

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

W i s d o m

For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

For gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young— let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore." Remember him before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is dim to your old eyes, and rain clouds continually darken your sky. ... Remember him before the door to life's opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint.



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LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE

BY PASTOR TIM HERSET

Living in a northern part of the Northern Hemisphere, I can't help but notice the significance of light this time of year. The hours of daylight get fewer and fewer from June until December. While the daylight hours disappear and the darkness settles in, many people have suggestions for how to deal with the lack of light. Popular in recent years is the adoption of the Scandinavian concept of *hygge* (pronounced hyoo-guh). Hygge is a word for enjoying the good things in life. Hygge evokes an atmosphere of coziness, accompanied by a feeling of contentment and well-being. Picture candles, cookies and coffee, and crafts and conversation.

This idea has become a big money maker in the U.S., shaping how designers encourage people to decorate their homes, boosting IKEA's already enormous profits, and creating more than a few new boutique small businesses specializing in candle sales. Last year, I was given The Hygge Game as a gift. It's a set of cards with questions and topics for "cozy conversation in pleasant company." The adopting of the hygge mindset surely helps create space for connection with others during the darkest days of our year.

While I've come to appreciate what hygge brings to my life on dark and dreary days, I've been even more impacted by two things Jesus says about light and darkness.

In John's account of Jesus' life, he recorded a situation in which Jesus was speaking with the religious leaders at the temple (8:1-11). When the leaders brought an adulterous woman to him

to condemn her, Jesus shined light on everyone's sinful condition. After the religious leaders heard Jesus and saw their own reality, Jesus told the woman to go on and to leave her life of sin. Then he spoke these words we know so well, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (vs. 12).

In the Gospel of Matthew, the famous Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 through 7 records Jesus' teaching in which he made it clear that his disciples are to live in a very different way than the world does. Jesus expanded the expectations his disciples had, raising the bar for what is considered Christ-like behavior. In this context, Jesus said to his dedicated followers, "You are the light of the world" (5:14). Then Jesus pointed out the obvious: a city on a hill is seen, and people don't cover a lighted candle in a dark house. Then Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (vs. 16).

As the days of November and December are upon us, would you contemplate with me what it means to take Jesus at his word? What would it look like to let Jesus light up your life? With Jesus lighting up your life, how can your life light up another's? When you do this, how will you glorify your Father in heaven?

Herset serves as the co-pastor of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

The next best thing to being wise oneself is to live in a circle of those who are.

—C.S. Lewis

If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is “thank you,” that would suffice.

—Meister Eckhart

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.

—Martin Luther

Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it.

—A.W. Tozer

I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

—Psalm 7:17

W i s d o m



For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Lodewijk Schellhout 1926 H 206

1926

Job

Faith amidst suffering

By Pastor Alex Amiot

Suffering has a way of making us feel helpless. Job would know. He was hit with many lifetimes worth of bad news in a single day. As they say—when it rains it pours.

First, he heard that all his cattle were stolen and the servants who cared for them were killed. Immediately, another report came that more of his servants and his 7,000 sheep had been consumed with fire. That report was interrupted when Job was told that more bad guys stole all 3,000 of his camels and killed more of his servants.

He was helpless to stop the bad news, and the worst had yet to be told. A servant rushed in with a report that put Job in a club in which no parent wants membership: he suffered the loss of a child. Not just one though—all ten of his children, seven boys and three girls, died when a great wind toppled the building in which they had gathered.

When was the last time Job had been so helpless? Probably when he was born. And indeed, that infantile helplessness came to his mind. Job 1:20-22 says, “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

The next thing Job lost was his own health, yet he still believed. In Job 2:10, as he suffered head to foot from painful boils, he asked, “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”

Despite his helpless suffering and loss, Job still had faith in the Lord’s Word and promises. What does helplessness plus faith equal? In his book, *Prayer*, Ole Hallesby wrote that when helplessness is united with faith, the result is prayer.

Isn’t this what happened with Job? Helplessness plus faith equals prayer. Job’s faith is seen most clearly in Job 19:25-27. He said, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

Job grieved the loss of his children. He grieved the

loss of his servants and his livelihood and the loss of all the earthly blessings that he had ever seen. And yet in that helpless suffering, he believed in something unseen. He believed in something promised. He believed in God as his redeemer. He believed that his redeeming God would stand on the earth. Job was looking forward to the coming of the savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Job waited a long time for healing and relief. All he had while he waited on the Lord was faith in God’s promise to send Jesus. When Jesus came, many were blessed both with faith and with healing. That’s my prayer for you who suffer: that you would be blessed with faith and with healing. But there is something to be esteemed even above physical healing, and that is the renewing of the soul that comes through simple faith in God’s Word.

His Word is at work when you hear it, when you read it, and when you meditate on it in the quietness of your private prayers. His Word is at work through baptism and through Holy Communion to revive your soul and forgive your sins as you receive Christ’s body and blood in helpless faith, rejoicing in the spiritual healing it brings. His Word is at work through the preaching of Christ crucified for your forgiveness and the restoration of your soul.

Do you need it? Are you so helpless that you depend fully on the mercy of God to be with you all the days of your life and forgive your sins through Jesus Christ? Job knew his helplessness, and God sustained his faith despite such terrible suffering. God will sustain you who are humbled by distress and trouble. His promises still point us to Jesus.

Despair is not the inevitable end of suffering. To your suffering the Lord adds faith in His promises. Faith added to suffering results in prayer, and the result of prayer to God in Jesus’ name is comfort. We can’t fully grasp God’s sovereignty amidst our suffering, but by God’s grace we believe that He is near, that He knows, and that Jesus who suffered for our salvation is coming again to judge the earth and make all things new. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Amiot serves Reiner Lutheran Free, Goodridge, Minn., and Our Saviour’s Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn. Adapted from a sermon he preached Feb. 7, 2021. “Job” by Lodewijk Schelfhout, 1926, Rijksmuseum.

Psalms

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

By Sarah Langness

Several years ago, my husband began the habit of asking our kids each night as we snuggled them at bedtime, “What do you want to thank Jesus for?” The responses have varied throughout the years and have grown in depth as they themselves have grown.

Our oldest son probably gets the credit for thinking the most broadly in his answers, thanking the Lord for items like steel and rubber: “You can make so much with them!”

Often, since they are snuggled into cozy beds with warm blankets, soft pillows, and one of their parents lying by their sides, by middle three girls will express gratitude for those comforts.

My youngest daughter is on a repeat track of thankfulness for her paper dolls and her baby brother.

Every once in a while, peppered amongst the gratitude for simple, everyday items and for the people in their lives, one of my children will respond by simply saying they are thankful for Jesus.

It can sound so much like the easy Sunday school answer, can't it? Almost like an answer that they gave so they wouldn't have to think much about it. Yet is there truly anyone or anything greater that we can be thankful for?

As we approach this season of Thanksgiving, it's easy to allow our minds to think of the physical, material things the Lord has blessed us with: homes, vehicles, clothes, food, and good health. It's not much of a challenge for us to think of the people for whom we are grateful the Lord has placed in our lives: parents, children, siblings, friends, pastors, teachers. It's not difficult to think of the spiritual blessings we thank him for, things like Christ's completed work on the cross on our behalf, his presence in our difficulties, or his living, powerful Word. None of these are the wrong answer to such a question. We should thank the Lord for these things; we should recognize that we are not worthy of them and that he has graciously bestowed upon us that which we have neither earned nor deserved.

But how often do we stop to thank the Lord for ... well, for himself? Sometimes, I think we slip into this habit of thanking the Lord for the things he has given us and see our material and spiritual possessions as his blessings to us, forgetting that the greatest blessing is himself.

Psalms 100 is classified as a psalm of thanksgiving. In it, the psalmist invites us to shout triumphantly to the Lord, to serve the Lord with gladness and bring our joyful songs

before Him. This is victory language! As those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, we have every reason to rejoice in Christ's triumph over sin and death, to celebrate the victory that we have in him because of his perfect, complete work.

In verse 3, there is a recognition of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord for what he has done for us: “Acknowledge that the Lord is God. He made us, and we are his—his people, the sheep of His pasture.” We have never been hidden from his sight; he is the one who wove us together in our mothers' wombs, who saw us before we could be seen, who knows each minute detail of our lives. Our God is one who cares deeply and tenderly for us; we are known by him, and provided for perfectly by him. What sweet comfort! What reasons to thank Him!

In the next verse, the psalmist encourages us to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless His name” (vs. 4). The final verse of this short psalm tells us why we should come before Him in such a manner and with praise on our lips, “For the Lord is good, and his faithful love endures forever; his faithfulness, through all generations.”

For the Lord is good! Yes, he has done good things for us, and that brings us gratitude and joy. But he himself is good. Nothing in him is evil, nothing is wanting or in need of improvement. He is good, and all that he does is good. Because of his goodness, we can trust him to do good despite what difficulties come our way. We come before him with praise and thanks because his steadfast—firm, fixed, unchanging—love will never cease. Though trouble comes and this world is unstable, his love remains, and he is faithful to do what he has said he will do, including walking with us through those difficulties.

The greatest blessing he has given us is the blessing of himself, forever, through all generations. No matter what troubles, anxieties, or changes come in this world, our God is the same omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign, faithful, merciful, gracious, just, loving, kind, and good God. I am so grateful for this God! I, too, like my children, want to thank the Lord for himself.

Langness is a member of Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich. “You People of the Earth,” with the words of Psalm 100, by Gesina ter Borch, c. 1654, Rijksmuseum.

Op de Wyse Van den 100. Psalm
Grij Volckeren des aerts:

1.
Wij dancken Godt den Aeer den Aeer
Dat ghij ons nu tot usser Eer
Gespijst hebt door u Heijlich wort
Dat wij alhier hebben gehoort

2.
Wilt dat voek nu maken Druckbaer
In onse Hertten alle gaer
Dat wijt volbrengen met der daet
Nae usser Goddelijcken raet

3.
Daer Zoelief Aeer geeft ons cracht
Dat bidden wij u met aendacht
Sonder u hulpe waert al om niet
U genade Over ons giet

4.
Eer sij u Vaeder ende Soen
En Heijghen Geest in s Hemels troon
Bij ons alle te samen sijn
Moet dit doch Ja en amen sijn
Eynis



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*The king's heart is like
channels of water in the
hand of the Lord; He turns
it wherever He wishes.*

Proverbs 21:1

A casual and careless reading of Proverbs will lead to a gross misapplication and misunderstanding of the book. This is true of any Scripture reading, but this is especially true of Proverbs. How does the book fit into the biblical message of Christ and salvation? Do we find Christ in the Book of Proverbs? Or is the book simply a book of “common sense” and moralistic instruction? How should we read and understand Proverbs?

At some points, Proverbs *seems* to contradict itself. For example, Proverbs 26:4-5 declares, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, That he not be wise in his own eyes.” At other times, statements are made in Proverbs that sometimes *seem* untrue. Proverbs 16:7, 13 says, “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. ... Righteous lips are the delight of kings, And he who speaks right is loved.” We know that often godly people have enemies who war against them, and many who speak right are not loved but are persecuted and even killed by opponents. We also know that the Book of Proverbs is included as part of the Old Testament and is indeed the inspired and inerrant Word of God. So how are we to read and understand this book?

Proverbs is an example of biblical wisdom literature. Biblical wisdom focuses on a sanctified common sense or a sanctified ability to cope with matters of this life (Hummel, p. 396). Biblical wisdom is a sanctified wisdom because it is wisdom which has its beginning in “the fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 1:7). It is a wisdom that is the result of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people of God. In other words, the context in which Proverbs must be read is the context of the covenant people of God, a people who have been justified by faith in the promised Messiah (Old Testament believers, Genesis 15:6) and a people who have been justified by faith in the completed work of Christ (New Testament believers, Romans 5:1).

This means that much of Proverbs consists of the third function of the law, instruction and guidance given to God’s people concerning God’s will and way of working in this life. The wise person in Proverbs is the person justified by faith who heeds God’s Word and who as a righteous person seeks to live accordingly. The fool in Proverbs is the person who ignores the will and way of God in unbelief. The result for the fool is judgment—the second use of the law, which is also found in Proverbs.

As wisdom literature, Proverbs then describes life as it is here and now, and it instructs the person of God in how to live. Because life here and now is characterized by fallenness (sin), life often

consists of conflicts and contradictions. Thus, sanctified wisdom in one context says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly,” but in a different context advises, “Answer a fool as his folly deserves,” because this is what the fool has earned for himself. Also, because Proverbs speaks to God’s people in a fallen world, sanctified wisdom declares principles which are generally true—“he who speaks right is loved”—but which, as a consequence of sin in specific instances, do not describe what actually happens. God’s Word is always true, but our understanding of his truth must always be in biblical context.

Proverbs

The necessity of biblical context

By Pastor Phil Haugen



Underlying all of Proverbs is the truth about Jesus. Even though the name “Jesus Christ” or “Messiah” is not found in Proverbs, he is clearly present. Jesus is the “wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24), who was present and active when God created the heavens and the earth. Wisdom is personified and speaks in Proverbs 8:12, and he declares his involvement in creation in Proverbs 8:22-31. Wisdom is described as present with the Creator as God’s “master workman” (Proverbs 8:30), which anticipates the description of the Word become flesh in John 1:1-18. Proverbs is written for the covenant people, believers in the justifying work of the Messiah through the cross and empty tomb. The redemption which Jesus has won underlies the entire book.

Thus, the Book of Proverbs does not contradict itself. The instruction in the book is not simply good moral advice,

but is instruction written to the justified and believing people of God. And we do find Christ in the book.

Haugen, a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, teaches Greek at the Free Lutheran Seminary. “River Landscape,” by Jan Veth, 1878, Rijksmuseum.

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Ecclesiastes

Our true happiness is found in the Creator

By Tami Demo

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” Says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

Ecclesiastes 1:2 is probably not a verse you would find on a canvas at Hobby Lobby or on a plaque hanging over your dining room table. Common phrases we do find in stores have sayings like, “Do what makes you happy,” “Above all be happy,” “Find your happy,” and even the old school, “Don’t worry, be happy.”

It seems like happiness is elusive—but is this a new problem? I don’t believe it is! Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” Nothing is new. This problem of elusive happiness seems to be a main theme in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and maybe even in our world today.

While reading chapter 2, I was struck by all of the ways Solomon sought to find happiness and pleasure. He says, “I tried cheering myself with wine ... I undertook great projects ... I made gardens and parks ... I owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem ... and I amassed silver and gold for myself ...” And in verse 10 he says, “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.” Imagine that. He tried everything for true and lasting pleasure, but nothing seemed to stick. Nothing brought him the satisfaction—the pleasure—that he was desperate to find. And in the end, verse 17 says, “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun is grievous to me, all of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

The word translated as meaningless is the Hebrew word *hevel*. It literally translates into “vapor” or “breath,” which, in the context of the book, indicates the idea of something fleeting.

It is hard for us to wrap our minds around how fleeting life is. The timing of life has always been in the Creator’s hands. In fact, we were created by God with eternity in mind. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” Perhaps this is why life’s fleeting moments felt so meaningless to Solomon. We so want the good things—the happy things—to last forever, all the while

knowing they are “but a breath.”

So, is it the same for us? Has everything always been meaningless? Is there no happiness to be found or held on to? No! I believe God has given us many good things to enjoy. His love for us is great. He says in 11:8a, “However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all ...” God wants us to live an abundant and joyful life. We just need to adjust our thinking.

For example, as the leaves change in the fall and glow in the bright orange light of the sunset, or when the fresh white snow sparkles in the light of the winter sun, remember that these things were created by God and meant for our enjoyment. We did not make these things, nor could we even imagine them. But God did. And he has already blessed us with what will bring us joy.

Solomon had no control over these blessings from God. He could not “try,” “make,” “buy,” “own,” or “amass” creation, as he eluded to in chapter 2. But he could enjoy it. These are gifts to us from our Creator, for our happiness. If we find our joy in the Creator, we can enjoy the things he has created.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 says, “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without Him who can eat or find enjoyment?”

In the end, Solomon found out that the elusive happiness he sought was there all along, but he missed it. The lesson Solomon learned here is the same lesson for us. Sometimes we get so busy looking around us for happiness and satisfaction that we forget to look up to the one who created all things. “To the man who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness” (2:26). Live for God, look to God, and Scripture says God will give you happiness. It doesn’t have to be elusive; it just has to be found in the Creator.

Demo is a member of Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn. “Landscape with two trees in the wind,” by Henk Schilling, 1903. From the Rijksmuseum.

*For everything
give thanks*



An original story by
Andrea Christenson



If it's true that bad things come in threes then Lucy Leighton could breathe easy. Because she'd already filled her quota—today had been a disaster from the start.

She looked at the needlepoint hanging above her couch across the room. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks ..." scrolled in a classic cross stitch font through a bright garden before ending with a flourish on the verse reference, I Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Ha. Funniest thing she ever read.

Clearly Paul lived far out of touch with reality when he penned those words to the Thessalonians church.

Sure, he'd been through some hard times, Lucy had to give him that.

But no way would he have jotted down those sentiments after his Moka coffee pot had exploded all over the kitchen *before* his first cup of the day. Or after he'd had to clean the dog's vomit from *every* room in the house. And definitely not after he'd finally remembered to switch the laundry from the washer to the dryer, only to discover that his daughter had left a red marker in her shorts and gotten it into the same load as his spouse's previously snow-white work shirts.

Not that Paul had a spouse, or a daughter, or white shirts probably. But, you know, the sentiment is still the same.

And he definitely, definitely wouldn't—couldn't—have said that after he'd lost— ... she pressed a fist to her mouth. No. Not happening. She didn't have time to think about her mom right now. Not when the kids would be home from school at any moment.

Grin and bear it, Lucy. Just like always.

Her phone rang, Carol's face popping up on the screen.

"Are you still coming to Florida for Christmas?"

"I didn't change my mind since we talked last week." And, yeah, she heard her own grumpy tone.

"You're in a mood." Trust her older sister to call her on it. But then, Carol had always been perceptive and never let Lucy get away with anything.

"It's been a day. I think I'm out of nice." Lucy stood and walked to the kitchen, phone tucked between her ear and her shoulder. "I can't talk long."

"It's okay to have an off day once in a while," Carol said. "You're allowed."

"Tell that to Paul,"

Lucy muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing. Thanks for the call. I'll call you next week to talk trip details." She hung up and began pulling cookies out of the pantry.

Her three kids tumbled through the door a few minutes later, the two younger ones shouting about their day before rampaging into the kitchen for snacks. Alex, her oldest, dropped his backpack with a thud and headed for his bedroom. His new favorite expression, a scowl, was plastered on his face.

"Come out here and pick that up," she called to his retreating back. His grunted response needed no interpretation. But at least he obeyed her. "Want a snack?" In answer he pulled the black hood of his sweatshirt up and over his head and down low on his eyes.

Alex was always quiet, but this past year even more so. Worse still after her mom passed away a few months ago. His quietness turned to moodiness and then to outright sullen behavior. Grandma Helen had known how to coax him out of his shell. They'd laugh together at the kitchen counter for hours as they baked a pie, or canned dilly beans. Lucy could still picture them—

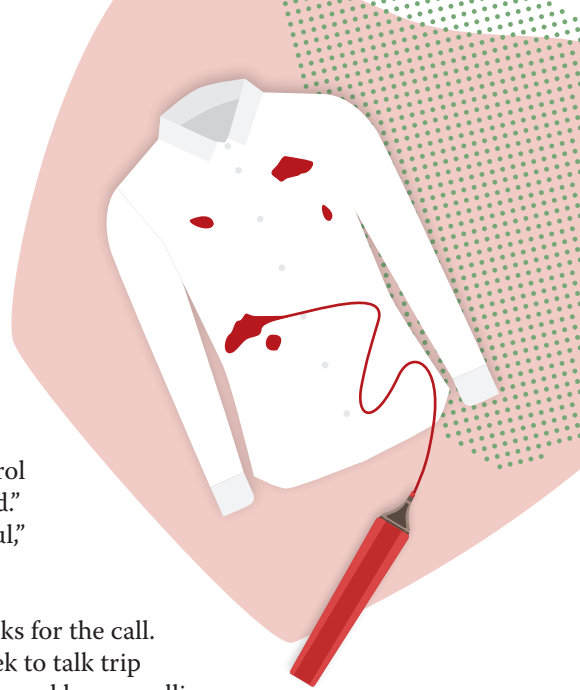
"Mom," Ava broke into her thoughts. Good thing, too, because she'd promised herself not to dwell on thoughts about her mom this afternoon. "Can you help me with my homework?"

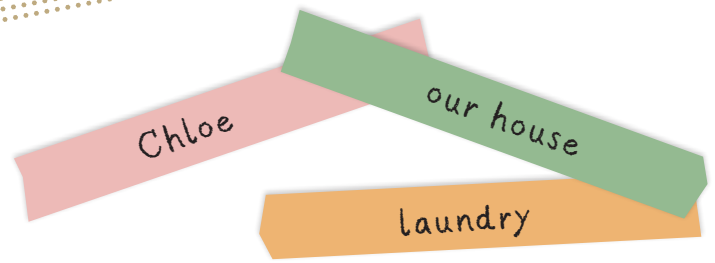
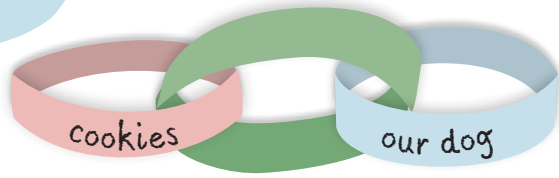
"Of course, honey." Lucy stopped to grab the cookies and a glass of milk for Ava, then followed her to the dining room table. At 10 years old, Ava was her artistic child, the likely culprit of the marker in the wash.

"We have to answer a bunch of questions about what we're doing for the holidays, and then write a paper about it. See?" She handed Lucy the form she needed to fill out.

A pang gripped Lucy's heart and she rubbed at her chest. Under, "Where I am spending Thanksgiving," Ava's scrawl read, "Not Grandma's."

"Oh, sweetheart." She put her arm around Ava's shoulder and gave her a squeeze. "Let's get





this filled out with happier thoughts.”

“Why?” Ava’s sniffles almost drowned out her words. “It’s the truth. We won’t be going to Grandma’s this year. We won’t ever be going there again.”

Lucy wiped her daughter’s tears away. “We’re all sad about Grandma. And you’re right we won’t be going there this year.” Her throat closed for a moment. She cleared it. “But we will make new traditions and new memories.”

“I don’t want new memories. I want to keep the old ones.” Ava doodled on her paper, not looking Lucy in the eye.

“Sweetie, the new memories won’t erase the old ones. We can keep those forever.” She sat down in the chair next to Ava. “Here, let me see your other outline points. I bet we can get this filled out in no time at all.”

Chloe walked into the room, holding a glass of milk with both hands. “I have homework, too.” Chloe’s teacher didn’t send homework home with her 6-year-old class, but Lucy wasn’t going to argue.

“Go and get it then.”

Soon, Chloe came back, a coloring book and stack of construction paper in one hand, and her box of craft supplies in the other. “Mrs. Peterson said I should bring her a picture tomorrow.” Chloe opened her book to an uncolored page and began to tear it from the book. The paper gave way at the last inch, sending her elbow flying straight into her milk cup.

The cup soared out over the edge of the table and into empty air. Lucy and Chloe lunged for the cup. Chloe’s forehead smacked Lucy in the eye just as she heard the unmistakable sound of glass splintering. Lucy froze, half bent, still reaching for the cup mid-air. She looked down and saw her heirloom cup from her grandmother’s jelly jar collection shattered in a half million pieces on the tile.

Lucy took a deep breath. Then another. This would not be the thing that broke her today. No use crying over spilled milk and all that. But she strongly suspected that whoever wrote that impossibly dumb adage had never had their coffee pot explode and the thing with the dog and the laundry all in one day. Or any of the things she lived with right now.

In fact, they probably lived on some milk farm where endless supplies of milk flowed, and no one ever had to cry if it spilled, they’d just go out and harvest more. And they must never have had anything precious to them be broken as a result of that spilled milk. Because no one would say those inane things if any of that were true.

And it was possible that this day was making her a little crazy. Harvest milk?

She quieted her thoughts, pasted on a smile, and met Chloe’s gaze.

“I’m sorry, Mom.” Chloe’s chin puckered.

Lucy tried to say, “It’s okay” or, “I forgive you” or even, “Don’t cry, it’s only spilled milk.” But instead, she heard herself say, “That was my favorite glass. Why did you pick that one? We have 30 others to choose from.” She held up a hand in a stopping motion. “Don’t move, I need to get this glass cleaned up.”

When she came back into the room armed with a washcloth and broom and dustpan, both girls sat stiff as statues at the table.

Deep inside, a crack widened, and all of her bad attitude spilled out and emptied itself on the floor alongside the milk, leaving only remorse for her sharp words. “I’m sorry girls. I’m cranky today. Forgive me.” She cleaned up the milk and the glass. “Chloe, I know you didn’t mean to spill your milk and break my cup. I’m glad you weren’t hurt.”

Chloe’s face brightened. “And I’m glad there is more milk in the kitchen.”

Lucy gave both daughters a hug and a kiss on the tops of their heads. “I’m thankful for you two.”

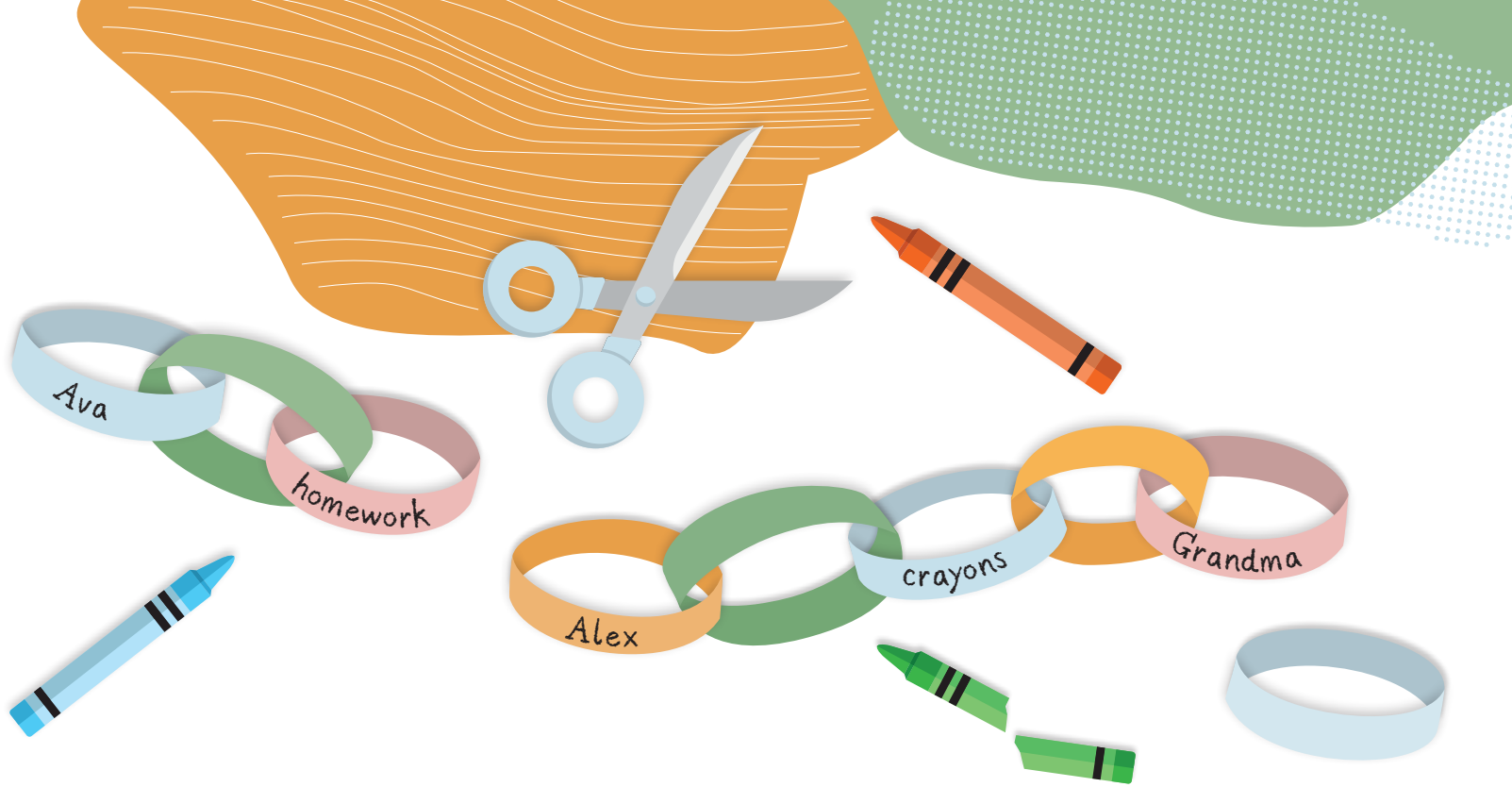
Sometime during the past few moments, Alex had joined them at the table. “Grandma told me once that she could always be thankful for something. I guess maybe she’d say that now, too.”

“You know what? You’re absolutely right.”

Lucy took some of Chloe’s construction paper and a pair of scissors out of her craft box and began cutting the paper into bright-colored strips. The kids stared at her. “We’re going to do a thankfulness project. Everybody get to cutting.”

Alex slumped in his chair, a cookie clutched in his hand. He probably regretted coming back into the dining room. Too bad for him. He was part of this now.

“What’s a thankfulness project?” Ava reached



for a scissors and began cutting.

Lucy thought fast, making it up as she went along. “We’ll make a paper chain and on every slip of paper we’ll write down things we are thankful for.”

Silence reigned over the room as everyone concentrated on cutting, then Chloe’s voice broke through. “I’m thankful for cookies.”

“I’m thankful for our house,” Ava chimed in.

“I’m thankful for each of you.” Lucy wrote their names on three separate slips of paper.

Moving at the speed of a snail in wintertime, Alex reached for a green sheet of paper. He cut out a long strip, then another. He kept his head down and said in a whisper, “I’m thankful for my memories of Grandma.”

Across the table, something snapped. They all looked at Chloe. She held her crayon, now in two pieces.

“Oh, Chloe,” Ava said. “You broke your special crayon.”

Lucy held her breath, waiting for the tears. Chloe furrowed her brow for a heartbeat, then she lit up again.

“I’m thankful that now I have *two* special crayons.” She grinned a gap-tooth smile as they all began laughing.

The crack in Lucy’s heart filled with warmth as a new thought awakened in her. She didn’t need to deny the hard things in her life, she could be grateful for them.

“Chloe is absolutely right.” Lucy reached for another slip of paper and wrote “Dog vomit” on it.

“Gross!” Ava covered her mouth. “Why would you be thankful for that?”

She made a gagging motion.

“If it hadn’t been for Red getting sick this morning, I wouldn’t have shampooed the carpets and I’ve been meaning to do that for months now.” Lucy added her paper to the chain.

“I get it,” Ava said. She wrote “bad math grade” on her paper. “If I hadn’t gotten a bad grade, Mrs. Patel wouldn’t have explained it to me and now I’m getting an A.”

A torrent of ideas came to them about bad things and good things to write on their papers. Soon, their chain ran around the room.

The sound of the garage door opening and closing echoed through the house. A moment later Lucy’s husband stood in the doorway. “What’s going on here?” he asked.

Lucy filled him in on her disastrous morning, their afternoon, Alex’s words about her mom, and the change in her heart. “So, we’re being thankful,” she said. “Why are you laughing?”

“You’re not going to believe what I read at lunch.” He pulled out his phone and swiped open his Bible app. “It was part of my reading plan. From Isaiah, ‘And on that day you will say, “Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name.”’ I’ve been thinking about thanksgiving all day.” He sat next to Alex and reached for a paper.

Lucy looked around at her family as they continued writing down their thanks.

And, okay, maybe Paul was onto something after all with his “rejoice always, give thanks in everything” business. She understood it now.

Christenson, a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., lives in Plymouth, Minn.

All Boards meet, new members installed

McCarlson installed as AFLC Youth Ministries director

Members of the boards and committees of the AFLC's corporations met Oct. 3 and 4 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Schools in Plymouth, Minn. Following individual meetings on Monday, the boards met as a group on Tuesday, where new members were installed and reports were given by the various ministries following a session on the Fundamental Principles led by Dr. Martin Horn.



President Micah Hjermstad (left) installs Adam McCarlson as director of Youth Ministries with Youth Board members Pastor Matt Nelson, Wendy Greven, and Michelle Olson present.



TOP: Members of the World Missions Board of Directors prayed for Pastor Matthew Abel, missionary to Paraguay who is home on furlough. Abel is recovering from Chikungunya, a tropical virus. ABOVE: WMF Board members listen to the reports. TOP LEFT: Pastor Dennis Norby prays with a group during morning devotions. LEFT MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: Pastor Jerry Nelson asks a question during Dr. Martin Horn's (bottom left) presentation on the role of the Fundamental Principles. LEFT CENTER: Dawn Johnson takes notes during the morning session. NEAR LEFT: Lavonne West, president of the WMF, gave her update to the all boards group session.





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he mission statement for AFLC Youth Ministries is “to encourage local

congregations to win teens to Christ, to build teen believers in God’s truth and love, to equip teen workers to live and share their faith, and to multiply maturing disciples in Jesus Christ.” Typically, we draw attention to the four main emphases: win, build, equip, and multiply. However, it’s important to see another part of our mission statement that is often overlooked and that helps direct our efforts to win, build, equip, and multiply. It’s the short, four-word phrase, “to encourage local congregations.” This really is our focus and a core component of the efforts of AFLC Youth Ministries.

Even though we do what we can through events and programming for teens, we know that it is primarily in the context of a local congregation that God works in the lives of teens to give and strengthen faith through his Word. And so, one of the ways we endeavor to accomplish our mission is

SUPPORTING YOUTH WORKERS

BY ADAM MCCARLSON

by equipping, encouraging, and engaging with those individuals who have been called by their congregation to assist in the soul care of teens.

Youth Workers Weekends is an annual event designed for youth workers from across our AFLC family to encourage and equip them. We recognize that ministry in general can be difficult and lonely, a reality that also applies to those investing in the spiritual lives of teens. And so, we endeavor to provide a time for youth workers to gather together to encourage one another, to find time to rest and renew, and to be equipped for the work of ministry in the congregations that they have been called to. This January 12-14, 2024, we invite our AFLC congregations to consider sending those individuals who are working with their congregation’s teens to the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., for Youth Workers Weekends. You can find more information at our website: aflc.org/youth.

Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the



Event: Youth Worker Weekends

Dates: January 12-14, 2024

Location: Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.

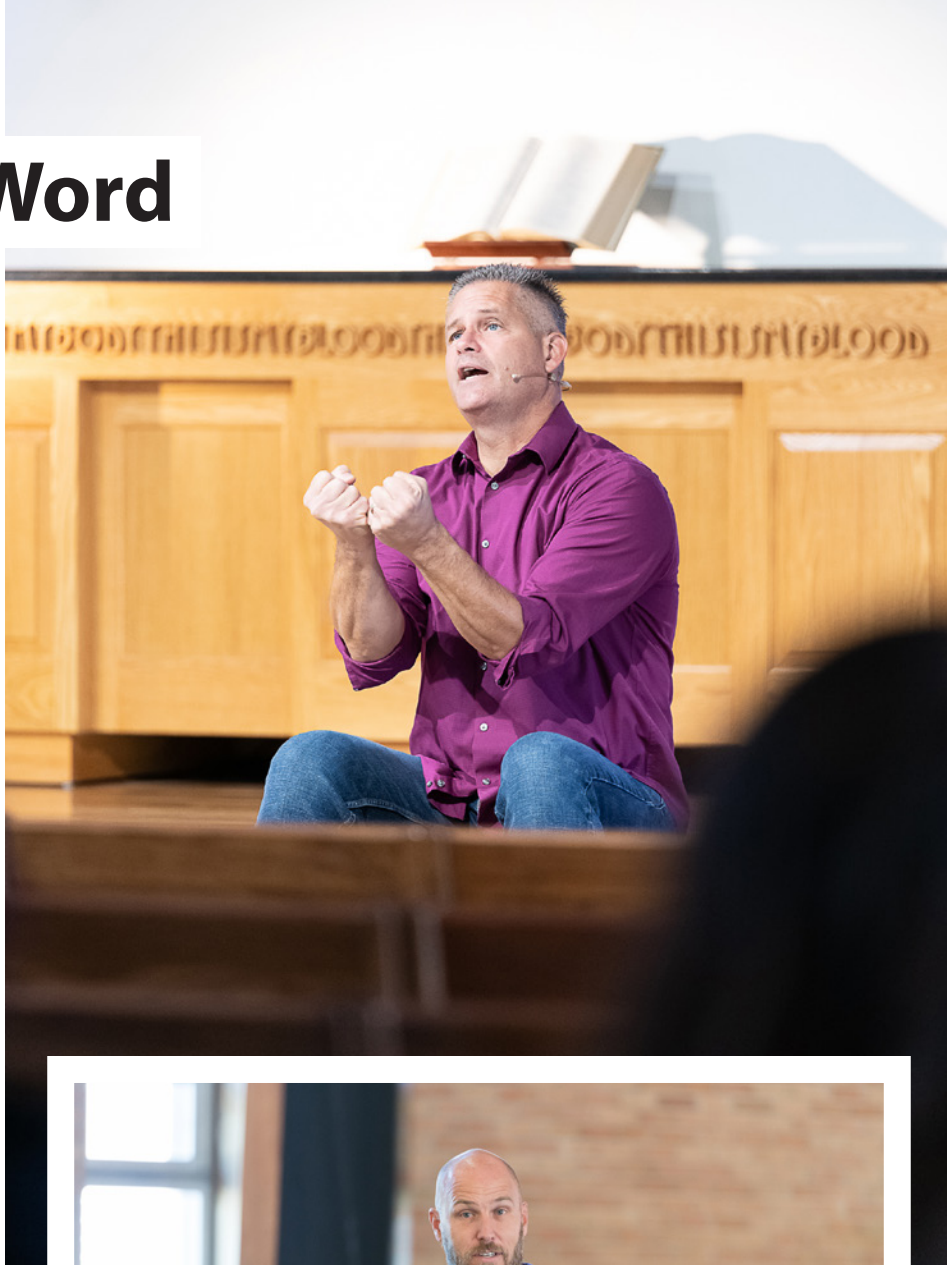
Registration: aflc.org/youth

body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” As the body of Christ, you have been called to build yourself up in love. This calling is for the whole of your congregation—including your teens. But let’s not miss the important truth: growth comes only because we are in Christ. As you labor to see the body grow, may you be encouraged today that it is Christ who is at work in your midst.

McCarlson, a middler student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

Spotlight: The Word

FLBCS hosts Ferrin, Whitman for conference on the Word of God



The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted the Spotlight: The Word conference Oct. 10-11 on its Plymouth, Minn., campus. Featured speakers included Keith Ferrin (top), author and founder of the BibleLife Community. Ferrin advocates memorization as a tool for studying and enjoying Scripture. During his sessions he recited and taught on I Peter and the Book of Jonah.

Also featured was guest speaker Matt Whitman (above), host of the Ten Minute Bible Hour podcast and Matt Whitman YouTube channel. During his sessions he gave an overview on the veracity of Scripture and encouraged students to embrace the importance of their role in carrying the gospel message to their generation.



NOW I LAY ME DOWN ... I CAN'T SLEEP

BY PASTOR TODD SCHIERKOLK

All of us who have ever had trouble sleeping at night will feel for a grade school boy experiencing the same problem. Diego began having trouble shortly after the school year started here in Mexico, and it just kept getting worse. His parents couldn't get to the bottom of what was wrong. He wasn't having nightmares—he just couldn't go to sleep. He would plead with his mom to let him stay home from school. When they asked him what was wrong, he couldn't really tell them anything. His parents finally decided to take him to the school psychologist to see if he could figure out what was going on.

We became aware of the

problem soon after returning from a short trip to the U.S. for deputation. We talked to him in Sunday school and prayed for him. When I visited the family, I suggested he take the Book of Psalms and read it to himself when he went to bed. He is a good reader. He was planning on seeing the psychologist in a few days.

The following Sunday, we were anxious to find out how he was and what had happened in his visit with the psychologist. Barb asked the young boy how his meeting went. He scoffed and rolled his eyes.

"What did he tell you?" Barb asked.

"Nothing," he said. "He just prescribed me some pills."

Barb persisted and asked, "Well, what did you do? Did you take them?"

"No," he said. "I just took the children's Bible you gave me and read stories from it."

"And were you able to sleep?" Barb asked.

"Yes, I'm sleeping fine now."

Ha! If only it were so simple for the rest of us. But the truth remains, "He gives to his beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2).



Diego, pictured second from right, celebrates his birthday with family and friends.

Schierkolk serves as an AFLC missionary in Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico, with his wife, Barb.



Alda Twite

Alda Twite, 98, of Cloquet, Minn., died Aug. 19 in Cloquet. Born Feb. 17, 1925, in Hammer, S.D., she was the daughter of Elmer and Ellen Peterson. She married Lyle Twite on Nov. 8, 1951, in Webster, S.D. They moved to Cloquet in 1956 where she worked at Pine Ridge Homes. Lyle served as a lay pastor at St. John's Lutheran, Finlayson, Minn., before attending the Summer Institute of Theology and the Free Lutheran Seminary. They moved to Bagley, Minn., in 1987, where her husband served Rice Lutheran and Grace Lutheran, and Alida Lutheran in Shevlin, Minn. They retired in 2008, when they moved back to Cloquet. She was a member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet. Her husband preceded her in death in 2020.

Surviving are three sons, Kent, Richard, Timothy; one daughter, Myrna Alley; eight grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

A service was held Aug. 23 at St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet. Burial was in Maple Grove Cemetery.

KAKN Radio seeks assistant

KAKN Radio in Naknek, Alaska, is seeking a part-time worker to assist station manager Pastor Bob Lee. A background in radio, computer skills, and communication/verbal strengths are desirable but not absolutely essential. More information is available upon request.

KAKN Radio is a ministry of the Alaska Mission and Home Missions. For more info, contact the Alaska Mission coordinator, Pastor Jeff Swanson, by email (jeff.swanson@afcl.org) or by phone at 785-294-8923.

Upcoming FLBCS events

Christmas Concerts

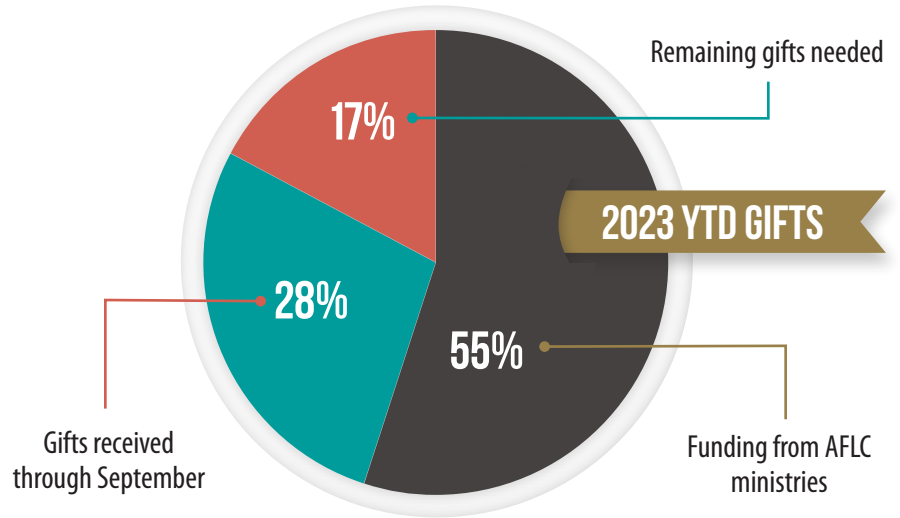
The annual Christmas concerts hosted by the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will be held Dec. 2-4, with concerts at 7 .m. Friday and Saturday and 4 p.m. on Sunday, featuring the Seminary Chorus, Proclaim Choir, Concert Choir, and Symphonic Wind Ensemble.

Seminary Symposium

A Seminary Symposium is scheduled for Jan. 17-19 at the Free Lutheran Seminary with the theme of "Ethics." Guest instructors will include Dr. Joel Biermann (professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), Pastor Micah Klemme, Pastor Nick Schultz and Dr. Nathan Olson. The symposium will end with the Georg Sverdrup Society Forum on Jan. 19.

• **For more information, visit flbc.edu.**

The Lutheran Ambassador financial update



Since our last financial update in June, *The Lutheran Ambassador* has seen a large response in gifts. As of the end of September, the AFLC's monthly magazine has received more than \$42,000 in donations this year. Thank you to all of our financial supporters.

To offset expenses in 2023, *The Lutheran Ambassador* needs \$27,000 in donations by the end of the year. While the magazine receives funding from the AFLC ministries, it is also dependent on donations to help cover nearly half of its annual expenses. As I previously shared in June, the magazine expenses have been impacted by a nearly 30 percent increase in printing and postage costs due to inflation. The cost to produce *The Lutheran Ambassador* for a year for one subscriber is \$53. If you haven't given to the ministry of *The Lutheran Ambassador* yet this year, please consider giving an end-of-the-year gift. You can visit our website (afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador) to view our donation options. If you have any questions, please reach out to me through email at katie.johnson@afcl.org.

~Katie Johnson, director of Business Management



AFLC Parish Education led a Christian Education workshop in August at New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D. Director Marian Christopherson (third from left, pictured with workshop participants) highlighted resources for teaching about prayer as the congregation has turned an extra classroom into a prayer room.



OUR SOURCE OF EXUBERANT JOY

BY DAWN JOHNSON

Exuberant joy: Do you have it? Have you experienced it? The WMF Bible study for 2024 delves into the topic of joy. This study, which was written by Angie Lombardo, a member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., will take us through the Book of Philippians. In the introduction to the study, Angie writes this:

“Lately, I’ve been reading about and observing a strange phenomenon among some women. They may admit to having it all—money, a wonderful family, a beautiful home, and success in their careers—yet even though their lives are so full, they struggle to understand why true joy eludes them.

“They may not realize it, but the answer to their deep need is found in the Bible—in particular this Bible study titled *Philippians—Exuberant Joy!* This study is for women who are searching for something more in their lives.

“In this study, we will follow Paul, the prisoner of Christ, in his journey of genuine joy, love, grace, peace, and self-revelation. We will discover his ultimate goal in life. What was that goal? Paul

desired to know Christ, to really know Him better and better, and to experience the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. This may seem to be a lofty goal, but amazingly, this goal is available to us, as well. That’s a heady thought! It is my prayer that we, like Paul, will experience a deep desire to know Jesus Christ better.

“Come with me as we embark on a journey of exuberant joy!”

In the study, Angie encourages participants to read through the Book of Philippians each month. The eleven lessons focus on smaller portions of Philippians. She also gives memory verse suggestions for each lesson. Join with women across the AFLC as we study the Book of Philippians in our groups or individually. More information will be posted on our WMF Bible study web page, and information will be included in the fall packet mailing.

Johnson, a member of Christ the King Lutheran, Wilson, Wis., is the executive secretary of the Women’s Missionary Federation.

2024 WMF Bible Study • Philippians—Exuberant Joy!

The cost per copy is \$14, including shipping. If mailing to your church, use USPS mailing address. Mailing will begin in late November.

Name: _____ Number of copies: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Church name: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Make checks payable to “WMF of AFLC” and mail to: WMF Executive Secretary, Dawn Johnson, 2991 30th Ave., Wilson, WI 54027.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Joe Larson, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was installed Oct. 1 at Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn., with Pastor Kirk Thorson, the South Dakota District president, officiating.

Members of **St. Olaf Lutheran**, Montgomery, Ill., celebrated the congregation's 135th anniversary with a special service on Oct. 1, including greetings from past members and pastors, special music from the Sons of Norway choir, and message from former Pastor Scott Guhl, who now serves St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran in Gifford, Ill. St. Olaf Lutheran is served by Pastor Josh Skogerboe.

Members of **St. Paul's Lutheran**, Cloquet, Minn., celebrated the congregation's 125th anniversary on Oct. 8 with a special service, including a message from former Pastor Peter Franz. The congregation was established in 1898 as Cloquet Independent Finnish Lutheran Church. The congregation later joined the Suomi Synod in the early 1900s. It was renamed in 1946 and joined the AFLC in 1965 under the leadership of Pastor Herbert Franz. The congregation is currently served by Pastor David Handsaker.

Journey Missions will send out four missionary assistants this winter. **Randy Carlson**, a member of Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran, Cannon Falls, Minn., will travel to Jinja, Uganda, with missionary Michael Rokenbrodt in December. **Zach and Carey Ritland**, members of Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, will travel to Curitiba and Campo Mourão, Brazil; and Villarrica, Paraguay, in January and February 2024. **Logan Blom**, Farmington, Minn., will join them in February.

Pat Hendrickson, 86, of Moorhead, Minn., died on Sept. 20. Hendrickson served as the cook from 1988 to 1997 on the campus of the Association Free Lutheran Bible College (now FLBCS), Plymouth, Minn.

SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Benjamin Copes

Home Missions

Milo Windahl

Seminary

Larry Haakenson

WMF

Gerald Copes

... in honor of

General Fund

Ellis Olson

2024 Lutheran Ambassador schedule

Below is the 2024 schedule for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue, or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. Email us at ruthg@afc.org or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
January	December 4	Attributes of God
February	December 11	Minor Prophets
March	January 29	Lent/Easter
April	February 26	Christians and the World
May	April 1	Biblical theme: Firstborn
June	April 15	Congregational spotlight
July	May 27	Church history
August	July 1	Conference Review
September	July 29	Youth: FLY Beyond
October	September 2	Missions
November	September 30	Reformation
December	October 28	Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 12-15 at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of April 1. This issue will include the schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF Day schedule and registration. Other conference information will be printed as it is available, including registration, housing, and youth and children's activities.

Congregational spotlights sought for June issue

The June 2024 issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* will feature spotlights on congregations that specialize in specific areas of ministry and members whose work has impacted congregations and their communities. Similar to our October 2023 issue, we want to highlight the work our congregations and members are doing in order to inspire our church family and honor the Lord's work. If your congregation fits one of these areas or if you have an idea for an area of ministry to spotlight, please contact us. You may email ruthg@afc.org, or laeditor@afc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-September 30, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$45,021	\$313,812	\$327,504
Evangelism	7,410	84,525	97,769
Youth Ministries	7,757	101,600	117,437
Parish Education	7,320	110,239	131,925
Seminary	14,764	198,972	175,759
Bible College	20,279	290,774	353,735
Home Missions	28,194	224,359	280,736
World Missions	24,162	270,095	328,915
WM Personal Support	45,122	544,287	547,377
TOTALS	\$200,028	\$2,138,663	\$2,361,156

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

OUR CALL TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD

The service was, as I remember, a mess. My call had started in August, so I was new to this particular congregation and not familiar with the cycle of services. I was surprised, when, with not much time to prepare, I was told I needed to have a sermon ready for the annual midweek Thanksgiving service. Psalm 107, I thought, would be the perfect text. Psalm 107 is a great Thanksgiving text, but I certainly did not do it justice; what I remember was standing in the aisle at church, Bible in hand, uncomfortably fumbling my way through the message.



Pastor J.
Christian Andrews

The importance of thanksgiving in the life of the believer cannot be over emphasized. Two reasons are given in Romans 1 for the revelation of God's wrath: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their

speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (vs. 21). Our ungodliness and unrighteousness are shown in our failure to honor God and to give him thanks.

Elsewhere in Scripture we read of the importance of giving thanks. Timothy was told to prioritize "entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings ... on behalf of all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). To the Colossians he wrote, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (3:17), and to the Philippians, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (4:6).

And there is Psalm 107, in addition to a great many other calls to thanksgiving in the Psalms. In the years since that uncomfortable Thanksgiving service, I've often come back to this Psalm to appreciate its call to give thanks.

The Psalm begins with a declaration for why we ought give thanks: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting," followed by examples of circumstances in which we might find ourselves and places from which we can call to the Lord, whose lovingkindness is everlasting.

When we wander in the wilderness, hungry and thirsty, with fainting souls, we can call out to the Lord to deliver us.

And then we give thanks when he satisfies our thirsty souls.

When we dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death because we have rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High, we can cry out to the Lord. Then we give him thanks because he brings us out of darkness and death and into light and life.

When we are fools because of our rebellious ways and are afflicted because of our iniquities, we can cry out to the Lord. Then we can give thanks to him when he saves us out of our distresses, sends his Word and heals us, and delivers us from our destructions.

When our souls melt away in misery, tossed by storms and waves, we can cry out to the Lord. Then we can give thanks because he guides us to our desired haven.

Before the Psalm ends there is list of blessings poured out by a God who loves, concluding with: "He sets the needy securely on high away from affliction, And makes his families like a flock."

The Psalm ends with this admonition: "Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, And consider the lovingkindnesses of the Lord"

Like those who stand as examples for us in this Psalm,

I've come back often in the years since that uncomfortable Thanksgiving service to really appreciate this call to give thanks.

I've found myself often and regularly crying out to the Lord. Sometimes the cry has come from the embarrassment of not being properly ready to share the Word. Sometimes the cry has come from the pit of despair, not necessarily wishing for death but wondering if there might be a solution this side of death. More often my cries are less extreme, but they are cries nonetheless to a God who does hear.

They are cries to a God who answers even if the answer may not be fully clear or something other than what I would have chosen. They are cries believing that, as God acted in his perfect plan and will through the death and resurrection of the Son to forgive my sins and save me, he also continues to work out his will in my life. Then I give thanks to the Lord as I consider His lovingkindnesses.

building the base

INCORRUPTIBLE, ETERNAL, GLORIOUS

BY PASTOR MICAH KLEMME

One of the themes in the *Lord of the Rings* is decay. A prime example is the city of Minas Tirith, the capital city of Gondor. As impressive as it was, the fortress city was in decline and without a king. The city used to be a beacon of hope by keeping the evil creatures of Mordor at bay, but now the city was crumbling, and its forces were becoming stretched thin as the darkness spread across the realm.

At the top of this city sat the The White Tree, which was a symbol of the nation. This tree had been dead for some time. Yet hope remained that the line of Kings would be restored. Of course, the final installment of the series is named *The Return of the King*, where mankind triumphs over the darkness, a white sapling is planted, and the city is restored to its former glory.

Last month, a trending joke was to ask men how often they think about the Roman Empire. No doubt men think about

the Roman Empire because of its former glories. Although the capital city was magnificent, it was hardly a beacon for hope. All we see today are ruins of a dead nation. When ancient Rome was sacked, St. Augustine wrote *The City of God* as a response to pagans' accusation that it fell due to lack of reverence toward the gods. Instead, Augustine argued that other factors led to the city's decline, such as moral decay.

Works like *The Lord of the Rings* and *The City of God* both redirect our thoughts of glory not to the past, but to the future. Whenever we are being nostalgic, the danger of escaping into a glory that no longer exists may prevent us from facing decay around us. Our world is still in a state of decline, but instead of escaping to former glories, we pursue the excellence that is to arrive on the Last Day. We fight back against the darkness within ourselves and our communities. Even when our outlook seems grim, the promise of future glory is still ours through the cross and empty tomb.

How often do you think about the City of God? We, the people of God, are being built into Christ, the everlasting man. God is at work through his people "even when steeples are falling" (*Built on the Rock the Church Doth Stand*, Ambassador Hymnal #294). Our Lord will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will restore his world to its former glory. More importantly, we will be raised up from death: incorruptible, eternal, and glorious. If you fear what may come in the near future, think further ahead. There is much work to be done in the name of Christ our King. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:51–58).

Klemme serves Minnewaska Free Lutheran, Starbuck, Minn.