

THE 

MARCH 2023

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



The  
Cross  
and the  
Gospel



## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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# HEARING HARD NEWS

BY TIM HERSET

**I**t's the look in your neighbor's eyes as she stands knocking at your door. It's the tone of your pastor's voice as you answer the phone. Before words are spoken you know in your gut the news will be hard. In that split second your jaw tightens, your hand grips the doorknob, and your ears ring—your body braces itself to bear the burden.

Like a fierce thunderstorm barreling over the mountains, churning the surface of the still water, snapping tree branches, and sending small animals running for cover, the words heard through the tears stop your soul in its tracks.

"He had a stroke; they say he's only got a few days left."

"It was a sudden, massive heart attack."

In moments like these our humanity is most real. The fleeting passage of time stands still as our memories switch to hyper speed, recalling the best times and remembering the last time with this friend, parent, neighbor, or child. Our systems are shocked, waking us from the doldrums of daily life. To consider times like these as "pure joy" seems a bit out there. Can't we develop perseverance without the testing of our faith (James 1:2-3)?

Some people experience life-changing struggles frequently. Others haven't yet had the visceral experience that shakes their souls. Each of us hears hard news differently. But we all respond in some way.

There are those to whom tears seem to come easily. Others have strong shoulders that sink. There are also those with furled brows that relax,

eyes that open wide, and wandering minds that wonder what to do. When the mind does make sense of what the ears have heard, the heart often breaks.

This is where our response can remind us of God. David wrote, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

At the doorway, as tears stain the shoulder of your t-shirt, God is near. With the phone to your ear, hearing what you'd prayed you would never have to hear, God is with you. With a broken heart and a crushed spirit, we trust that God is close.

When Jesus was on earth, physically close, He made a number of statements about who will be blessed, and what that will be like. Here is one of those statements, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Mourning seems to be an uncomfortable practice for most people. Paul's comments to the Corinthian church are helpful in this case: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (II Corinthians 1:3-4).

If someone close to you hears hard news, offer them the comfort you've received from God.

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

As smoke is a sign of fire, so are the blessings of God a certain proof of his love towards us.

—Johann Arndt

Sin is a wound; repentance is a medicine. Just as there are for the body wounds and medicines, so for the soul are sins and repentance.

—St. John Chrysostom

I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil.


—J.R.R. Tolkien

May the Strength of God pilot us. May the Power of God preserve us. May the Wisdom of God instruct us. May the Hand of God protect us. May the Way of God direct us. May the Shield of God defend us. May the Host of God guard us. Against the snares of the evil ones, against temptations of the world. May Christ be with us! May Christ be before us! May Christ be in us, Christ be over all! May Thy Salvation, Lord, always be ours, this day, O Lord, and evermore. Amen.

—The Blessing of St. Patrick

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

—John 14:6



**T**he observation of Lent is not binding on Christians. Yet, for those of us who observe this season, we want to do so in a way that is most beneficial. In the following pages I suggest how we might best walk through the Lenten season.

#### **What Is Lent?**

Advent prepares us for Christmas. Lent prepares us for Easter. On man's side of things, we focus on repentance, with many traditions also promoting the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and giving to the needy. On God's side of things, the focus is on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, as well as his temptation in the wilderness for 40 days. We observe Lent from Ash Wednesday (February 22 of this year) through Holy Saturday (April 8). Then we rise with joy to celebrate the best day of the Church year: The Resurrection of our Lord, also known as Easter Sunday.

#### **The Main Thing: Repentance**

On our side of things, we focus on repentance during Lent. In its broad sense, repentance includes sorrow over sin, confession of sin, and faith in Christ for forgiveness. If our repentance is true, then we will bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8). Our need to repent continues so long as we remain in this life. Our love for God and for our neighbors is not as whole-hearted as it should

be. And as long as sin clings to our flesh, we have the daily task to put it to death, confess it, and turn away from it. Oh that the image and character of Christ would be fully formed in us!

God brings us to repentance through his Word. Therefore, the best way to observe Lent is to occupy ourselves with his Word. Everything else can go, so long as we have this Word. If possible, attend your congregation's midweek Lenten services. I also encourage you to begin or continue to practice a daily time of Bible reading and prayer. If you live with your family, I encourage you to have daily devotions together. What I'm getting at is this: let God's Word have full sway and free reign among you during this season.

Why is this so important? I bet many of you have attended Bible camps and, as a result, have experienced spiritual transformation. Your faith in Christ became stronger, your conscience became more tender regarding sin, and you felt a fervent desire to live for the Lord. Why did this happen? It happened because of increased exposure to God's Word, day after day, while you were at camp. I believe the same thing can happen through Lent. It's not camp, but it is an opportunity to have greater exposure to God's Word. Open your hearts to receive his Word with repentance and faith. When Easter comes, you will not be the same person you were on Ash Wednesday.

*Continued on page 7*

# Walking through Lent

By  
Pastor  
Jarrod  
Hylden





### Traditional Disciplines

Historically, Christians who observe Lent have focused on three spiritual disciplines. They are taken from Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-21 (which, not coincidentally, is the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday). Jesus's main point in this part of the Sermon on the Mount is stated in 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." Then Jesus illustrates how we should live out this principle when we give to the needy, when we pray, and when we fast. He tells us not to call attention to ourselves in order to be praised by others. In that case, we will receive no reward from God. Instead, we should practice these things in secret and our Father who sees in secret will reward us. How might we practice these spiritual disciplines during Lent?

#### • *Giving to the Needy*

To be honest, I had never thought of this practice as something to do during Lent until doing research for this article. My wife and I follow a set pattern of giving throughout the year, sometimes giving more to certain ministries at the year's close. But for many Christians, the season of Lent is a time to give intentionally and sacrificially. This Lenten practice is not binding on us, but we are welcome to consider it. Remember that our Lord promised that when we give in secret our Father who sees in secret will reward us.

#### • *Prayer*

Prayer is binding on us. To be a Christian is to call upon God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. This is not to say we must follow a special prayer regimen during Lent above and beyond our normal practice. And yet, perhaps like me, your prayer life is prone to wander, prone to leave and neglect fellowship with the God you love. So why not devote ourselves to prayer with renewed vigor during Lent? I suggest taking up the Psalms, the Small Catechism, a hymnal, or a prayer book to help you focus on biblical themes as you pray.

#### • *Fasting*

In the Bible, especially the Old Testament, fasting is associated with repentance. For instance, when the citizens of Nineveh believed God's Word, "they called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of

them to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). On the other hand, God became angry with the people of Judah who would fast without showing the fruits of repentance (Isaiah 58:1-8). The key takeaway is that fasting is good so long as it is joined with true repentance.

From the New Testament recordings, it seems the apostles continued the practice of prayer and fasting after Jesus's resurrection (See Matthew 9:14; Acts 13:2-3 and 14:23). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumes his disciples will fast from time to time. I encourage you to begin fasting during Lent. Start small. Many Christians who fast find that it gives them more time for other disciplines, such as prayer and reading God's Word.


Related to fasting, some Christians practice "giving things up" during Lent, besides food. As we consider our lives, we can all come up with things that would be good for us to give up. Depending on the person, this might be screen time, caffeine, or high fructose corn syrup. I don't have a strong opinion about this. Do it if you wish. Please remember what Christ said about not doing such things to be seen and praised by others.

### Conclusion

In this article I have focused on what we might do or practice during Lent. On our side of things, we should focus on repentance. This comes about by the Holy Spirit working through the Word. Therefore, we should occupy ourselves with God's Word. We should also consider the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and giving to the needy. These three disciplines represent, broadly, our piety toward God (prayer), toward our bodies (fasting), and toward our neighbors (giving to the needy). You might think of other ways to pursue godliness in these three areas besides the ones I have mentioned.

We must repent in order to be saved. And yet the most important focus during Lent should really be on God's side of things. The main thing is not what we might do or give up. The main thing is what God has done through his Son, Jesus, who gave up his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). It is upon his doing and his giving up that our salvation depends.

*Hylden serves Skreftsrud Lutheran, Beresford, S.D., and Immanuel Lutheran, Centerville, S.D.*



**W**hy did you leave me?" asked my daughter Ruthie, tears streaming down her face. My heart broke into a million pieces when I heard her question. We were at our local children's museum with some friends and while taking the group of kids through some exhibits, we didn't notice that we left one behind. After 10 minutes at the next exhibit, I finally realized that we had forgotten one child back on the first floor. When I ran back for Ruthie, there she was, silently sobbing alone.

"Why did you leave me?"

Jesus also knew abandonment, but his was real and purposeful by God his father. My daughter's question reminds me of the question Jesus asks in Matthew 27:46, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This abandonment was real; the pain Jesus experienced was both physical and psychological. Yet, before Jesus spoke these words and experienced this painful death, God foretold these specific details in Psalm 22.

This Psalm starts out with the very same words of Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When King David wrote these words, he included "You deliver" (v. 4) and "you rescue" (v. 5), signifying that although he may have felt alone, he trusted in the Lord's salvation. In comparison, when Jesus spoke these words, He was truly separated from God, his father, who cannot be in the presence of sin. All of our sin was laid on Jesus' shoulders, and He became the final and complete sacrifice for our salvation.

In his sacrifice, Jesus endured the other painful scorn that is outlined in Psalm 22. He was mocked—"all who see me mock me" (v. 7). He was nailed to a cross—"they have pierced my hands and feet" (v. 16). The Roman guards gambled for his clothes—"they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (v. 18).

David may not have known when writing these words that he would be carefully outlining what would happen to the Messiah, but God did. God knew that Jesus would be the one person who would truly be forsaken, like the words in Psalm 22. He knew Jesus was the only one capable of taking on

the sin of the world so that we might not be cast off.

Jesus took on this real, purposeful abandonment so that we would never truly be alone. We are able to hold to the same hope as David when he wrote in verse 24, "For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him."

And from verse five, "To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame."

David's confidence in this Psalm is the same confidence that we can experience in our own trials, persecution, or feelings of abandonment. God has heard our afflictions time and time again, and He rescues us; we are never forsaken. We can have confidence in the Lord and know that He will not let us be put to shame when we are tested.

Christians who are persecuted for their faith have hope that in their suffering, they will see the presence of the Lord. For instance, in the Book of Acts the martyr Stephen sees Jesus in heaven as he is stoned (5:55-56). The Apostle Paul also gives us the charge to "rejoice in suffering" later in his letter to the Roman church (5:3-5). There have been countless other testimonies around the world from the persecuted church of people who have felt the presence of the Lord amidst tribulation.

In our suffering the presence of the Lord, which is given through the Holy Spirit, was made possible from the forsaken nature of the cross. Jesus took on the psychological and physical pain of abandonment in that moment so that we would never have to. Even now, we can rejoice that God promises to walk with us every day—in both our trials and joys—because of Jesus.


We can share in the hope given in the final words from Psalm 22, written a thousand years before Jesus and still true now, two thousand years later, "They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it" (v. 31).

*Paige is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.*



# A Resurrection Prophecy

By  
Naomi  
Paige

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a night sky filled with stars and several bright, white meteor streaks falling from the top left towards the bottom right. At the bottom of the image, there is a dark silhouette of a desert landscape with rolling hills and a range of mountains in the distance. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is centered in the upper half of the image, containing the title and author's name.

# Do you believe this?

By  
Amy  
Skogerboe

As I've recently crossed the half century mark in age, I am struck by how so many of the complexities of our human experience and biblical faith—matters of life and death, when under pressure or duress—quickly refine down to an all-encompassing question posed by Christ in John 11:26. Jesus makes a bold and clear statement of who He is, "I am the resurrection and the life," and then asks of Mary, "Do you believe this?" Only four words, yet the question cuts to the chase like a knife. All eternity rides on one's response.

Accomplished musicians will appreciate this analogy in a way that does the question justice, but I have enough choral experience in my background to still be wowed at the impressive feat accomplished by Ludwig van Beethoven in composing his *Fifth Symphony*, the first such endeavor of its kind—an entire movement built on four notes that every one of us recognizes instantly whenever they're played. Only four notes, yet it's said that the energy of the entire piece comes from that motive and that every element in the movement is derived from it. A powerful and compelling underlying theme. Everything circles back to it, and if you stripped the symphony of every other masterful, complex chord and progression, we'd still have a visceral draw to that foreboding yet familiar progression of four notes.

An argument could be made that the moments in life which most quickly strip away all that we hold fast to as human identity, relationship, and comforts—the extra orchestration that fills out our lives, if you will—tend to happen in hospital rooms, yes? These are our "cut to the chase" experiences often involving life-and-death matters, or they certainly feel as though they do. I've learned to refer to these experiences as "God alone" moments when the people you love can't be with you and the outside world of normalcy is abruptly stripped away. On a gurney or in a hospital bed, our mind does a rapid inventory, a detox of narrowing down to the absolute essentials. Inevitably, as believers, we arrive at this very truth and question presented in these verses.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall

he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Father God, *I believe You*. If I go now, I go with You. Have you been there? It's raw, isn't it? Surreal yet completely real. Terrifying and soul anchoring at the same time. Most of us recall being told at some point in our upbringing that "what we do with Christ is the most important decision we'll ever make." Let me assure you younger generations of this—it *is true*. It seems awkwardly simple to narrow down all the beauty, wonder, passion, and life to such a basic core. But now let me clue you in to what you may not yet have seen. In Christ's promise that *He is life* beyond our physical death, and in our response, "Yes, Lord, I believe it," the most freeing, colorful, and complex orchestration of eternal freedom comes alive in and around you in ways you can hardly imagine—a reason worth living and a theme upon which to base the entire symphony of our lives, families, ministries, and careers.

To those who have yet to encounter "God alone" moments that yank away your reality, steal your breath, and force the question, I encourage you to quiet yourself and reflect on what the Word asks of you here, even today. Jesus tells you that when your body here is done and gone, *He is* your hope and resurrection, your eternal life, and your only way to go on living.

And He asks you even now, "Do you believe this?"

As we come together within the body of Christ in both friend and family contexts, let's prioritize this. Tell me of your family, and I'll tell you of mine. Laugh with me, challenge me; we'll grieve losses and celebrate victories. It matters, and God's goodness flows through it all. But let's circle back quickly and often to our shared bottom line, the four notes that drive everything that is vital. I'll speak of Christ's promise of eternity and life to you, and you'll ask me, "Do you believe this?" Nothing will matter more.

*Skogerboe is a member of St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill.*



India, with its 1.4 billion people, is believed to have surpassed China as the most populous nation in the world. It has more than four times as many people as the United States. It is also often regarded as the most religious nation in the world. Fewer than 33,000 people in India claim to be atheists or have no religion.

The country is dominated by Hindus who make up approximately 80 percent of the population. Muslims are 14 percent and Christians are two percent.

I have had the privilege of going three times to India to teach pastors and church leaders of AFLC India. Our sister church body has 56 congregations in India. On my trips there I have also had the privilege of preaching in a few of those congregations.

What do you preach and teach when you are in India? The culture is quite different than ours in the United States. A number of illustrations I use in the U.S. are not understandable to an Indian congregation. They could relate to a cricket illustration if I could come up with one, but I'd strike out if I used a baseball illustration. The means by which the message is presented can, and sometimes should, change. The content of the message we share with the world must not change. Every person in every culture in every nation needs to hear the good news that Jesus died for our sins.

One of the times when the people of Israel complained against the Lord, God sent venomous snakes among them. The people cried out to the Lord to take the snakes away. The Lord told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Anyone who was bitten and looked at the bronze snake lived (Numbers 21:6-9). Jesus said this pointed ahead to Him. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

As the snakes slithered around the people it didn't matter what the person looked like or what tribe they belonged to. Everyone was getting bitten. Everyone was perishing. Everyone needed to be saved.

Outward appearances also did not matter when it came to being saved. No matter who they were, if they looked at the snake on the pole they lived.

It is the same when it comes to the cross of Christ. Sin has bitten everyone. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). The faithful, devout Hindu in India has sinned and fallen short. The Muslim who prays each day in the proper manner and at the required time has still sinned and is falling short. No matter the color of our skin or the language we speak, we are all sinners who need a Savior. We have the same need, and we can have the same hope. Everyone who looks to Jesus, lifted up on the cross, will live.

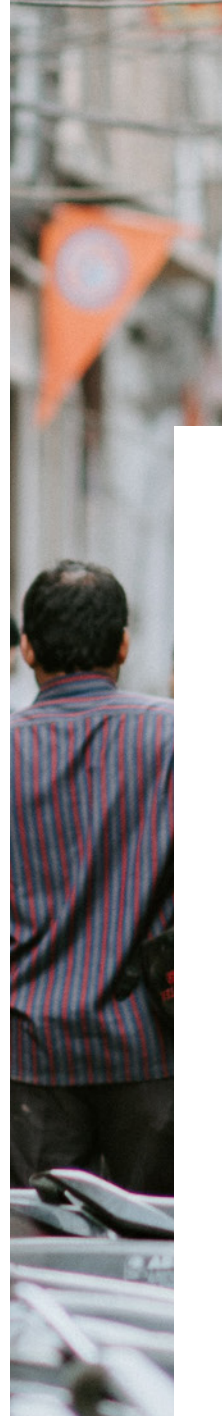
Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). The cross is above all the lesser things of life that divide us. The cross is above our differences in background and ethnicity. Christ gave His life on the cross for the sins of all people. The cross draws all people from every culture and every country. "... we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

It is popular to think: "Those people have their own religious belief. Let them believe what they want. We'll believe what we want. We shouldn't tell them what to believe."

In villages in India, poor people, whose diet consists of not much more than rice, are suffering greatly from diabetes. Many do not know their diet is threatening their lives. They do not know there is another way. It would be cruel to say, "That's their culture. Leave them alone." Caring doctors go to people and tell them: "You are in danger. Let us tell you of another way." What those doctors do regarding people's physical condition, we do regarding their souls. We warn of eternal death and we share the good news that Christ and the cross offers life.

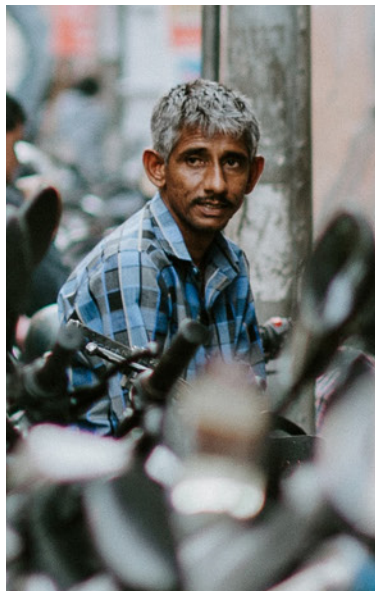
The cross is for everybody we meet. Each person in the world is somebody Jesus loves and Jesus died for. The invitation is extended to all: Look to the cross and live.

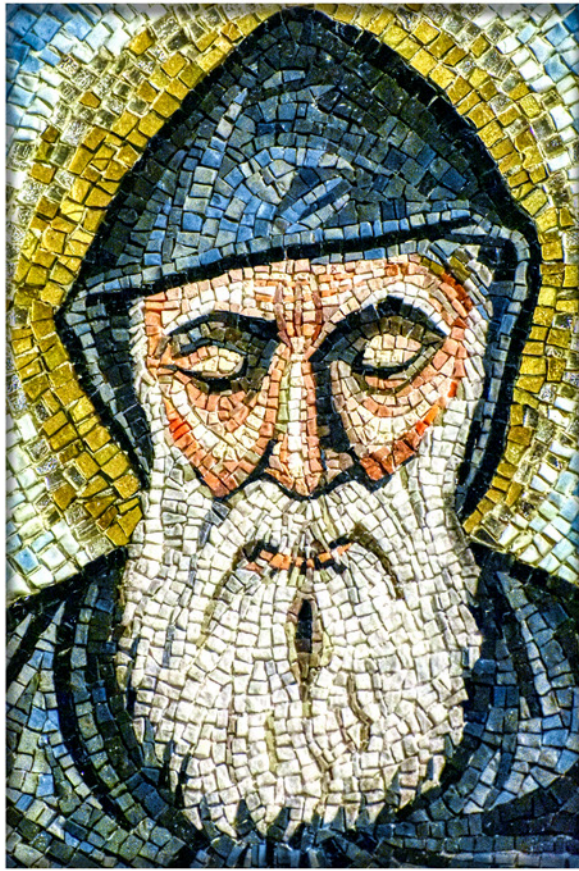
*Johnson, a member of the World Missions Board of Directors, serves Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash.*



# The Gospel is for Everyone


By  
Pastor  
Craig  
Johnson





# Maewyn Succat

By Ryan Egan



A quick Google search of “Saint Patrick’s Day” yields two things: links to information about Patrick, the foremost patron saint of Ireland, and links to beer varieties and green food.

Likely you’re in the group of people who associate March 17 with shamrocks, leprechauns, parades, and a general shaking-of-the-head at why this particular holiday has turned into an opportunity for not-so-subtle revelry.

But do you ever wonder how a holiday that honors a Christian figure has become synonymous with excess drinking and celebration? Why is Patrick even honored in the first place? Let’s dig a little deeper and find out the *real* reasons we should be interested in Patrick’s life.

Maewyn Succat, who we know as Saint Patrick, was born in England to Calpurnius and Conchessa Succat. At the age of 16, in the year 430, Maewyn was kidnapped by Irish pirates. In his own words:

“A young man, almost a beardless boy, I was taken captive before I knew what I should desire and what I should shun” (*The Confession of Saint Patrick*\*).

After being enslaved in Ireland for six years and beginning to truly rely on the faith instilled in him by his parents, Maewyn was led by God to escape captivity. His own *Confession* recounts how he was told in a dream that his “ship was ready.” Maewyn fled his captors and found the ship, where he was told by the captain that he should “by no means attempt to go with us.” Maewyn, now a man of deep faith and prayer, would respond in the only natural way he could, through more fervent prayer. Shortly after this the men on the boat called back to him and invited him aboard.

According to history passed down to us, Maewyn and this new ship landed in France, only to find themselves starving after wandering the countryside for 28 days. Maewyn again prayed, after being challenged by the steersman. In fact, he not only prayed but issued a direct evangelical challenge to the crew:

“Be converted by faith with all your heart to my Lord God, because nothing is impossible for him, so that today he will send food for you on your road, until you be sated, because everywhere he abounds” (*The Confession of Saint Patrick*).

A herd of pigs was found, and the hunger of the crew was resolved. Maewyn then stayed in France for several years, eventually reuniting with his family in England where he then became a priest and took on the name by which we all know him: Patricius, or Patrick. It’s intriguing

to note that during his time in France Patrick (as recorded in his *Confession*) was taken captive a second time as well!

Eventually, with a heart for the people and land where he had been a captive, Patrick returned to Ireland to teach and preach about the Christian faith. “Traveling for 40 years throughout the country preaching the Gospel, he converted thousands of people,” writes Lynda Suwala in her article, “Who Was Maewyn Succat.”<sup>1</sup>

It would be interesting to know the exact details of his time in Ireland as history seems to suggest several showdowns between Patrick and the pagan Druids who were prominent there. “Biographies of the saint are replete with stories of druids who ‘wished to kill holy Patrick,’” writes Mary Cagney, in a *Christianity Today* article outlining Patrick’s history.<sup>2</sup> Patrick lived the remainder of his life in Ireland, purportedly dying in 493. While no one knows for sure if March 17 was the actual date of his death, Cagney writes, “his feast day is recorded as early as March 17, 797.”

Historically, March 17 fell near a great Lenten feast in which fasting and drinking restrictions were temporarily removed, thus linking the holiday to excess celebration, especially in American culture. Patrick himself, were he to observe how people “honor” his death, would not be very pleased. But if we looked at and learned from how he viewed life, we would do well to follow his own words in his *Confession*:

Therefore, indeed, I cannot keep silent, nor would it be proper, so many favours and graces has the Lord deigned to bestow on me in the land of my captivity. For after chastisement from God, and recognizing him, our way to repay him is to exalt him and confess his wonders before every nation under heaven.

*Egan is a member of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.*

\**The Confession of Saint Patrick* is freely available to read at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library ([ccel.org/ccel/patrick/confession/confession](http://ccel.org/ccel/patrick/confession/confession)). This brief autobiography, while touching on some historical instances in Patrick’s life, reads more like an unashamed confession of Patrick’s faith.

<sup>1</sup> [inthelandofireland.com/who-was-maewyn-succat](http://inthelandofireland.com/who-was-maewyn-succat)

<sup>2</sup> “Patrick the Saint,” vol. 17, no. 4, 1998. ([christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-60](http://christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-60))

# WMF

WOMEN'S  
MISSIONARY  
FEDERATION



## A

few months ago, I was invited to attend a concert put on by a group called We the

Kingdom. I wondered about the origins of their name, and since then my mind has been on a journey reflecting on the Kingdom of God.

What is the Kingdom of God? Is it in the future or the present? Is it a place, a person, a group, a dwelling, a gift, a position, a thing?

Students in biology classes learn about the different kingdoms: plants, animals, bacteria, fungus, and more. There are books and movies that create fictional kingdoms. Industries use *kingdom* in their organization titles, too.

Jesus says the following about the Kingdom of God:

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:16-17).

"The coming of the kingdom of God is not

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

BY KAREN FLOAN

something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst" (17:20-21).

To Peter Jesus said, "and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

The phrase "the Kingdom of Heaven" is also used in Scripture many times. In Matthew 13, Jesus explains to his disciples why he used parables to teach the people saying, "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them." Jesus introduced the parable sets with these words, "The kingdom of heaven is like this ..."

In the first parable, a sower plants seed in various soils with different results. In the Parable of the Weeds, a sower plants seed in good ground, but bad seed is also sown by the devil. In the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast, the smallest amounts of each grow into something much larger. In the Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, each is likened to a valuable that is prized. Finally, the Parable of the

Net pictures the judgment and separation of the wicked from the righteous.

At the end of these parables Jesus asks, "Have you understood all these things?"

I think these parables remind us that we need to be diligent sowers of God's Word; be like yeast and the mustard seed expanding our influence for the Kingdom on our homes, churches, families, and society; and treasure the prized gift of the Kingdom with joy, making sure others know of its value. Ultimately, we need to consider the Kingdom and the picture of the Parable of the Net in which all are gathered for judgment day.

I confess that I do not understand all things about the Kingdom of God, but Jesus said it is in our midst. We need to diligently share with others its mysteries until one day we enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

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

# LIFE, GRACE, AND FAVOR

BY MICHAEL ROKENBRODT

**W**hen I returned to my Ugandan host home in August 2021, there was a new denizen to greet me who had not been there before ... baby Rohi. The name means “life” or “soul.” Her presence in the house resulted in a name change for me from my host family. Instead of the usual “Teacher Michael,” I was now routinely being called “Godfather.”

While the term is familiar to us in America, I think most Americans rarely use it as a term of address outside of Italian mobster circles. In the States, I am blessed to have sponsored two in my family. But neither my aunt’s family nor my sister’s family address me as “the Godfather.” I had neither been asked to be a godfather nor had I done anything to earn the title. Oddest of all was that, from what I could perceive, Rohi’s actual baptism, according to the traditions of her family, was at least a decade away. It was time to learn more about

this Ugandan familial term.

“Alex,” I said to Rohi’s father a couple of weeks later, “This ‘godfather’ I keep hearing—what does it mean?”

“You are joining Mary and I to be Rohi’s lifelong spiritual advisor.”

“That is an honor. Thank you. How soon do I start giving spiritual advice?”

“Even now.”

“This word has been strange in my ears, because I have witnessed the baptism of my other two godchildren in America. In my tradition, a person becomes a godparent when their godchild is baptized. I can’t think of any better spiritual advice to give as Rohi’s godfather than that.”

And so began the conversations that would lead to Rohi’s baptism. The teaching of infant baptism is one of the topics covered in the Ambassador Institute curriculum. But as with many Lutheran theological teachings in our curriculum in Uganda, what is taught to them and what is later practiced by them sometimes differs. It takes some additional ingredients of gentle persistence to bring the two into agreement. For Pastor Alex, those ingredients were his willingness to be intentionally disciplined, time in the Word beyond the classroom, and, of course, the physical presence of little hands and little feet to add a dash of urgency and a pinch of practicality.

We have seen the Ambassador Institute curriculum lay the foundation for similar



reversals in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. For instance, Dream Church of Wakitaka had not been offering its congregants communion. When our teachers confronted them on the negligence, the class objected, “Why would we eat our Savior? That would be cannibalism!” That startled our teachers to be sure. But after a hard look at the Word, members of Dream Church are now regularly receiving the body and blood of Christ for their forgiveness of sin.

Even in America, I suspect the walls of denomination and tradition are not so hardened that these simple ingredients of intentional discipleship and time in the Word (and maybe the presence of a baby) cannot make a difference in the lives of our family members who attend other churches. I encourage you to take the initiative and open that conversation. The benefits of sacramental grace and forgiveness are worth it.

I had the joy this January to not only baptize Rohi, but also her 3-year-old cousin Grace and her 7-year-old cousin Favor. It was my first time to baptize anyone. I was thankful to be instructed not to dip the baby three times; Pastor Alex and Mary, you see, were not the only ones who needed some further instruction.

*Rokenbrodt is an AFLC missionary serving in Uganda.*

# Klus speaks at FLBC Missions conference

Pastor Michal Klus spoke on the missionary call of Abraham during the Spotlight: Missions conference held Feb. 8-10 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. Klus, a 2003 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, is from Trinec, Czech Republic, where he serves Silesian Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession.

The conference offered five sessions based on the call and life of Abraham, opening Wednesday evening with the theme, "Are you ready to hear the call?" On Thursday morning, Klus spoke over three hours, asking students, "Are you ready for losses?" "Are you ready to struggle?" and "Are you ready to wait?" Klus concluded on Friday morning with a final session, "Are you ready to pray?"

Traveling with Pastor Klus was his wife, Šárka, a graduate of the Bible college, where their daughter, Miri, currently studies.



ABOVE: First year students Olivia Johnson (center) and Aili Keranen listen during a session.  
TOP: Pastor Klus uses a cap full of water to illustrate how vast, yet how infinitely small, is God's creation.  
CENTER: Pastor Klus (near right) led a final session on Friday morning after Pastor Jeff Swanson (far right) gave an update on the Alaska Mission and FLAPS.  
RIGHT: Lydia Rieschl and Madi Demo (near right) and Tabby Bandy and Olivia Underwood (far right) form discussion groups during Thursday's session.





TOP: Madelyn Carr (left) takes notes while Talia Nessa and Lauren Seeba (top right) pray. Anna Renn (above middle) talks with Janay Helms. ABOVE: Emily Adamow, a representative from World Mission Prayer League, gives a ministry update. LEFT: Pastor Klus pretends that he caught a spider as he opens his session on "Are you ready to struggle," illustrating the need to listen to the Lord if you are fearful.



Peterson (top and at right) was on the FLBC campus in February. Pastor Wade Mobley (above) introduces Peterson prior to a concert.

## Andrew Peterson leads creative vocation session

### FLBC hosts two concerts

National recording artist Andrew Peterson was on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College in February, giving two concerts and leading a session during the Spotlight: Missions conference. Peterson, a singer and songwriter, has also published several books, including *The Wingfeather Saga*, which is now being released in an animated series. In his creative session, Peterson spoke on the need for creative vocations, noting the role artists play in interpreting truth in a secular world. During his two concerts, which were opened to the public, members of the FLBC Concert Choir accompanied Peterson in his song, "Is He Worthy?"





**D**

id you know the  
FLY Convention  
started a Podcast?  
The FLY  
Convention

mission statement says we want to provide tools for local congregations to help disciple-making relationships. Members of the FLY Committee look at our mission statement throughout the convention planning process. One of our goals is to help congregations equip students and families to strengthen their faith in Jesus.

We have heard many stories of how God has used the FLY Convention in people's lives. People who have come to know Jesus as their Savior. People who have made Jesus Lord over their lives. People who hear the Lord calling them into ministry. Those are some of the stories we have heard, and we know there are lots of other untold stories. When students and adults return from FLY, our local congregations hear these stories and get a glimpse of what God is doing during the week of FLY. Our desire is to give everyone a glimpse into these stories.

Last fall, the FLY Convention Podcast launched. You can subscribe to the

# PODCAST OFFERS NEW RESOURCE

BY DANIEL KEINANEN

podcast wherever you listen to podcasts. Our goal is to help congregations have a better understanding of what is being presented at FLY and to assist them in reaching the same students who attend FLY. We want parents to have information that can strengthen the relationships they have with their children and open opportunities to have faith conversations. When those faith conversations are happening at home, it increases the odds exponentially that a teenager will stick with Jesus throughout his or her life.

During the first year of the FLY Convention Podcast, you'll hear testimonies from different people associated with FLY, including the president of the AFLC, the president of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, the president of the 2023 FLY Committee, and a NCAA D1 college hockey player. There are updates on the upcoming FLY Convention, too.

As this summer's FLY Convention in Estes Park, Colo., approaches, the podcast will take a different turn. You'll hear interviews with each of our elective speakers and get a small review or preview of their elective session. Also, for



the first time, each elective will be recorded in an audio format so you'll be able to then listen to the elective session online on the FLY Convention website. The electives are consistently one of the highlights for students. You'll hear speakers deep dive into a specific topic related to our relationship with Jesus.

Members of the FLY Committee want local congregations and families to have access to those electives, and the FLY Convention Podcast will be a platform to help promote that.

We believe the FLY Convention Podcast will increase a congregation's ability to reach their students and families. We see it as a tool for you, the local congregation, to help communicate what is being said at FLY. It will be a way for parents to connect with their children, and for church adults to have a better understanding of teens. As a result, our hope is to strengthen those relationships as they together pursue Jesus.

*Keinanen, the youth and worship director at Christ Is Lord Free Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis., is the FLY Convention Coordinator.*

## PEOPLE &amp; PLACES

**Licensed Pastor Kevin Borg** has recently resigned from serving Grace Free Lutheran, Edinburg, N.D.

**Pastor Steve Junker** has been approved for the AFLC Fellowship Roster upon completion of all rostering requirements. Junker currently serves Chippewa Lutheran, Brandon, Minn.

**Pastor Mike Klenner** has retired from Maranatha Free Lutheran, Chassell, Mich. Klenner is not seeking a new call.

Members of **Taylor Lutheran Church**, Taylor, N.D., called Chuck Loftis in June 2022 to serve as their pastor. He also serves Immanuel Church of Taylor (formerly of the UCC), which with Taylor Lutheran forms the Taylor Ecumenical Parish.

**Pastor Wayne Hansen**, 82, of Fountain Hills, Ariz., died Dec. 17, 2022. Hansen, a former AFLC licensed pastor, served three AFLC congregations in Minnesota, including King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville; and Maranatha Free Lutheran, Spring Lake Park. A service was held Jan. 5 at Minnesota Valley.

**Pastor Leland Evenson**, 89, Monticello, Minn., died Dec. 2, 2022. Evenson served Vision of Glory Lutheran (AFLC), Plymouth, Minn. A service was held Jan. 19 at Church of the Open Door, Maple Grove, Minn.

After surveying AFLC congregations with pastoral vacancies, the AFLC president's office has received updated information from several congregations with interim pastors who have now accepted calls as senior pastors. Pastor Bill Helland serves **New Hope Free Lutheran**, Sisseton, S.D. Dr. Steven Peterson serves **Our Redeemer's Free Lutheran**, Superior, Wis. and Pastor Rick Gleason serves **Bethany Lutheran**, Brodhead, Wis.

## JANUARY MEMORIALS

**Bible College**

John Larson  
Ruth Claus  
Donald Hylden  
Diana Holland

**Home Missions**

Pastor Wayne Hanson  
Harriet Rolf

**Parish Education**

Myron Anderson  
... in honor of

**Seminary**

LaVonne Hylden

## Free Lutheran Seminary assigns internships; four current interns ready to receive congregational call

Two third-year students at the Free Lutheran Seminary have received internship assignments for their final year of study, June 2023 through May 2024. **Scott Olson** has been assigned to Our Saviour's Free Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn., and Reiner Lutheran Free, Goodridge, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Alex Amiot. **Jeremy Nikunen** has been assigned to Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Tim Johnson.

After meeting with members of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees, the Coordinating Committee and the Colloquy Committee on Jan. 16, four interns have been approved to receive calls beginning March 1. They include **Joe Frech**, serving an internship at Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Dennis Norby; **Joe Larson**, serving an internship at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Kent Sperry; **James Scott Pierson**, serving an internship at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Jeremy Larson; and **Alex Woodworth**, serving an internship at Emmaus Free Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Nick Dyrud.

## ARC to hosts season of camps, retreats

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., will host a season of camps and retreats in 2023 under the theme, "Steadfast Hope" from I Corinthians 15:58. For more information on specific camps, visit their website at [arc-aflc.org](http://arc-aflc.org).

- Women's Retreat: April 28-30
- Family Work Weekend: May 26-28, volunteer to help clean up the camp for the summer season. Free registration by May 23.
- FireUp: June 26-30, youth camp for students in grades 5-8.
- Family Camp: July 30-August 5
- Young Adult Retreat: September 22-24
- ARC Holiday Shop: November 4

## Conference registration delayed

Online registration for the 2023 AFLC Annual Conference, which was expected to launch by Feb. 1, was delayed due to uncertainty over meal prices. The registration form, with confirmed pricing, was expected to be posted by the end of February. It can be found at [aflc.org/conferences](http://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.

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-31, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$46,104	\$46,104	\$37,144
Evangelism	9,283	9,283	9,779
Youth Ministries	15,027	15,027	23,112
Parish Education	10,780	10,780	11,465
Seminary	30,517	30,517	22,261
Bible College	40,419	40,419	34,332
Home Missions	30,253	30,253	54,538
World Missions	37,932	37,932	41,962
WM Personal Support	58,919	58,919	71,868
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$279,235</b>	<b>\$279,235</b>	<b>\$306,462</b>

For additional financial information for each department, go to [www.aflc.org/giving](http://www.aflc.org/giving)

# THE PSALMS NARRATE OUR CHRISTIAN WALK

The Psalms can be a confusing book. Sometimes reading through Psalms gives me whiplash: I go from joyous thanksgiving in Psalm 136 to anguished lament in Psalm 137; from blessings in Psalm 68 to curses in Psalm 69. Reading from one chapter to the next is a spiritual journey from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. What are we supposed to do with this big Book of Psalms? Or maybe a better question is what are we supposed to do with *all* of these Psalms?



Pastor Andrew Kneeland

We read the Psalms a lot; your local congregation might even include a Psalm in its readings each week. The Psalms are a regular part of our worship life, but there are some Psalms that we either ignore or just don't know what to do with their message.

We love some of the Psalms: "The Lord is my shepherd," "the Lord is my light and my salvation," "taste and see that the Lord is good," "I lift my eyes to the hills." But what about those depressing Psalms of lament or baffling Psalms of curses? "I suffer your terrors; I am helpless." "Let them be cast into the fire!" "May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow!" These verses are confusing and seem like they don't even belong in a Christian setting.

But each one of these 150 Psalms is perfect and useful in our Christian walks. A quick history lesson helps us see why.

The Book of Psalms was the hymnal of the Israelites. It was a collection of their best and most important music and poetry from when Moses first led them across the Red Sea to when they returned from exile in Babylon. These Psalms were cultivated and arranged by different people through the years, probably including Solomon,

Hezekiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The Israelites sang these songs in their festivals and celebrations, in their public worship services, and even in their private devotional lives. Each Psalm was written in a particular historical circumstance, but it was memorized and sung by many others through the years of Israel's history. They were the words that narrated Israel's spiritual life. The Psalms gave a voice to their deep emotions and feelings as they waited for salvation to come.

Many others have treasured the Psalms through the years. It was one of the first books Martin Luther taught when he was an Old Testament professor, and he published many translations and commentaries of the Psalms. He said, "We may call it a little Bible. Most beautifully and briefly it embraces everything in the entire Bible."

Luther knew the Psalms contained prophecies about Christ's death and resurrection, just like Naomi Paige wrote about in her article in this issue. But he also knew the Psalms were filled with words that matched every aspect of the Christian life. The Psalms give us words to use in any situation in which we find ourselves.

The great variety of voices and tones throughout the Psalms is proof that God cares about us and our situations and feelings. Just as it's okay to feel loved, forgiven, and secure, it's also okay to feel lonely, and angry, and heartbroken. Luther said: "Everyone finds

in his situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better."

The Psalms give us words to use when we're thankful, when we're sad, when we're confessing our sins, when we're sharing our faith. Psalms of lament give words to our deeply felt grief and sorrow. Psalms of curses give words to our cries for justice. Even as we pray for our enemies, we also pray that all who defy God will be brought to justice. God knows we think these thoughts and feel these feelings, so He gave us words to use.

We can use the Psalms to reflect our situations, but we should also use the Psalms to correct ourselves. Our pride should be killed by Psalm 51: "I know my

transgressions and my sin is ever before me." Our doubt should be cured by Psalm 4: "The Lord hears when I call to him." Our habitual sin should be exposed by Psalm 15: "He who walks blamelessly and does what is right." Our hope should be restored by Psalm 121: "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."

When we run from the gospel, the Psalms drag us back. The Psalms provide words that narrate our Christian walk, and they always bring us back to Christ. At a loss for what to say or pray? Open the Psalms.

*Just as it's okay  
to feel loved,  
forgiven, and  
secure, it's also  
okay to feel  
lonely, and angry,  
and heartbroken.*

*something to share*

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# SLAVE OR SON?

BY ANDREA CHRISTENSON

**A** few years ago, I read *The Black Count*, a biographical retelling of the life of Alex Dumas, the father of Alexandre Dumas, author of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Alex was the son of an aristocratic French sugar plantation owner, Antoine, and his black slave woman/wife, Marie Cessette. They made their plantation home together on the tropical island of Saint-Domingue which is now called Haiti. Antoine and Marie Cessette had four children together, one of whom was Alex Dumas.

At that time in the late 1700s, the French laws had strange provisions for the children of mixed heritage such as Alex Dumas. You could either claim your “mulatto” child as your own true offspring with all the implied rights and privileges, or you could choose to keep him or her as your slave. Antoine chose to claim Alex as

his son, thus ensuring that Alex received the full benefits of being the son of a French nobleman. Antoine’s other three children and his wife were not so lucky. Antoine left them all behind in Saint-Domingue while he and Alex returned to France.

In the space of a moment, with a single spoken word from your father, you could go from being a slave to being a son.

This story with its strange law reminded me of a passage in Galatians 4:7, “So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” All of us were once slaves, slaves to sin and to our own human nature. These things bound and entrapped us, and we could do nothing about any of it. Fortunately for us, we don’t need to do anything on our own. Instead, Galatians reminds us: “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem

those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (4:4-5).

As believers we were once slaves. But now, through the sacrifice Christ made for us, God calls us His children. And as God’s children we are His heirs with all the implied benefits and privileges.

In the space of a moment, with a single breath from God, we went from being slaves to being sons and daughters of the King.

Man can be fickle. I’d imagine Alex lived in fear for quite some time that Antoine would not claim him as a son and would instead leave him behind to be a slave forever. Praise God that our heavenly Father is not fickle. He adopted us as sons and daughters, and He will never let us go.

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*Christenson, Plymouth, Minn., is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.*