

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

Exodus
and the
Christian
Life



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NOTHING AND SOMETHING

BY TIM HERSET

The conversation in the high school hallway starts with a simple question: “What’s new with you?” The reply is drenched with the drippings of early morning drudgery: “Nothin’ ...”

The caring teacher can tell something is new and asks a follow up question: “Really?”

The student slowly smiles and whispers, “No.” With a smile on his face, the teacher responds with the initial question: “What’s new with you?”

The student smirks and says, “Somethin’ ...”

The two go on to talk about the exciting news for the student’s future, the hopes and dreams that seem to be coming to fruition. Rather than another brutally boring Monday morning greeting, they actually engage in conversation.

This all-too-common verbal exchange shows two things. First, with a little patience and perseverance we truly can get beyond the surface to know people personally. Second, far too frequently we reduce our ordinary (or extraordinary) life events to *nothing*. After decades of overemphasizing bigger and better—more, more, more—our culture has created a way of viewing the significant moments of our daily life as *nothing*.

At the same time, we take the things in our life that we wish we hadn’t done, the stuff we want to keep secret, and in conversation with God we turn those things into *something*. The dialogue we have with ourselves goes something like this: “My regrets are repulsive to me, so it must be something God won’t want to deal with.” Or we convince ourselves that those things that were

said or done to us or that thing that we did cannot be forgiven. We might even say to someone, “I’ve done some things that God can’t possibly forgive.”

There are surely things that cannot be classified as *nothing*. For those things we grieve and turn to God. But there are also things we determine are *something* and we must deal with them and turn back to God.

In Romans 8, Paul made it clear that he was convinced that “nothing can ever separate us from God’s love” (vs. 38). He then explains what he means when he uses the word *nothing*. “Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.” He wrote using broad strokes, covering all of humanity’s biggest fears. But in the use of the word *life*, he includes the assumed *something* that you are facing today. The ordinary and the extraordinary. The old and the new. The happy and the sad. The beauty and the tragedy. Everything. When he wrapped up his thoughts he wrote emphatically, “nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vs. 39).

I’m not sure what your *nothing* is or what the *something* in your life might be, but know this: it cannot separate you from the love of God that Jesus reveals to you.

Herset is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.

—Max Lucado

If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God, you'll be at rest.

—Corrie Ten Boom

You move us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.

—Augustine of Hippo

We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Bible is a remarkable fountain: the more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst.

—Martin Luther

Red Sea Crossing

By Joan Culler

Exodus 14:13-14

I have a confession to make. When I first began attending Bible studies as an adult Christian I wasn't very interested in the Old Testament. I had studied the Old Testament as history in college, and I knew all the Old Testament stories from my childhood Sunday school classes. What else was there to learn? A lot of Jewish laws that were no longer relevant? No thanks. The New Testament was what I needed to dig into. The Gospels with accounts of the life and death of Jesus, the history of the early church, the letters to the churches—these were the things that would inform and direct my faith life.

In time I discovered how wrong my thinking was. For one thing, the Apostle Paul, in a letter to Timothy, writes: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness ..." (II Timothy 3:16).

Since the New Testament didn't exist at the time, Paul was obviously speaking of the Old Testament. That gave me pause. Then at some point, I signed up for a two-year, through-the-Bible course where we spent a great deal of time on the Old Testament. I began to put those Sunday school stories into chronological order and to see that the Bible is one grand drama with many chapters. The overarching theme is the redemption of the people of God. It became obvious that many events in the Old Testament were a foretaste or hint of what was to come later. As St. Augustine put it: "The New Testament is in the Old concealed, the Old is by the New revealed."

The Exodus, and in particular the account of how God rescued the Israelites at the Red Sea, is a prime example. As I read chapter 14 of Exodus, I see that this is a truly desperate situation. Facing the people is the sea, Pharaoh and his army are pursuing them from behind. They are truly trapped and cannot save themselves. Moses understands that they must rely completely on God. He tells them: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today ... The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exodus 14:13-14).

God is in complete control. He not only directs Moses, He hardens the heart of Pharaoh and He repositions the pillar of fire and the angel. He drives the sea back so that the Israelites can cross on dry land, and then returns it to

its normal course, destroying the Egyptians.

This is not only an event involving water, it is a watershed event! It is one of those moments when history is changed forever. The Israelites never forgot their rescue, commemorating it every year in the Passover celebration.

As individual Christians, our baptism is a similar watershed event. Through water and the Word of God, we too are rescued. Just as God defeated Pharaoh through the water of the Red Sea, in the water of our baptism God defeats the world, the flesh, and the devil. Like the Israelites, we are no longer condemned to a life of slavery; we are new creations, united with Christ and promised eternal life with God. The action is entirely His. Whether we are baptized as an infant or an adult, it is the grace of God alone that finds us and saves us, the crux of faith as summed up by Paul: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The water of baptism combined with the Word is God's victory for His people. When we view our story and our salvation in light of the Old Testament, we understand that God is always victorious. He is always acting. He is always about the business of saving His people.

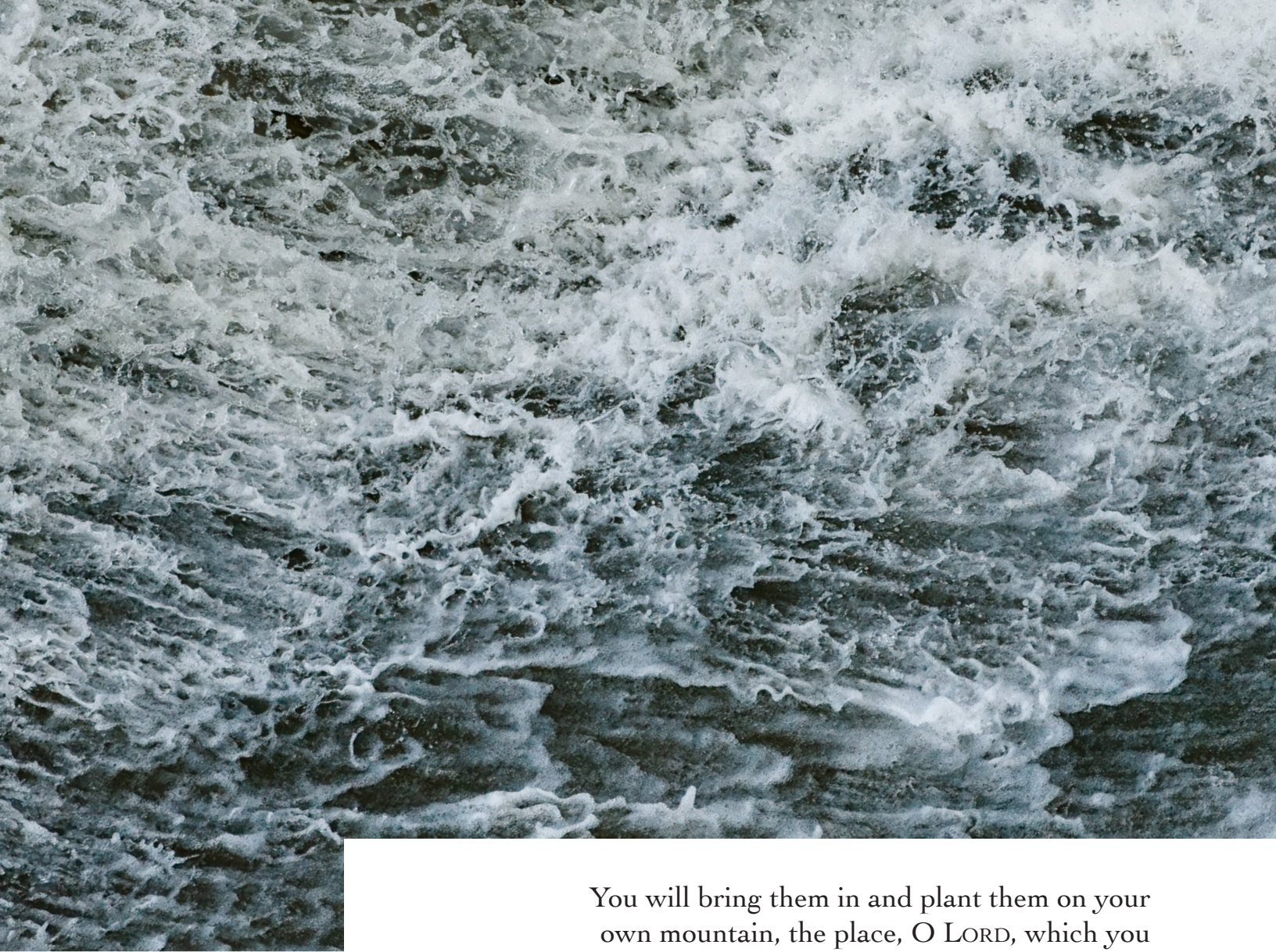
The yearly Passover meal celebrating their deliverance from slavery in Egypt was a way to remind the Israelites that they were the people of a mighty God, a God who was with them and who had saved them. According to the *Large Catechism* of Martin Luther, recalling our baptism serves the same purpose: "This is how we must regard baptism and make it profitable to ourselves; when our sins oppress us we must strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless, I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life both in soul and body."

You are a child of God. You have been saved. Remember your baptism.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md. Artwork: "Passage Through the Red Sea," Oragio Borgianni, after a painting by Rafaël, from the Rijksmuseum.



Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today ... The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.



You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.



The suffering of the Israelites in Egypt was worse than I realized. Their bodies suffered under Pharaoh, but did you know that their souls were being afflicted by their own idolatry? Joshua 24:14 reveals the sad truth that the Israelites were sinning against the Lord by serving false gods during their sojourn there.

When they finally cried to Yahweh for help, He heard them. God's aim was not just to free them from Pharaoh, but to release them from the claws of Pharaoh's gods. The Lord rescued His people from Pharaoh by many signs and wonders, culminating in the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. Once on the other side, they sang Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea.

Dr. Brent Olson's (FLBCS faculty) doctoral work shows that the Song of the Sea exalts Yahweh as the divine warrior whose victory at sea broke the bonds of Israel's slavery to both Pharaoh and his gods, especially one of their main gods, Baal-Zephon.

The mythical story explaining why Baal-Zephon was worthy of worship was well known by Egyptians and Israelites alike. The myth told of how Baal-Zephon had fought the god of the sea, a seven-headed dragon called Leviathan, and won. Because he defeated the sea god, Baal-

praise. I remember singing Exodus 15:1 faster and faster with every repetition in Sunday school, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and rider He has thrown into the sea!" Yahweh, their divine warrior, not Baal, won the battle at sea.

The Lord's victory is expounded for ten verses. Then in Exodus 15:11 the song modulates to the praise of Yahweh above all other gods with the words, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?" In this section of the song the Lord's love and salvation for His people is punctuated with verse 17, "You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established." Yahweh, their divine warrior, not Baal, would build a sanctuary on His own mountain, literally, "the mountain of His inheritance."

Dr. Olson notes that this phrase, "the mountain of His inheritance" is only ever used in the Baal myth and then in the Song of the Sea to refute the Baal myth. Yahweh brought His people to His mountain first at Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, now in the congregation since Pentecost, and soon in the New Jerusalem when Christ returns.

The Song of the Sea ends with some holy *chutzpah* in verse 18, "The Lord will reign forever and ever." Moses was doing what Paul would describe in I Corinthians 1:31 as "boasting in the Lord." Yahweh, their divine warrior, not Baal, manifests eternal kingship.

By the end of the Song of the Sea, the

Israelites were not only freed from Pharaoh, they were also freed from the lie that Baal-Zephon had any power over them or any blessing to offer them. Salvation is found in Yahweh, nowhere else. How fitting, then, that when God became flesh in the person of His Son, He was named Jesus, meaning, "Yahweh is salvation."

Jesus led the ultimate exodus, delivering us from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is the divine warrior who conquered through suffering, dying, and rising. He graciously plants us in His abode, the mountain of His inheritance—the congregation, which is the form His eternal kingdom now takes on earth.

The Lord heard the Israelites, and He will hear you. Cry to "Yahweh is Salvation," to Jesus, when you are burdened with suffering and sin. With hearts of thanksgiving for His salvation, sing to the Lord.

Amiot serves Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn., and Reiner Lutheran Free, Goodridge, Minn.

Song of Moses

By Pastor Alex Amiot

Zephon now controlled the waterways. The myth told of how Baal-Zephon then built a temple on "the mountain of his inheritance" and boasted that his kingship was eternal.

How could Yahweh compete with such an epic tale that had captured the hearts of many of His people? This is what He did: He sent them on a camping trip; He gave them a water activity; He taught them a song. Kind of like Bible camp, but bigger.

The camping trip: before crossing the Red Sea, the Lord told the Israelites in Exodus 14:2 to camp in front of a place called Baal-Zephon. They sat in the shadow of that temple and looked over the unassailable sea. Baal-Zephon defeated Leviathan in the myth, but how would the false god fare against Yahweh?

The water activity: Yahweh won. He showed His lordship over all earthly elements and all spiritual deceivers like Baal-Zephon and Leviathan by cutting a dry path through the sea.

The song: Read Exodus 15:1–21 and note how Yahweh directly replaces Baal as the divine warrior worthy of all



In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

Do you ever find yourself discontent with your current situation? Maybe you have moved recently and feel completely disconnected from your new community. Maybe you have been looking for a new job that might bring you more satisfaction. Maybe you are wishing for just a little more in your savings account.

Whatever it might be, you find yourself thinking and possibly even telling others, “If only I had _____, then I would feel content.”

Although I hate to admit it, I find myself all too often doing exactly this. I look at my life and find it almost perfect, except for one more thing that would make it just a little bit better. As an adult, most of the things that I end up wanting are good things. I want a nice home for my family. I want a deep, genuine friendship with my wife. Having these desires doesn’t make me a complainer or a grumbler. And yet, in reality I *am* grumbling, wishing that God would be a little bit faster at providing what I think I need.

In Exodus 16, we see the Israelites grumbling due to lack of food. I think we all can agree that this is perfectly normal considering their situation. According to the notes in my study Bible, it had been one month since the Israelites had left Egypt. That is a fair amount of time on the road for such a large amount of people; their existing food supply was likely diminishing far too quickly. Yet the Lord hadn’t provided a new source of food for them. It seems clear that this must have been intentional in order to prepare their hearts for His coming provision.

“So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there



Exodus 16:2-4

Manna & Quail

By Samuel Quanbeck

was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. ...' The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey" (vs. 13-15, 31).

What an incredible miracle and gift! God would provide daily for their need for food, and fulfill exactly what they needed despite their grumbling. I am amazed at how often God blesses us in the same way. Even at the moment of our grumbling, He steps in and provides.

What has struck me more recently in this passage, though, is how God provided for the Israelites. He didn't provide an abundant food source in which they could feel secure. He provided only what they needed for that day. In so doing, He exposed a deeper need of theirs: their need to recognize their dependence on Him. God knew their physical and spiritual needs far better than they did. He planned for their physical needs in order to reveal their spiritual needs, as well.

In the New Testament, we see that God continues to use physical means to teach the spiritual reality of our need for

Him. In John 6, thousands of people followed Jesus due to the miracles they had seen Him perform. And when they became hungry, He fed them, multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish into an overwhelming supply of abundance. Later on in the chapter, we see how this set the stage for Jesus to teach about Himself.

"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh" (v. 51).

Jesus had provided for their physical needs, but even more so, He provided a context for them to understand their spiritual need for redemption and His provision for it. Throughout Scripture, God uses the physical world He created to teach us about our need for Him.

When we encounter the physical needs that are so present in this life, when we are tempted to think about that one last thing that we feel would lead to contentment, let us recognize God's sanctifying work that is occurring. And let us remember His provision for both our physical and also all our spiritual needs.

Quanbeck, Granbury, Texas, is a member of Word of Truth Free Lutheran, Glen Rose, Texas.

Numbers 13:30

The wandering Israelites had great hopes for the future; God Himself had promised them a good land. Some of them went in and *saw* it was a good land ... and then they saw the strength of the people who lived there. And they thought about what would happen if things didn't go as planned. And having known God's promise to give them the land, they nevertheless wanted to walk away because they feared the Canaanites and worried over what might happen if God wasn't entirely with them. They wished they had never followed Him out of Egypt in the first place. They trusted God about as far as their own arms could reach, their own eyes could see, and their own legs and strength could carry them.

These sad events come from Numbers 13-14, and they are painfully familiar, for we have lived out a similar train of events. Whether pursuing some new dream that we believe is from the Lord or simply trying to deal with an unexpected set of new challenges, the minute that something comes up that is more than a tiny bit beyond our strength or control, defeatism strikes, usually within a storm of anxiety.

"We walk by faith, not by sight"—these words from II Corinthians 5:7 speak of our hope in Jesus, and in the life that He died to give us: a kingdom and a home that we do not see now but *know by faith* is ours. As we live and walk toward His coming kingdom, we live and walk by faith.

Inherent in faith is a sense of trust and reliance. In fact, the Greek term that we translate as "faith" can be used either to refer to the act of trusting or to someone who is fundamentally trustworthy and reliable. *We trust* in God; God is and has been proven to be *trustworthy*.

Before going to spy out the land, the men selected from each of the twelve tribes and the rest of Israel had seen how God could be trusted. He kept them safe while devastating Egypt with plagues. He brought them through the parted sea, and then drowned the Egyptians in it. He fed them consistently with manna and quail. He gave them water miraculously from a rock. He gave them victory over the Amalekites. He gave them the law written with His own hand. He judged them because of the golden calf, but still confirmed His plan to bring them to the promised land. He didn't give up on them.

Along with what Israel experienced, we can add our

own experiences of God's faithfulness in providing for and taking care of us. The Lord is trustworthy; we have every reason to trust in Him. The question is, will we? All too often, we tend to trust Him about as far as our own arms can reach, our legs and strength can carry us, or as far as we can dare to envision. But if that's only as far as we are willing to trust Him, are we really trusting in Him, or in our own strength and vision?

Cautious objections are quick to arise: "In making decisions, we should use the brains God has given us and not take needless risks. God hasn't called us to be reckless." These words carry some truth. They also can be "safe"

Spies in Canaan

By Pastor Phill Hooper

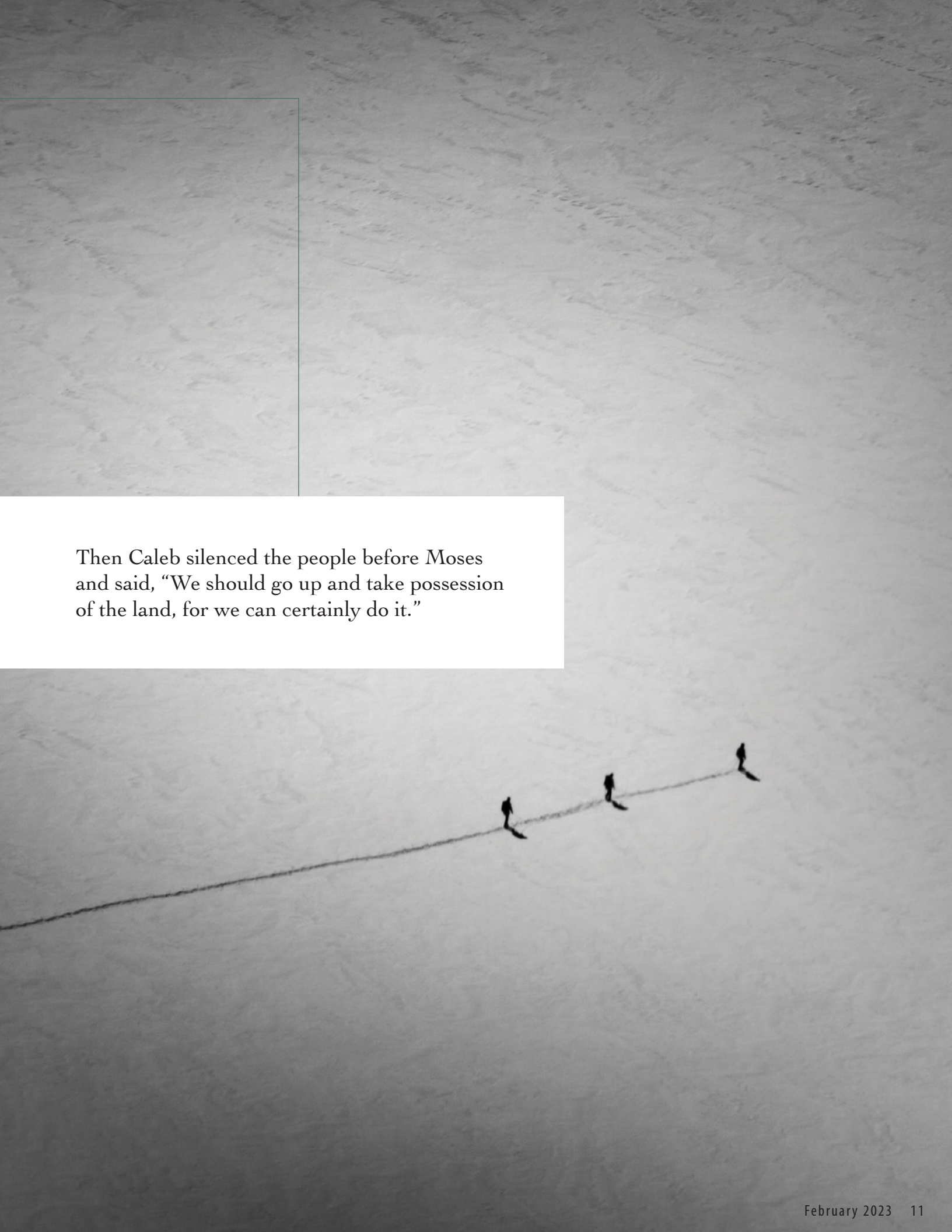
excuses for us not to dare to dream out of fear of loss, or failure, or just disappointment. They can become license to give up the moment some frightening risk or challenge shows up.

What is going to define our lives—walking by faith, or listening to fear and doubt?

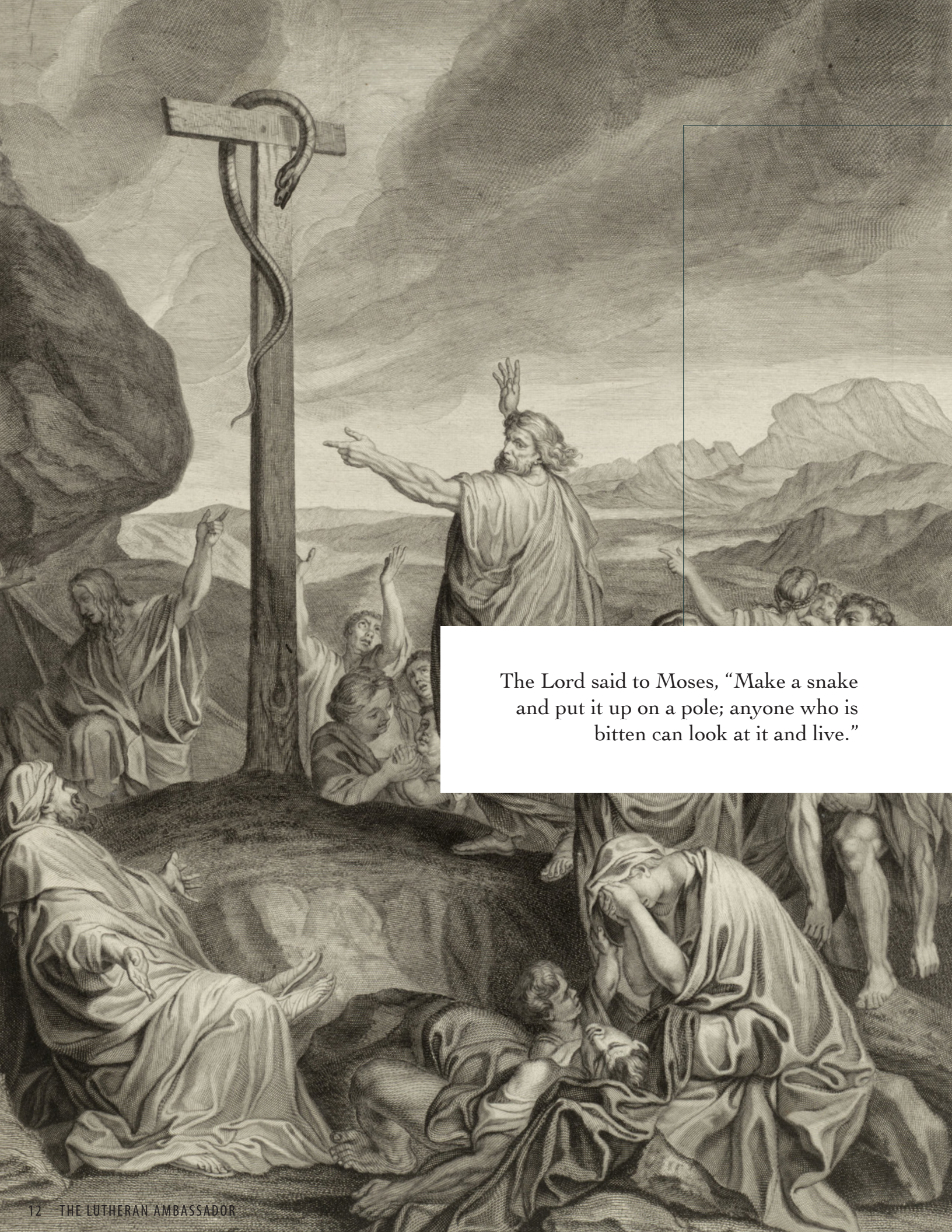
The Lord had promised Israel the land; all they had to do was study the details and get a sense of the job that God had given them—would they need to bring a ladder to deal with walled cities, or not?—and so forth. Ten of the spies got distracted by the strong people and cities, and lost sight of God, His promise, and His power. They couldn't see how *they* could do it, and that was it. Joshua and Caleb fixed their eyes on God, and how *He* could lead them into the land and give them the strength to do what seemed impossible. They understood how to walk by faith—trusting in God.

As challenges arise and we see grim circumstances, let's remember to shift our gaze back up to God. He can get us through what seems impossible. Let's remember His presence and power as we try to decide whether or not to pursue a dream. *We* may not be able to see how something might be accomplished or overcome, but we trust and walk with someone who can do immeasurably more than we can even imagine.

Hooper serves St. John's Free Lutheran, Duluth, Minn.

An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered mountain slope. Three hikers are visible as small dark silhouettes, spaced out along a faint line of tracks that winds across the snow. The snow is textured with numerous small tracks and indentations, suggesting a busy or well-trodden path. The overall scene is desolate and emphasizes the scale of the environment compared to the individuals.

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”



The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.”

Do you ever struggle with impatience? I tend to think our collective impatience is getting increasingly worse with every generation, along with our growing desire for instant knowledge and gratification. But then I read about the Israelites. Time and time again the Israelites grew impatient—with Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and God. God would bless them, deliver them from various dangers, and walk with them through numerous crises, and they would turn around the next day and, in impatience, complain.

Numbers 21 is a good example. The Israelites encountered an army intent on destroying them. They faithfully turned to the Lord and asked that He save them from the Canaanite army and they promised to completely destroy the Canaanites—all of their cities—for God's glory. The "Lord heeded the voice of Israel" (vs. 3). The Israelites were delivered, and the Canaanite cities were destroyed according to the Word of the Lord. But in the very next verse, the Israelites grew impatient with their continued wandering through the wilderness.

When I read through the story of the Israelites' journey, I find it easy to want to yell at them, "Can't you see? The Lord is with you, guiding you, loving you, providing for you!

their impatience led them to complain. Their sins came in the form of serpents and bit them, killing some of the people before they ever entered the Promised Land.

This was the closest to the Promised Land that the Israelites had come in their journey from Egypt. The older generation was told they would never enter the land promised to their forefathers due to their unbelief. This new generation was falling into the same cycle of lack of trust in the one true King. They needed to be reminded that the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was also their Lord.

The Israelites recognized their unbelief and cried out to Moses, asking the Lord to deliver them once again. In response, the Lord directed Moses to craft a bronze serpent, set it on a pole, and raise it up. And anyone who looked upon that serpent was saved. This was a true test of faith. Generally speaking, just looking at something does not produce complete healing from a life-threatening situation. The Israelites had to trust that just looking at a serpent on a pole was going to bring them healing because of the Lord's promise. The serpent did not bring the healing. The Lord brought healing when the people trusted in Him.

This piece of Israel's history in Numbers 21 is recounted in John 3:14-15. Jesus tells Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted

up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." In the same way that all the Israelites had to look at the serpent and believe in God's promise and power in order to be healed,

God calls all who wish to be saved from sin to look at the cross and believe in the saving power of Christ for salvation. Just as the serpent represented the Israelites' sin, and that representation was placed on a pole, so the sinless Son of Man was placed on the cross. All the fullness of man's sin (past, present, and future) was placed on Him, allowing us to have salvation, hope, and reconciliation in Him for eternity. The Israelites experienced physical healing through looking at the serpent, but in looking at the cross we experience spiritual healing that can be found nowhere else.

Let us look to Christ on the cross and remember His promises and provision, not growing impatient with unmet desires but finding full satisfaction in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and in Christ alone.

Kregel is the student life coordinator and women's resident head at the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn. Artwork: "Creation of the Brazen Serpent," by printmaker Antoine Masson after Charles le Brun, Rijksmuseum.

Bronze Serpent


By Emily Kregel

Just look around! He is in your midst!" Instead, they only think inwardly about what they want, how they are feeling, and what they are lacking. They fail to see that they have everything they need in the God who walks alongside them.

Can you relate? I can. I often default to looking inward instead of heavenward for help. However, the Lord doesn't leave us there. He shows us our path of waywardness, and sometimes, as with the Israelites in Numbers 21, our unfaithfulness is revealed through painful trials.

After voicing their impatience with the Lord in verse 5—"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food"—the Lord responded: "Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (v. 6).

In the Bible, serpents often represent evil or sin. In the Israelites' unbelief, selfishness, and pride, they sinned against God. They didn't trust that if they asked the Lord for help or for answers, He would provide for them. Instead,



And Joshua said, “Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.”

Not long ago I visited a college I attended when I was young. I did some math in my head and realized that my age in relation to current students is the same as somebody who went to college around 1920 would have been when I was a student there.

A sobering thought.

Currently in my life, I’m taking measures to get healthier, and I’m pleased with the results. I find myself, when I’m not careful, imagining I can keep this up forever and never die.

Then I have a good laugh at myself because God has fixed my times and seasons. Death is coming.

“Crossing Jordan” is a metaphor that’s used a lot, in poetry and hymns, to describe our inevitable date with death. “Deep River” is a famous spiritual. “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I Stand.” “The Jordan River is chilly and cold ...” I could go on and on. I don’t think the Bible ever actually uses this metaphor, but it’s not a bad one. Crossing a river, in the old days, could be terrifying. Unless there was a solid bridge, the fording place could be treacherous. The bottom could be miry or conceal deep potholes. The current could be perilous, especially in spring when snow melted in the mountains. Also, it was cold.

Christians have always understood that, although “Whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:26), the experience of physical death is just something we’ll have to endure.

Joshua 3:9-13

Crossing Jordan

By Larry Walker

It was like that for the people of Israel when they crossed the Jordan River into Canaan. Their parents had gone through the Red Sea, which must have been a harrowing experience. Now they faced their own trial by water—a great mountain of surging hydraulic power heaped up to one side of their fording place.

It was scary, but it had to be gotten through. Like death.

But, as I mentioned, that metaphor isn't from the Bible. I can't think of any Scripture reference that speaks about death as "crossing the Jordan."

Instead, crossing the Jordan in Scripture is a time of beginning. The people of Israel are *entering* the Promised Land.

It's kind of a "glass half full" thing. When we look at Jordan as an ending, we miss the point.

The Bible speaks of our "going out and our coming in" in several places, including Psalm 121:8 and Isaiah 37:28. The phrase is pretty, but I used to wonder what it actually meant.

I finally decided (and I welcome Bible scholars to correct me) that it's talking about changes in life. Going from childhood to adulthood. From singleness to marriage. From one occupation to another. From one house to another.

There's the going out part, which is poignant, a looking back. But the child of God looks forward, too, with

hope and faith. We don't know what the future holds, but we hold onto the promises.

What kind of promises?

The Bible offers many images of Heaven. The Promised Land itself. The bosom of Abraham. The new City of God.

But my favorite is the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19).

I think we Free Lutherans sometimes miss the point of that image. The Apostle John, writing in Revelation, wasn't thinking of our kind of weddings. He was a Jew. He was thinking of a Jewish wedding.

What's a Jewish wedding like? I've never been to one, but I've heard descriptions and seen movies. (Caution: some of the following may offend some believers' sensibilities.)

A Jewish wedding means wine. A Jewish wedding means dancing (yes, dancing). A Jewish wedding involves laughter, and feasting, and revelry. A group of people living under the threat of genocide celebrates the hope of new life, of their family's future. When they celebrate, they go all out.

When I cross the Jordan, I think I may have to learn to celebrate. Might be a challenge.

Walker is a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



RECHARGED & ENCOURAGED

BY KAREN FLOAN

I have always viewed Saturdays as precious days to catch up on life, especially after a busy week of work or a week filled with family activities. So, I was unsure about attending our district Women's Missionary Federation (WMF) fall gathering on Saturday, Oct. 1, 2022.

You, too, may think that taking time to attend a WMF spring or fall gathering is the last thing you have time to do. But I would like to encourage you to consider that attending one might be exactly what helps you get recharged and encouraged. Let me share with you what the day meant to me.

The early morning drive with a friend to the

WMF rally in Amery, Wis., did take more than an hour, but the beautiful drive and the good conversation brought a boost of energy. Arriving at the rally with approximately 65 other ladies, we exchanged smiles over coffee. As the program began, we were led in praise and worship by the ladies from our host congregation, Amery Free Lutheran. The keynote speaker, Gwen Berge, shared words of testimony on the theme, "We Will Testify of His Greatness," and emphasized God's goodness even in times of personal difficulties. She also helped us memorize the theme verse from Psalm 31:19 using actions for phrases of the verse: "How great is Your goodness that You have stored up for those who fear You and accomplished in the sight of everyone for

those who take refuge in You."

Before the mission hour, door prizes were given out and updates were given on various missionary needs. The ladies participated in a prayer walk around the room to stations representing the four main WMF projects: Christian education (AFLC schools and Parish Education), Home Missions, World Missions, and WMF general needs. Following our mission time, several more ladies shared short testimonies of God's greatness, goodness, and faithfulness to them. An offering for missions and a short business meeting took place before the noon luncheon of delicious soup and salads.

Yes, I'm glad I spent part of this Saturday with others who took time to testify of His greatness in their lives. It's wonderful to be encouraged and reminded of His goodness!

Floan, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the recording secretary for the national WMF.



WHAT IS IN A NAME?

BY JONNI SLIVER

I have four young friends who have been adopted: Juliano, Juliana, Jonathan, and Allison. That sounds like good news, but for Juliano and Juliana (ages 10 and 7), the process has been challenging. Though they wanted a family and a home of their own, they had been disappointed over and over by broken promises. They still loved their parents; to call someone else “mom” and “dad” was difficult. But after short visits, then longer visits, bonds were formed and it has now been several months since the children have been living full-time with their new parents.

We recently had a visit from the oldest son and his new mom, and we learned that the children had received new names. Now, I confess, that was hard for me. The children had already lost so much—now they were losing their very identity. Then something happened that

changed my mind. As soon as Diego (formerly Juliano) saw our social assistant, he asked if his register had arrived. The children are receiving new birth certificates, and he was excited to see his new name on it.

A Scripture passage came to mind. Hosea, a prophet of Israel, had received an unexpected calling from God to marry a prostitute. This relationship was to symbolize Israel’s relationship with God—unfaithfulness and spiritual prostitution. In 1:6-8 we see that they have a child named Lo-ruhama, which means “no mercy,” because God’s patience with Israel was running out. Another child was born and his name was Lo-ammi, which means “not my people,” because the people of Israel had rejected God. Notice, the separation between God and Israel is caused by Israel’s rebellion, not by God turning away, and their correction was drawing near. These two children had identities built on the wayward attitudes of the nation, and it is a heart-breaking image.

It makes me think of my young friends who also carried identities influenced by what had happened in their lives and by what they had witnessed. They had seen behavior that taught them that lying, manipulation, and stealing are wrong, but only if you get caught—so don’t get caught! They heard words that wounded their hearts and learned that words can be powerful



weapons. They learned that promises were made to appease, to distract, not to be kept. It was easy for them to think that was who they would be. But do children have to become like their parents?

Let’s go back to Hosea 1:10-11. Aha! One of the names was changed. Lo-ammi became “Children of the Living God.” If we jump to 2:23, Lo-ruhama became “My Beloved.” The first names looked back at where they had come from—their inheritance of the flesh. Everything that comes from the flesh leads to corruption and despair. The new names looked forward to the plan God had to bless, edify, and restore. God’s will always leads to life, new life!

Our children don’t have to live looking back, thinking they have to be what their parents were. They are free to look forward and dream of the good things God has planned for them. They also have a sure promise. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Sliver is an AFLC missionary serving in the Miriam Home, Campo Mourão, Brazil.

Symposium puts focus on early church fathers



The Free Lutheran Seminary offered a continuing education opportunity on Jan. 11-12 on their Plymouth, Minn., campus. The Seminary Symposium offered teaching on “patristics,” an area of study focused on the early church fathers, featuring two sessions by Dr. Daniel Janosik (right) on John of Damascus. Janosik is adjunct professor of apologetics and Islamic studies at Southern Evangelical Seminary, Columbia International University, Erskine Seminary, and Veritas Seminary. The symposium, which replaces the former January terms, also included sessions by Pastor Andrew Kneeland (Holy Book, Holy Readers), Pastor Matthew Ballmann (A Case for Reading Holy Scripture with the Early Church), and Pastor Steve Mundfrom (Was Origen’s Christology Heretical?).



TOP: Shannon McNear, New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D., reacts to a comment by Dr. Daniel Janosik during his presentation on “John of Damascus on the Trinity.” ABOVE: Seminarian Scott Olson takes notes during the symposium. NEAR RIGHT: Pastor Brian Lunn asks a question. FAR RIGHT: Seminarian Troy Hansen listens as a fellow participant ask a question.



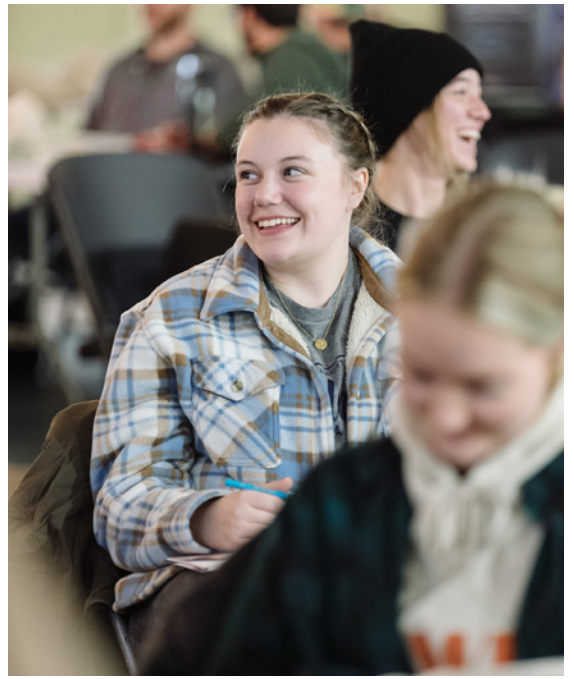
Ministries of mercy are focus of annual Sverdrup Forum



TOP: Pastor Steve Mundfrom gives a presentation on Origen, an early Christian theologian. ABOVE MIDDLE: Pastor Matthew Ballmann presented a paper on the benefits of reading Scripture with the early church fathers. ABOVE: Dean Hedlund, who serves First United Lutheran (LCMC), Roseau, Minn., listens to a session by Dr. Janosik on "John of Damascus on Islam."



Meeting under the theme of "Sverdrup and Ministries of Mercy," the Georg Sverdrup Society met on Jan. 13 at the Student Life Center on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn. Featured presentations included "Georg Sverdrup and the Deaconess Tradition," by Gracia Grindal (top left), "The Congregation as the Temple of Christ" by Dr. Brent Olson (top right), and "Sverdrup and the Ministry of Mercy: Madagascar Medical Missionaries," by Dr. Stanley Quanbeck, presented by Marian Christopherson. In attendance were members of the society, as well as current seminary students, including Micah Moan (left), and guests. Loieli Dyrud (above) asks a question. Pictured middle left is Troy McNear, Jamestown, N.D.



ABOVE LEFT: Cody Halverson, youth worker at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D., and his wife, Sierra, participate in a coaching session. ABOVE RIGHT: Madison Greven, Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

Youth Ministries hosts Youth Worker Weekend



AFLC Youth Ministries hosted a weekend retreat Jan. 13-15 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. The annual event provided teaching and training for youth workers on the theme of "Like Jesus." Jay Fast (above left) and Joshua Edwards (above center, with Mark Rustad, seated), from Sonlife Ministries, focused training sessions on Jesus' disciple-making process, which featured four chairs of growth and

development: come and see, follow me, fish for people, and go and bear fruit.

The weekend also offered youth workers a chance to connect with fellow ministry workers from around the country, group activities, and coaching sessions between experienced youth workers and those who are new to ministry. An optional personal retreat was offered for youth workers arriving on Jan. 12.

Kyle Anenson (middle), Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., and Reba Cox (above), United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb., listen in during a training session.



'W

ould you like me to call Pastor John?" the Elgin, N.D., fire chief asked his crew when the fire

department and rescue squad had returned to their station after dealing with a fatality.

As a pastor and chaplain in this rural area, I appreciate knowing that the local community is willing to make use of the resources that I can offer to them. I am one of a number of AFLC pastors who are volunteer chaplains to their local emergency medical services, fire departments, or law enforcement agencies.

I consider chaplaincy a ministry of presence, an extension of my ministry in these communities where I have served for 28 years. They know I am there at any time of the day or night to listen, pray, and in some situations to be available with them at the scene of a tragedy.

The reality for these first responders in this rural area is that everyone knows everyone. Sooner or later they are going to respond to a call that involves a close friend or even a family member, which can be very traumatic for them.

BEING THERE WHEN NEEDED

BY PASTOR JOHN AMUNDSON

In one instance, a young man in the community committed suicide and the officer who found him was a close friend. Everyone knew him. When I arrived at the hospital, I spent time with the family and also touched base with the EMS squad, the sheriff's officers, and the medical staff throughout the evening hours. The doctor on call that night commented that it was the first time she had been given the opportunity to simply have a shoulder to lean on in the midst of a tragedy like that.

The next day at the hospital, the medical team was given the opportunity to debrief with all of those who had responded to the tragic situation. I told all of them that this was personal for me, as well. In our confirmation program we claim our kids "forever," and he was one of my kids. The debriefing was a time to listen, a time for them to share, a time for some tears and frustrations. Most of all, it was a time to begin just a little bit of healing for them. A time to let them know someone was available to listen to them whenever they needed to talk.

Many of these men and women don't want to admit they need to debrief, to let it out. I am

sure it is a part of the stoic culture here, but it is also a part of our human nature to believe that even when we experience those kinds of traumatic incidents, we are okay and don't need to talk about it. That is why I thanked God the day I glanced up from weeding my garden and found one of the deputies standing there. He said he needed to talk but wasn't ready to be seen by others in a setting where they might see him as weak.

That is what it means to have a ministry of presence. I might be in my garden. Or maybe when I come out of the local café, one of the deputies will beckon me to join him in his patrol car where we can sit and share. Often times they just wander into my office, plop down in a chair, and it becomes their safe place to vent. The important thing for them is that there is someone who cares, someone who will listen and walk with them through a tough moment in their lives.

Amundson, who serves Immanuel Lutheran, New Leipzig, N.D., and Trinity Lutheran, Mott, N.D., also serves as a chaplain in his local community.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Jon Langness has accepted a call to serve as the co-pastor of Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D. Langness currently serves Abiding Word Lutheran, Deshler, Neb. The new call will start in April.

Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Ramsey, Minn., has accepted an interim call to Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D. He will begin serving the last Sunday in January and will serve through mid-June.

The **Free Lutheran Bible College** will host several upcoming events.

- **Spotlight: Missions**, Feb. 8-10, will feature Pastor Michal Klus, Třinec, Czech Republic, a 2003 graduate of FLS. Klus will speak on the “Missionary Call of Abraham.” National artist Andrew Peterson will also present a session Feb. 10 on “The Importance of Creative Vocations.”

- **Spotlight: Gender and Worldview**, featuring Nancy Pearcey, will be held March 13-14. For more information about these events, visit flbc.edu/events.

The 2023 AFLC **Pastors' Conference** will be held Oct. 3-5 at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis. All boards will be held Oct. 2-3 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn.

Registration opens for Conference

Online registration for the 2023 AFLC Annual Conference will launch on February 1. The registration web page can be found at aflc.org/conferences. The conference will be held June 14-17 at the Best Western Plus Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center in Sioux Falls, S.D. Pre-conference registration fees are \$35/person or \$60/couple. Prices will rise if registering on site.

Housing must be booked separately. Various housing options are available at local hotels, camp sites, or through online housing rentals such as VRBO. The Ramkota conference center is offering standard rooms for \$119/night when booked with “South Dakota Association Free Lutheran Congregations for the AFLC Annual Conference.” For this rate, contact the Ramkota by phone at (605) 336-0650. Several suites are available for an upgrade.

The 2023 Conference theme is “Victory in Christ” from I Corinthians 15:57. As they become available, other conference resources will be available online, including evening service live streaming, past conference reports, and children and youth activities.

Youth Ministries offers free webinars

Through a collaboration with Youth Ministry Consultants, AFLC Youth Ministries is offering pre-paid webinars throughout the year for those involved in sharing Jesus with today’s teenagers.

Youth Ministry Consultants, a Minneapolis-based organization led by Tiger McLuen, will offer a total of 10 virtual webinars through 2023. AFLC leaders can use the code “AFLC23”

and their cost will be covered for each webinar registration. Visit the website at youthministryconsultants.org.

With topics from youth ministry coordination to teen mental health, these offerings are open to all AFLC youth leaders including volunteers, vocational directors, parents, and pastors. For more information, email the AFLC Youth Board at youth@aflc.org.

DECEMBER MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Diana Holland
Claudia Hooper

Evangelism & Discipleship

LeRoy Sletten

General Fund

Charlotte Fruehauf

Lutheran

Ambassador

Charlotte Fruehauf
Lee Quanbeck
Pastor John Abel

FLAPS

Pastor Paul Nash

Home Missions

Pastor Paul Nash

Seminary

Paul & Marge Ray
Dave Trangsrud

World Missions

Deb Benson
Karen Dalager
Gene Knudsvig
Pastor Jerome Elness
Ron Jan

WMF

Ada Windecker
Dee Teigland
Glenda Fradenburg

... in honor of

FLAPS

Kevin Lee

General Fund

Pastor Thomas W. Olson

Lutheran

Ambassador

Pastor Tim & Cindy Johnson

Your gifts support the AFLC’s monthly magazine

The AFLC’s monthly magazine, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, is now free for all subscribers. The ministry is subsidized by your gifts. For more information on giving to our ministry, contact via email at lasubscriptions@aflc.org. Or, visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-December 31, 2022

FUND	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$49,399	\$445,700	\$413,860
Evangelism	23,322	133,330	131,760
Youth Ministries	15,882	154,893	198,960
Parish Education	24,878	187,317	201,864
Seminary	43,770	280,364	324,068
Bible College	188,952	603,212	470,867
Home Missions	42,097	402,444	663,809
World Missions	70,705	500,954	479,830
WM Personal Support	94,513	763,663	871,159
TOTALS	\$553,517	\$3,471,878	\$3,756,178

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

THANKFULNESS, THE ANTIDOTE TO MONOTONY

February can be a difficult month. It only has 28 days but somehow each of them blurs together. To many of us in the Midwest, these February days are the drudges of an eternal winter where there's no Christmas to look forward to and the spring lilies seem like they'll never arrive. Each day feels like the last.



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

Are you going through a season of monotony?

Many of us don't have work or daily rhythms that are regularly stimulating or energizing. Waking up at the same time every morning, doing the same things we always do, and going

to bed at the same time every evening. Day after day sitting in the same squeaky chair, doing the same uninspiring work, drinking the same stale coffee from the same ordinary mug.

Congregational life can grow monotonous, too. Maybe the idea of loading up the kids early Sunday morning isn't as exciting as it used to be. Deacons and trustees can be drained by the endless facility upkeep and maintenance, and Sunday school teachers can prepare the same lessons week after week for kids who never seem to pay attention.

Does your spiritual life feel as monotonous as these winter days? If you do pick up your Bible during the week, you read the same stories you've been reading for years and the same truths you've been taught since childhood. Same old, same old.

There's nothing wrong with repetition, but monotony can easily settle into our lives like a thick, gray fog. Monotony is a killer of joy. We'd all love our lives and our faith to be filled once again with wonder and excitement, but often the only advice we receive is to pray and read our Bibles more. That solution is trite and memorable, but usually unhelpful.

Instead, I think it's important that we remember that these dreary February days come every year. It's okay to live through seasons of monotony. In the weeks and months after his great losses, Job cried to God: "I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn" (7:3-4). We know that even with all his wealth and power Solomon also struggled with feelings of monotony. He wrote in the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes: "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises" (1:3-5). Can you imagine the monotonous routines of the Israelites who lived off manna and quail for 40 years? Or the woman in Luke 13 who couldn't straighten her back for 18 years?

It's normal for the Christian to live through seasons of stagnant repetition and listless monotony. Every day won't be a roller coaster of spiritual discovery and adventure. And that's okay. Sometimes, God is encountered not on mountaintops but in the mundane.

If your spiritual life feels as monotonous as these February days, don't spiral downwards. Yes, keep reading your Bible and turn your continuous internal dialogues into conversations with God. But also make it a habit to intentionally practice thankfulness. Remembering God's faithfulness in the past can bring fresh meaning to the present. Psalm 107 is a good

place to start, but also reflect on your own life. How has God provided for your needs in years past?

As you make that same daily commute, thank God for a consistent paycheck. As you run those same errands, be thankful for the businesses and stores you can visit. As you sit in the pews and listen to another sermon, be thankful that you can gather and worship freely. Monotony can be a killer of joy, but thanksgiving is oftentimes the best antidote. As Thomas Chisholm's famous hymn says: "All I have needed Thy hand hath provided; Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me."

But the most important thing to remember during these metaphorical February days of monotony is this: The vitality of your relationship with God does not depend on how you're feeling in the moment. The monotony of everyday life might be affecting your attitude and

disposition, but you are still a loved and chosen child of God.

Your inability to focus when trudging through your daily devotional reading doesn't change that God Himself was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. The glossed-over eyes you get during

your pastor's sermon doesn't take away the suffering, dying, and rising that Christ did for you. Feelings of monotony do not change God's relentless love for you.

The dreary days of February can drag on and on, but remember: springtime is coming.

Every day won't be a roller coaster of spiritual discovery and adventure. And that's okay.

building the base

CREATED

BY PASTOR MICAH KLEMME

Distinctions are vital when teaching the faith. We are *created* beings. We are *sinful* beings. Yet we are not *created* *sinful*. A distinction must be made between human nature and sinful human nature, which started because of original sin. One is God's work, one is Satan's work (Ephesians 1:1-2). The value of human life must be grounded with this distinction in mind.

God is the author of human nature. Both male and female were created uniquely in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). Even after sin entered by our rebellion, the Psalms declare that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (139:14). The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is our confidence that sin will one day be destroyed and humanity's original glory will be restored. Being confident in these things, Christians can speak the truth about the value of human life.

Do we exist by chance or is there a Creator? If humanity came about through cosmic flux and is likewise doomed by it, would not human rights also be accidental?

If we are here by accident, the task of grounding human rights will not stand the test of time.

I recently read about Confucius. His teaching emphasized a respect for the government but lacked a reason to stop tyrants. Today, advertisements tell us to "be kind." But like the teaching of Confucius, no reason is given why that advice is binding. The mantra of the sinful nature, which only finds value in selfishness, is "rules for thee but not for me." Whether under a tyrant or a society of opportunists, your value is up for grabs. Or so it seems.

Throughout history believers have confessed that humanity belongs to the one true God. His revealed law is binding on all. More importantly, our value is made clear through Jesus Christ, who was sent to suffer and die for our salvation. No other religion can make higher objective claims on mankind than Christianity, nor can any love on earth be greater than our Lord's.

What does the world offer but temporary distractions and false hopes against the evils of the world? Christ offers the certainty of eternal life. He promised

to return to earth to put an end to all the devil's work. Every day is to be lived in light of that day, which means casting aside sin, trusting Christ, and pursuing the good. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10).

Good works are for your neighbor. Perhaps your neighbor does not feel valued. Perhaps loving your neighbor in this day of confusion takes the form of listening and empathizing. What remedy for our burdens is better than a trusted friend? Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Stick with that person in your life and keep the conversation going, always being eager to give comfort in Christ. Know that making the case for our value, whether before the world or to our neighbor, is not in vain.

Klemme serves St. Peter's Free Lutheran, Melvin, Ill.