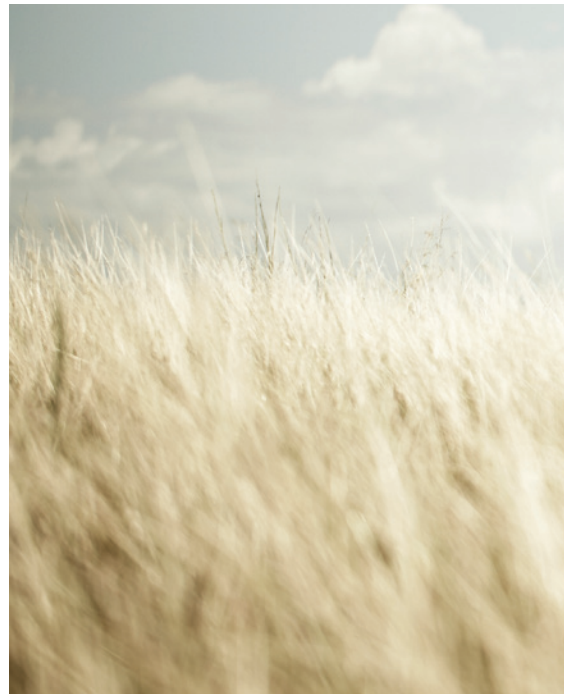
Indeed, as the day wears on, the same Jewish leaders linger, making sure this pesky upstart preacher meets His deserved end. No one can say they’re the Son of God, and yet did He not imply it over and over? It’s His own fault He’s up on that cross. They join the crowd in mocking Him, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him ...”

Jesus knew, of course, that coming down off the cross might indeed deliver shock and awe, but above all it would subvert the very thing He came to do—not only to suffer, but to die for our sins. Determined to drink the entire cup the Father had placed before Him, He would not flinch at the final dregs. Unlike the bitter drug

the Romans offered Him to dull His senses and make a torturous death more humanly bearable, this cup was deeper and far more difficult to swallow. But Jesus knew the outcome as no one standing with Him on that hill, that Place of the Skull, could. Jesus was after nothing less than our full redemption. “... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame ...” The absolute horror and bitterness of His death on Golgotha would become the medicine to heal the sins of the entire world.

And how often does the world choose a temporary dulling of its spiritual pain rather than accepting the complete solution?

Darkness falls on the scene—a solar eclipse, we moderns are told, but one of an incredible three-hour duration. Near the end, Jesus cries out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Here He is separated from the perfect fellowship He’d enjoyed for eternity past with God the Father. It is the moment when “He who





knew no sin became sin for us,” when God the Father can bear it no longer and turns His back on His own Son. Again, Jesus tastes the ultimate separation so that we may never ourselves be forsaken.

Here also He is offered the sour wine to drink—some commentators state that it was the drugged version, although none of the accounts say so—and He accepts it. It’s almost as if He’s wetting His throat for the final pronouncement—“It is finished!” And with a last scream of anguish, He surrenders His life.

Did the entire creation hold its breath for an instant? We are told “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.” That veil was over the Most Holy Place, which scholars tell us was not some gauzy curtain but a woven hanging, three inches thick! And another curiosity: “... the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” Can you imagine, the saints of old, resurrected alongside Jesus, and roaming about?

What grips my heart, though, is that centurion and his men who sat down to keep watch over Him. They saw everything. Heard the insults heaped upon Jesus from the gathered crowd. Heard every word Jesus spoke, and the exchange from the criminals hanging on either side of Him, where one went from reviling Jesus to confessing Him as Messiah. They witnessed the eerie darkness and the composure Jesus displayed throughout the entire process, which made His cries at the end all the more startling. And then at the moment of His death, they felt the great earthquake. It was enough to strike terror into the hearts of hardened Roman soldiers, and drove the centurion to declare, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Let that sink in. The first statement of Jesus’ identity, once the crucifixion had accomplished its task, came from one of those whose hands nailed Him to that cross.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul ... O my soul!

McNear is a member of New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D.

God's Word gives us a virtual tour of the day when death was defeated and Jesus' redemptive work was validated. Taking time for another annual pilgrimage to the garden tomb on that first Easter morning brings us joy tempered with reverence. Christ took our sins and died with them on the cross. The resurrection was proof of His victory over death, and in Him we are made alive. There cannot be any greater news.

My last trip to Jerusalem included spending time at a garden tomb just outside the Old City walls. My heart was awed as I stepped into the ancient Jewish tomb where many believe our Lord Jesus was buried and rose again. We don't have to visit the site, however, to grasp the reality and implications of Jesus' resurrection and what that means to each one of us.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John describe that profoundly consequential Sunday morning. Through the eyes of those present, we can see the whole picture which the disciples only grasped in stages.

At dawn, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices. While the women were walking to the tomb, they wondered how they would move the huge stone from the entrance, but they found it had been rolled away. Matthew 28:2 says, "And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it." The Roman guards were so frightened that they were like dead men. Some of the guards headed into the city to report to the chief priests.

The angel's message in verses 5-7 gave the women the information they needed. The angel knew they had come to find the dead body of Jesus. "... He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead ..." Interestingly, His own disciples were absent. Their hope died with Jesus on the cross. They had every reason for hope and joy, but they failed to listen to the words Jesus had previously spoken about these very things. They could have been there to welcome Him back to life instead of brooding over His death.

We share the indescribable emotion the women felt as reality began to dawn. This place of death was now the place of life. The women were "afraid yet filled with joy."

Suddenly, Jesus Himself met them, "Greetings," He said. They recognized Him, came to Him, and knelt, clinging to His feet in worship (vs. 9).

John records a special encounter with Jesus at the tomb. Mary Magdalene lingered outside crying. She looked inside the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been. After a brief exchange of words with the angels, Mary turned around and saw Jesus actually standing there. But she did not realize that it was Him. She was blinded by sadness and doubt until He spoke to her: "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (20:15). His voice awakened her spirit in joyful recognition. Then Jesus said, "Mary." She cried out, "Rabboni" or teacher, which carries more meaning than the common title of Rabbi (vs. 16). Jesus said to Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (vs. 17).

Many wonder about Jesus' admonition to Mary not to hold on to Him. He was alive, yet His followers could not hold on to Him the way they did before. There was to be a different yet closer relationship coming. Jesus says in John 16:7, "... it is to your advantage that I am leaving; for if I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." Jesus was to live within His people, not just with them as before. He would be held in the sanctuary of their hearts.

Everything we believe depends on the truth of Jesus' resurrection. The late Ole Hallesby wrote, "Here we have Easter's most joyous message: my acquittal papers with God's own signature affixed have been ready and waiting for me since Easter morning."

Easter not only commemorates Jesus' resurrection, but our own resurrection out of spiritual death to life eternal. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5, NIV). As we revisit the empty tomb again, may our hearts be stirred and filled with reverential joy. He is risen, indeed!

Hjermstad is the interim pastor at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.



DEATH WAS DEFEATED

by Pastor Wayne
Hjermstad



HE HAS RISEN INDEED

by Pastor Jon
Langness



He is risen! Cue monotone obligatory response: “He is risen indeed.” Perhaps the lack of gusto in the response comes because it’s prompted, people are still waiting for the caffeine to kick in, are caught off guard, or are still thinking about their egg bakes. If there was ever a phrase to get excited about, it’s this. It’s the basis of all our hope! If it isn’t true, we are a pitiful bunch of buffoons (I Corinthians 15:19). Thankfully, this is certainly true!

The Apostle Paul writes to reassure the Corinthian Christians of the verifiable fact that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. More than 500 witnesses could attest that He was no longer dead (vs. 6). They saw Him—not a vision of Him, but the resurrected Christ Himself. In the flesh. It’s a truth that ought to stay on the forefront of our minds and yet we allow so many things to mute that marvelous truth. Paul summarizes this truth in verses 3-5:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” Christ was dead and now He lives.

What does this mean for us today? To start, it means there is a resurrection of the dead. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have died (vs. 20). During the last twelve months, death has been an inescapable topic of discussion. It has been consistently shoved in our faces. That’s not exactly a bad thing, however. It’s good to wrestle with our own mortality. The problem comes when death is treated as the end, as though there is nothing after death. Not so. Christ is risen! “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (vs. 21). Skip ahead to verses 35-



49 to read more about the resurrection of the dead. It's definitely something to look forward to with anticipation. Christ is risen, Christ is victorious over the grave. This is part of the reason why Christians have endured terrible persecution over the last two millennia. "O death, where is your sting?" (vs. 55).

Christ's victory at Easter isn't just a future hope we have to look forward to, it's our present hope. There's more to Christ's victory than one day rising from the dead. Christ's victory meets us wherever we are and provides hope. Look again at verse 3: "... Christ died for our sins." What sins? All of them. Yes, that one. And that one, too. Have you ever feared being truly known? Not the persona you carefully manicure on social media or the version you present to the public eye. I mean the version of you that you try so hard to suppress and silence in hopes that no

one else would ever see. You tell yourself, "Conceal, don't feel!" What if that person was brought to the light? The truth is, each one of us is rotten to the core. So rotten that the sin which ought to repulse us has an eerie draw and appeal. It's magnetic. It's attractive. We want it. We chase it. But it lets us down. We cover it and vow to try harder next time. It's the carousel ride that never ends. That's true for you, isn't it? You are not alone. You are not defeated, either. Christ is risen.

Paul went through that same struggle, wrestling with his flesh and sin, wanting to serve God and do right, yet still finding himself giving in to sin. Realizing his inability to handle it, he exclaims, "wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). It's this same Paul who writes I Corinthians 15:57, "but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Our victory over the sin in our life isn't found in our ability to try harder and avoid it. It isn't found in our resolve to do better. It's found in Christ, "who died for our sins ... and was raised" (3-4). The risen Christ is the proof that our sins have been dealt with; we carry them no more!

We're tempted to look for victory in our performance, but that isn't where Scripture points us. When we do that, we either comfort ourselves with our own self-righteousness, or come to the same point as Paul and countless other believers, utterly broken over our own wretchedness. Our performance is the wrong metric. Our victory was never meant to be found in our performance as Christians, but in Christ, who died for our sins and rose again. This victory, Paul writes, is given to us by God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's victory is our victory, now, presently, and for all time. His victory is our victory!

Since we are victorious in Christ and through Christ, our toil is not in vain (vs. 56). Your life is not in vain. Therefore, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (vs. 58). Christ died for our sins and rose again. We've been given the victory through Christ. There's a lot packed in to those three little words, He is risen! Let's continue to proclaim it: He is risen indeed!

Langness serves Abiding Word Lutheran, Deshler, Neb.

AFLC Annual Conference

June 16-19 • Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary

The 2021 AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 16-19 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. The conference theme, "Prepare the Way of the Lord," comes from Isaiah 40:3.

Registration

Registration for the conference, found online (aflc.org/conference), is now open and will close on June 1. A single registration is \$35, and couple registration is \$60. Meal plans and individual meals, offered through the FLBCS cafeteria, can be purchased through the registration form. Meals may not be purchased on arrival, so please be sure to register by June 1.

Campus Housing

FLBCS has guest housing available during the conference, but capacity is limited. Each dorm room provides a bed, dresser, and desk. Please note that dorm rooms will not have air conditioning, and guests must provide their own bedding. Bathrooms in both dorms are shared. Kitchens are available on the lowest level of each dorm.

Trygve Dahl Hall (the women's dorm, located on the northeast side of Heritage Hall) has been reserved for families and individual women. Bathrooms are available for both men and women. There is also a kitchenette on each floor (including a washer, dryer, fridge, microwave, and sink).

John Strand Hall (the men's dorm, southeast of Heritage Hall) has been reserved for individual men. Bathrooms are only provided for men. There is a microwave on each floor.

For prices and to reserve a space in guest housing, contact Emily Kregel at emily.kregel@flbc.edu.

Off Campus Housing

Off-campus arrangements have been made with the following hotels:

- Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, 210 Carlson Parkway, Plymouth
763.473.3008 • \$102/night
- Cambria Hotel, 9655 Grove Circle North, Maple Grove • (952) 225-2685
- Crown Plaza Minneapolis West, 3131 Campus Drive, Plymouth
763.559.6600 • \$132 plus tax, or the prevailing rate, whichever is less

Children and Youth

Families are welcome at the Annual Conference. Vacation Bible school will be led by two ministry teams from our Free Lutheran Bible College for children ages 4 through 6th grade. The time will include Bible lessons, music, crafts, and recreation during morning and afternoon sessions, and children will join their families for lunch and supper.

Childcare will be available for those younger than 4 during the morning and afternoon sessions. Children will join their families for lunch and supper. If you think you may use the service at some point, please register your child for accurate planning.

Students in 7th through 12th grade who register for the teen track will join together for worship, Bible study, and fellowship activities each morning and afternoon. Activities will include on- and off-campus opportunities with transportation provided by Bible College staff. Teen programming will provide a chance for students to grow in the Word while meeting students from other AFLC congregations. Note that students are encouraged to join their families for lunch and the evening services.



Conference schedule

Wednesday, June 16

- 9 a.m. Conference committees meet
- 7 p.m. Ordination service

Thursday, June 17–Saturday, June 19

- 7:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 8:30 a.m. Devotions
- 8:45 a.m. Business session
- 10:50 a.m. Lecture series, FLBCS faculty (Thursday and Saturday)
- 11:40 a.m. Prayer
- Noon Lunch
- 1:15 p.m. Corporation meetings
 - Thursday ARC Corporation
 - Friday Schools Corporation
 - Saturday Missions Corporation
- 1:15-2 p.m. Electives
 - Thursday World Missions, Youth, Coordinating Committee
 - Friday Home Missions, AED, Parish Education
 - Saturday Coordinating Committee, Parish Education, Lutherans for Life
- 2:15-3 p.m. Electives
 - Thursday Home Missions, FLBCS, AED
 - Friday World Missions, Youth, ARC
 - Saturday Schools, ARC, PACCT
- 3:40 p.m. Worship and devotions
- 4 p.m. Business session
- 5:30 p.m. Dinner (Thursday and Friday)
- 7 p.m. Evening service
 - Thursday Mission Festival service
 - Friday Communion service
 - Saturday Testimony service (4:30 p.m.)

W

ould you help us pray for our mission work in Alaska? Long-time missionary Jeff

Swanson has sensed that his time in Alaska is coming to a close. This has caused members of the AFLC Home Missions Committee to start seeking the Lord for a missionary to serve the Alaskan people in the Bristol Bay area.

Pastor Jeff and his wife, Jane, have served faithfully over the past 13 years. We praise God for their hearts of service. The way Jeff and Jane have so personally connected with the people in the communities of Naknek and King Salmon will make their departure difficult.

The work, established in 1922 by the Lutheran Mission Society (LMS), was offered to AFLC Home Missions in 2008. Over the past 20 years, God has used AFLC pastors such as Jeff Swanson, Tom C. Olson, Henry Mohagen, Brian Davidson, Paul Nash, and Joe Ocker to build a missions connection.

Together with local Christians, more than 200 volunteers from the greater AFLC family have worked on projects and helped send three full-time missionaries into gospel ministry there. And many summer teams have taught vacation Bible school in the months of June and July, and worked in The Net.

Mission life in Alaska is

ALASKA: MOVING FORWARD

BY RON JORGENSEN

arduous yet rewarding. The remoteness can foster loneliness. But somehow love for life there and its people gets in your blood, the missionaries tell us. All it takes is one mission trip to change your life forever, say some volunteers.

Members of the AFLC Home Missions Committee are looking for a mature and energetic missionary who is committed to loving the people, leading the team of missionaries, preaching the gospel, and sharing the light of Christ to souls who need Him. There is now a healthy team in place with Pastor Bob and Margret Lee and Pastor Jeremy and Lacey Crowell, along with several local believers in the church. Missionary Lee manages the Christian radio station, KAKN. Missionary Crowell provides aviation services via FLAPS to make evangelism, outreach, and discipleship possible.

What are the qualifications needed? A mature faith, a shepherd's heart, and an affinity for cross-cultural ministry. A biblical Lutheran theology and a deep love for people is also important. Being ordained is not a prerequisite but a heart for relational ministry is. Engaging the people in life's struggles is a responsibility that cannot be taken lightly. This missionary pastor cannot afford to sit in the office all day. Acceptance in the community is won by participation, not by separation. Connection with the locals in Alaska involves earning their trust by involving yourself

wholly in a wide range of relationships, even if it takes many years.

During the salmon fishing season of early summer, the village of Naknek swells to many times the population, from approximately 500 residents to sometimes 10,000 seasonal workers. The laborers come from all over the world. It is a rare opportunity to have a mission field where the world comes to you.

Home Missions' desire is for this work to become self-sustaining. We want to let the ministry flourish and grow locally. Because of the uniqueness of ministering in the Alaskan villages, outside help from missionaries is viewed to be temporary. This new missionary will need to focus on discipling local believers who will be able to multiply new shepherds from the area.

Home Missions is looking at ways to reestablish the funding of the Alaska Mission. Possibilities include personal support funds similar to World Missions or separating the Alaska Ministry account for more transparent and intentional accounting. We are also asking LMS to assist with pension and home/family travel expenses.

Jorgenson, a member of the Home Missions Committee, is a member of Bethany Free Lutheran, Abercrombie, N.D.

SLC opens for final home games of season



Completion of the final details on the new Student Life Center came down to the wire, when the keys to the building were officially turned over to the Free Lutheran Bible College on Thursday, Feb. 25. The final home games for the Conquerors were able to be played in the SLC Friday and Saturday, Feb. 26 and 27. The teams hosted Sisseton Wahpeton College for the weekend games.

FLBC plans grand opening weekend events April 16-17

A weekend full of events have been planned for April 16-17, marking the grand opening of the new Student Life Center on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College in Plymouth, Minn. Highlighting the event will be Sean McDowell, a Christian apologist, who will speak on

the importance of a biblical worldview. Friday's events will begin with tours of the SLC and will conclude with a ribbon-cutting ceremony that evening. Saturday's events will feature an alumni basketball tournament capped by a featured game in the evening.

Guests are asked to reserve a spot for the event by registering for the grand opening, meals, and the basketball tournament. The forms can be found at flbc.edu/events. Housing on campus will not be available. However, blocks of rooms have been reserved at several local hotels.

The paper hearts on our front windows went up in March 2020. Are yours still there, like ours are? The vacuum of limited human contact imposed by the COVID-19 shutdown prompted people everywhere to reach out in love in new ways. The simple visual symbol of a heart had a unifying effect, even from the distance of a passing vehicle. More than a year later, people are even more in need of love. What have you and your church been doing to share the love of Jesus through this pandemic?

Our Women's Missionary Federation chose to show our love for the front-line workers at our local nursing home by bringing them trays of baked goods. (I'm sure there is a commandment somewhere about sugar!) The generous response from our members to the request, "Bring treats," was so large that we had enough to also bring trays of cookies and bars to our police and sheriff departments and staff at our city hospital. Now that's a lot of sugar! Before Christmas, our church had a day of showing our appreciation to the 150 faculty and staff of our local school system who have had full class sessions since August 2020, despite mask wearing, distancing, and sanitizer

BY MOLLY WIESEN

overload. Yes, there were more baked goods, snacks, and signs saying, "Thank you—we appreciate you."

In spiritual terms, a sticky caramel bar might not fit the Lord's Great Commission to "Go into all the world ..." (Matthew 28:19-20). The back of our church bulletin recently had a devotional by Jonni Sliver, AFLC missionary to the Miriam Home in Brazil. In it, she asked, "What does love look like?" She shared how a little boy new to their care experienced the realization that he was loved by the staff because the house mother/chef had made especially for him his mother's cheese bread. That frightened, lonely child was comforted through the efforts of time and action taken by the love of that generous woman.

Did Jesus bring homemade bread or cookies to the sick? Doubtful. What He did do was sacrifice His time, physical comfort, relationships



and, ultimately, His life to bring forgiveness, healing, peace, and the promise of eternal life to those who believe in Him.

II Corinthians 2:14 says, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere."

So, bake the fragrant cookies, pray, give someone a ride, donate to a missionary, invite a friend to church, bring clothes to a homeless shelter, and more ... all in Jesus' name. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. ... Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (I John 3:16a, 18).

Wiesen is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.



Dramatic retelling of Jacob and Esau story

Students at the Free Lutheran Bible College joined with staff and family March 12-14 as they presented “I’m Going Home,” an original two-act play written by seminarian Michael Rokenbrodt. The drama, presented in the style of the American Frontier, portrayed the story of Jacob and Esau. Left: The cast. Below, left: Jacob (Christopher Hooper) meets Laban (Josh Moe) and his wife (Leah Aamot) and daughter Leah (Lyda Carr). Center: Esau’s wife Judith, played by Sarah Gullickson. Below: Aaron, portrayed by Dr. James Molstre, presides over Miriam’s funeral while the family looks on.



Illinois District hosts Reawaken to the Mission conference

Departments work to connect with congregations

The Illinois District of the AFLC hosted a conference February 20 called “Reawakening to the Mission.” About 60 attendees gathered at Helmar Lutheran in Newark, Ill., for the one-day event to hear seven speakers address the topics of personal revival, Home Missions, evangelistic work, and church planting. Speakers included AFLC president Lyndon Korhonen, “Revive Us Again;” Kirk Rautio, “Bible Camp Ministry;” Pastor Jason Holt, “Reaching Gen-Z;” and Pastor Randy Nelson, “The Gospel Under Quarantine.” Missionary speaker Michael Rokenbrodt brought a message on reaching the next generation in Uganda, and Home Mission

Director Jim Johnson spoke on “The Call to Church Planting.” Host Pastor Steve Lombardo also shared on the topic of “The Doctrine of Invitation.”

Other AFLC districts will host Reawakening conferences this year: the South Dakota District is set for Sept. 18 in Arlington, S.D.; the Northwestern Minnesota District will host a conference on Oct. 18; and the West Coast District will host a conference on Nov. 20.

“We need to keep in touch with our people to see and ministry from their vantage point,” said President Korhonen, who tries to visit a different Free Lutheran church every Sunday.

Evangelism Director Randy



Nelson agreed: “I’m excited for us to come together to refocus on the mission of sharing the good news of Jesus.”

Missions directors Earl Korhonen and Jim Johnson were inspired last year when Our Savior’s Free Lutheran of Thief River Falls, Minn., organized a similar event. The conference drew church attenders and

area believers to discuss church planting, the call to send missionaries across the globe, and the mission in Alaska.

“I appreciate how the weekend lets us share our heart for missions,” said Earl Korhonen, “but it’s just as important for [AFLC directors] to hear the hearts of our congregations.”

WHO IS THE REAL WINNER?

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

A nice thing about sports is you know who wins. You look at the scoreboard, you see which team scored the most runs and that is the team that won the baseball game.

Success is not so easy to determine in church life and in missions.

It is tempting to do like we do in sports and look at the numbers and “count the nickels and noses.” We can count attendance numbers and how much money has been given, and those numbers can become like the scoreboard. If the numbers of people coming is up and the giving is up, then many think the church and its leadership is successful and winning. When the numbers are down the congregation and pastor struggle to not feel like failures who are losing the battle.

Missionaries face a similar struggle. Supporters like to see pictures of crowds attending services and hear of big numbers coming to the Lord. Some missionaries are blessed with more financial support than others. Are the missionaries with crowds and bigger savings accounts more successful than the others? The world may think so, but God uses different criteria for determining success than mere numbers.

The first church I served out of seminary was Spencer Creek Lutheran in Eugene, Ore. It was a supportive, loving congregation, but small in numbers. The smallness had me wondering at times about my abilities. The tempter whispers in your ear: “A good preacher would have more people coming to listen to him.” It felt like we were losing when we compared ourselves to the big churches with their large numbers of people and ministries.

Around that time I read *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, by Kent and Barbara Hughes. The book was the encouragement and attitude-altering perspective I needed. Kent shared about a time in his ministry when he felt like a failure and was about to give up. He had “bought into the idea that success meant increased numbers,” He wrote. “To me success in the ministry meant growth in attendance. ... Given my thinking, the only conclusion I could come to was that I was failing” (p. 29).

They started studying what the Scriptures say about success. One passage that spoke to

them was the story in Numbers 20 about Moses getting water from the rock by striking it, even though God had said only to speak to it. Water gushed out anyway and the people viewed Moses as a great success. But God had a different view and told Moses he wouldn’t get to enter the Promised Land, “Because you did not trust in me” (Numbers 20:12). They wrote: “It was a banner day in our lives when we saw from the Bible that great public success in the ministry, like that of Moses at Kadesh, is not necessarily success in God’s eyes. God’s call is to be faithful rather than successful” (p. 43).

Some missionaries can feel discouraged when they visit congregations. They can’t show pictures

of big crowds that are coming. But what matters for each of us, no matter what country we are in, is that we are faithful. To the servants who are trusting the Lord and trying their best to share the good news of Jesus, our gracious God says, “Well done.”

Johnson, who serves Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., is the chairman of the AFLC World Missions Committee.



PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Craig Johnson, Astoria, Ore., has accepted a call as interim pastor at Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash.

Pastor John Kiehl has resigned from Faith Lutheran, Metropolis, Ill., and has accepted a call to serve Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore., beginning in April. The congregation is currently served by Pastor Richard Gunderson, who has resigned.

Kyle Smith, who will graduate from the Free Lutheran Seminary in May, has accepted a call to serve First Lutheran, Ellendale, Minn.

Pastor Christian Andrews has accepted a call to serve Immanuel Lutheran, Springfield, Mo. Andrews had been serving the congregation on an interim basis.

Pastor Nathan Olson, who recently accepted a call as full-time faculty at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, will continue to serve Living Word Free Lutheran, Egan, Minn., on a part-time basis. He has stepped down from his role as a member of the AFLC Youth Board, effective June 1.

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn., will host several events in the coming months, including:

- **Campus Days:** April 9-11
- **Spring concert:** May 7
- **Graduation:** May 8
(including 2020, 2021 graduates)
- **Annual Conference:** June 16-19
- **Golf Scramble:** July 30
(at The Refuge, Oak Grove, Minn.)
- **Summer Institute of Theology:**
August 2-6

FEBRUARY MEMORIALS

Bible College

Tom Fugleberg
Donna Anderson
Orrin Qualley
Valborg Huglen
Ruth Claus
Betty Floan
Owen Aasness

FLAPS

Pastor Irvin Schmitke

General Fund

Betty Floan

Home Missions

Valborg Huglen

Parish Education

Gary Sorenson
Valborg Huglen

Seminary

Valborg Huglen
Rhoda Huglen

World Missions

Valborg Huglen
Gloria Ulrich
Tom Fugleberg
Dennis Jorenby

Artist Timm to speak at FLY One Night



Artist Eric Samuel Timm (left) will headline FLY One Night, a live-stream event planned for 7 p.m. July 7 and presented by the 2023 FLY Committee and AFLC Youth Ministries. All are welcome to join the live-stream at flyconvention.org.

Students in the class of 2021 and 2022 are invited to attend the event in person at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary (FLBCS) chapel, Plymouth, Minn. Registration is required and will be available online starting April 6. Register early as seating is limited for the live event. The event is free, but donations are welcome.

Other speakers for the evening include FLY Committee President Gideon Johnson, FLY

Convention Coordinator Daniel Keinanen, and AFLC Youth Director Jason Holt. The evening will include music, testimonies, and a word from FLBCS, event sponsor. For more information, email fly@aflc.org.

**Phyllis Nikunen**

Phyllis Nikunen, 78, of Clarion, Iowa, died March 2 at Iowa Specialty Hospital in Clarion.

Born Aug. 31, 1942, in South Range, Mich., she was the daughter of Pastor John and Julia (Walikainen) Junttila. She married Jerome Nikunen Sept. 14, 1963, in Chassell, Mich.

She graduated from L'Anse High School in L'Anse, Mich., in 1960. She studied accounting at Suomi Junior College, Hancock, Mich., graduating in 1961. After marriage, and her husband's ordination in 1968, they served many AFLC congregations in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Iowa. She worked as a certified chiropractor assistant, dental assistant, sales representative for Thrivent, special education para and helped with the disabled. She served on the AFLC's national WMF board as recording secretary from 2004 to 2008.

Surviving are her husband; one son, Jeff Nikunen (and Brenda); one daughter, Rebecca (Dale) Trushenski; one sister, Kathy Nikunen (Dave); and ten grandchildren.

A memorial service was held March 9 at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., with Licensed Pastor Mark Olson officiating.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-February 28, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$24,795	\$69,669	\$76,368
Evangelism	13,639	31,755	15,945
Youth Ministries	22,573	40,083	18,703
Parish Education	10,107	20,874	18,422
Seminary	24,825	45,709	58,386
Bible College	47,801	81,217	64,202
Home Missions	25,489	62,067	51,118
World Missions	34,409	72,088	83,630
Personal Support	93,868	188,012	133,112
TOTALS	\$297,507	\$611,473	\$519,886

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

LENGTHENING LENT

It's been a strange Lenten season for most of us this year, with coronavirus restrictions or recommendations still in effect, which has meant online midweek services offered by many of our congregations. Looking through my Lenten file, I found old bulletins from Tioga and Valley City, N.D., and Helmar, Ill., as well as quite a sizable collection of sermon notes on the Seven Last Words of Christ.

Our Lenten observances themselves are not a biblical custom, of course, and not a part of worship tradition in many Protestant faith families. Even the word itself is not a biblical one. "Lent" comes from an Old English word that means "to lengthen," referring to the season of springtime when the days become longer. The observance originally was 40 hours long, prior to Easter, to be spent in fasting. In about the year 800 A.D., it became 40 days, not including Sundays. Why 40? One author suggests that it corresponds to the fasting of Moses and Elijah, but especially of Christ's 40 days in the wilderness. The dates are determined by the date of Easter, which changes every year.

Should we lengthen Lent? What, to 50 days, a number which also has scriptural connections (check your concordance)? No, of course not. Rather, I believe all of us could be strengthened in our walk with the Lord if the heart and purpose of the Lenten season were lengthened to last all year long.

So, what should Lent mean to the Christian? It's a time to remember the centrality of the cross. I have always greatly appreciated the special emphasis in the Lenten messages on the suffering and death of our Savior—the Upper Room, Gethsemane, the courtrooms, Golgotha. This is the gospel, the good news, the last hours in the life of Jesus. We have heard

these accounts so often, and yet there always seems to be something fresh that speaks to our hearts and minds. We all need the blessed opportunity to walk spiritually with Jesus on His pilgrimage to the cross and to learn again what it means in our lives today.

"I love to tell the story;
for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story,
that I have loved so long."
(*"I Love to Tell the Story,"*
Ambassador Hymnal, No. 304)

Lent is meant to be a time for personal repentance, and a lengthened Lent points us to the need for daily repentance in our lives as Christians. The suffering and death of Christ powerfully show us the price that He had to pay to atone for your sins and mine, moving us to confession and amendment of life, remembering that repentance is a gift from God, too (Acts 11:18).

Lent has been seen over the years as a time for spiritual self-examination. There are probing questions that may be asked: How is it with my times of devotion and in my prayer life? Have I grown careless and spiritually complacent? We look within, and could easily lose hope, but then we look to our Heavenly Father who loves and forgives. The spirit of Lent reminds us that this should be more than an annual action.

Self-examination also points us to changes that should occur as a result. It is

easy to become careless. There are tasks undone, obligations unfulfilled, people who should be remembered. Making these changes is a journey, and we are not expected to travel it alone. Our Savior walks with us, and His Spirit empowers us to respond in faithful obedience. The Spirit gives life!

The Lenten season offers tools that will aid us in our journey. A time of fasting is traditional, and for some it may sharpen our senses and help us escape from much that distracts us. And then there is music. Some of us have learned to appreciate the passion poems of Hallgrímur Petursson, set to music and close to the heart of Icelandic Christians. (We have one in our *Ambassador Hymnal*, "Upon the Cross the Robber Prayed," No. 92). Handel's "Messiah" also comes to mind as especially fitting, but surely not only for Lent. This year my wife

We all need the blessed opportunity to walk spiritually with Jesus on His pilgrimage to the cross ...

and I sang two hymns daily through the season, and we didn't run out of selections. The music of Lent is so Christ-centered and rich and should not be limited to 40 days a year.

Yes, let's lengthen Lent, drawing from its lessons to enrich our walk with the Lord throughout the whole year.



Pastor Robert Lee

association retreat center

TO PRESS ONWARD

BY KIRK RAUTIO

As the snow begins to melt here in Wisconsin and the calendar begins to fill, I am reminded again of God's faithfulness at the Association Retreat Center. I wonder, though, am I reminded of His faithfulness because the calendar is filling up? Or was I already well acquainted with His faithfulness?

As I sat down with our staff to determine a theme for 2021 at the ARC, it was in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was impressed upon our hearts to "press onward," and so our theme was chosen. Why did we choose this theme? We realized that despite the difficulties driven by the pandemic and the daily pressures and stresses through which we live, our Heavenly Father calls His children to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Why do we need to press on? When we

pursue that upward calling from Him, we find that He is faithful to equip us to reach that goal.

I was privileged to sit under a sermon about the Israelites which recounted the story of their flight from Egypt into the desert, where they were pressed on both sides. I'm sure you know the story quite well—the Egyptians were behind them and the Red Sea blocked their escape in front. What did Moses tell them?

"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. ... The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:13-14).

And then the Lord said, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on" (vs 15).

God was calling His people to press onward to follow His calling. Likewise, God calls us to pick up our feet and He promises to place our next steps. All too often we wish to see the road laid out ahead of us or

even the whole map. But that is not what we are guaranteed. Like oxen which press on as they pull a plow through a field, we must faithfully press on in our tasks. This is a laborious picture. But the oxen have a task: they are pressing onward and being faithful.

So that is why our staff at the ARC are refreshed and renewed as the snow is melting and the calendar is filling up. Praise the Lord! He is walking us through the desert—there are many steps to go—but He is calling us to remain faithful and press onward. What is He calling you to be faithful in? How is He calling you to press onward in life, ministry, or family? Look for opportunities to press on as the Lord is asking us to strive for the upward call in Christ Jesus.

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.