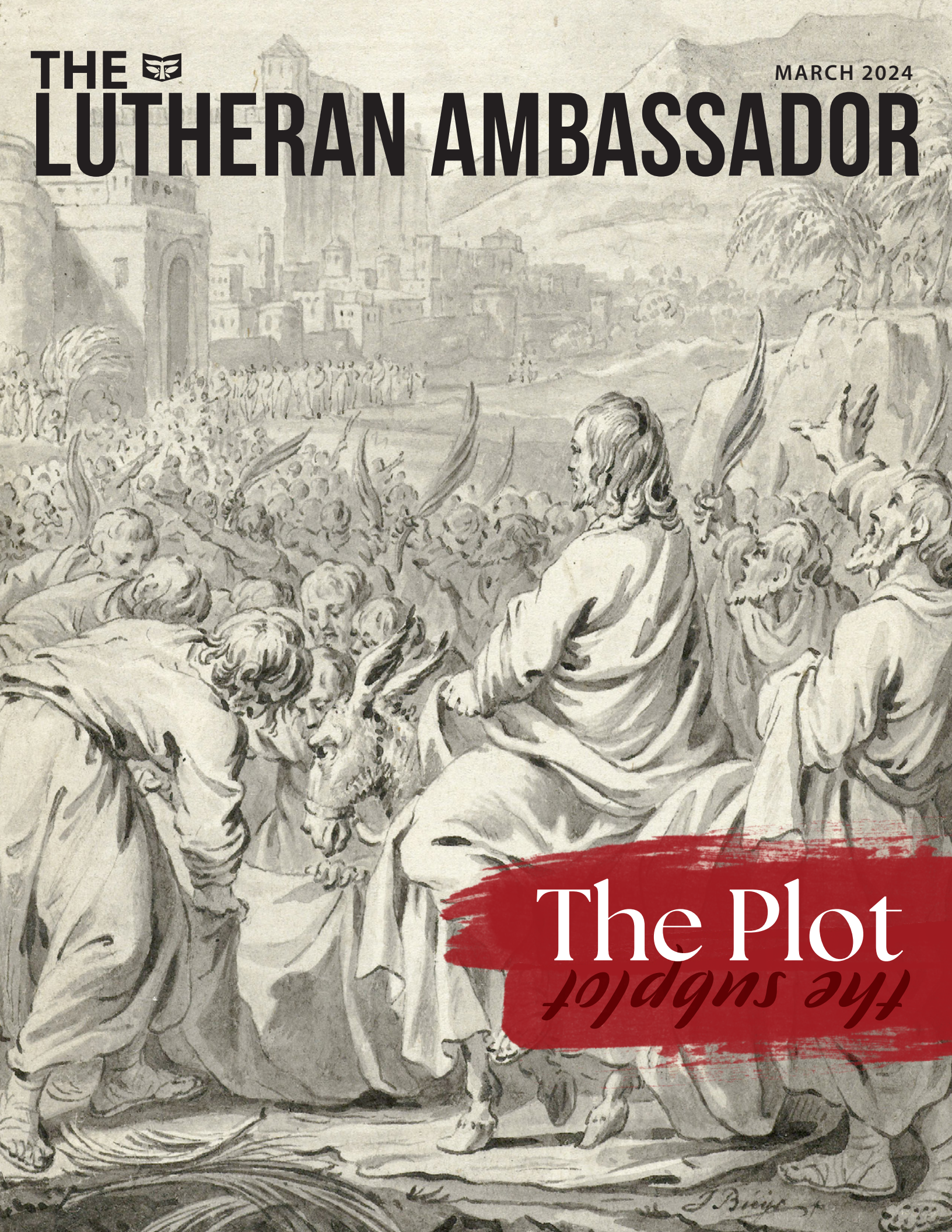


THE 

MARCH 2024

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



## The Plot

*the subplot*

# The plot, and subplot.

**T**he Bible is not a history textbook. It is much, much more.

I like history books, and not just because I'm a history teacher. I enjoy reading about the personalities and perspectives of people who lived in different times and the decisions and events that helped shape the world we live in today. More than just showing us "what happened," these stories from the past can help us see the future more clearly. Reading different perspectives can show us where we are colored by our culture or conditioned by our context.

History matters, and there is history in the Bible. We read in Scripture about the creation of the world, the movements and activities of the Israelites, the interactions of God's people with their international neighbors, the life and teachings of a Jewish rabbi, and the early spread of these new teachings throughout the Roman world.

But God is the author of Scripture, and he is interested in doing more than just teaching us history. The Holy Spirit is active in and through the words of Scripture to create and strengthen saving faith when someone hears the gospel. The words in the Bible are different kinds of words than in any other book. A history textbook can teach us *that* something happened; the words of Scripture *make* something happen.

We should keep this in mind as we continue walking together through Lent and toward Easter this month. The articles in this issue will walk through the last few chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, where we read several historical accounts of Jesus' last days before the cross. In some of these stories, though, history is just the subplot of what God is really up to.

Jessica McCarlson writes about the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, a story of excessive waste when looking at merely the history but, in reality, an important event on the road to our salvation. Nathan Dalager finds something similar when looking at those familiar words of the Last Supper: More than a simple meal among friends, Jesus distributes his very own body and blood.

Pastor Nick Dyrud and Pastor Mark Molstre look at two aspects of the account of Peter's denial in Matthew 26. It's not just an historical account of Jesus predicting what Peter would do, it's a mirror of our experience. Just as Peter arrogantly stumbled into faithlessness, so do we. And just as Christ graciously restored Peter's failures with the gospel, he does the same for us. Alisha Kneeland shows us that reading the account of Jesus' trial and crucifixion does not leave us in despair, but in triumph because we know how the story ends.

Seth Skogerboe wraps up this issue by writing about the resurrection. The other accounts in Matthew have a surface-level, historical story and something more significant that God is accomplishing, but in the resurrection, the historical event *is* the ultimately significant event. The resurrection is only meaningful because it is historical. Paul writes that, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (I Corinthians 15:14).

Don't mishear me: the history in the Bible matters. But God wants to do more than teach us history through the pages of Scripture. He wants to give us Christ, who was crucified and risen for our sins, so that we can have confident hope and eternal life.

"You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (I Peter 1:23).

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



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The commands of God become sweet when we understand that they are to be read not only in books, but in the wounds of the sweetest Savior.

[Martin Luther]

“

God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but He does what is still more wonderful: He makes saints out of sinners.

[Søren Kierkegaard]

As Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, so also He must be the beginning and end in our meditations and studies. Whatever you think, whatever you say, whatever you write, it has no taste unless Jesus be in it.

[Johann Gerhard]

The Scriptures alone dispel the gloom which rests on the tomb. [Charles Hodge]

The special mark of the modern world is not that it is skeptical, but that it is dogmatic without knowing it.

[G.K. Chesterton]

I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad;  
I found in Him a resting place, and He hath  
made me glad. [Horatius Bonar]

# Anointed

*consecrated*





By Jessica McCarlson

I rifled through my wallet, checking my Christmas cash to help pay for this week's buy-one-get-one-free deal at my local gas station. I also got points toward my next gas purchase because I bought a bottle of water. And using cash, it was basically "free" money, as any budgeter knows.

This has become a big part of my life: looking for deals, calculating expenses. I am a little bit worried about finances—with good reason—while between jobs.

Cautious.

This word is the opposite of what the woman, believed to be Mary, exemplifies in Matthew 26:6–13 when pouring expensive perfume on the head of Jesus (also referenced in Mark 14:3–9 and John 12:1–8). While the disciples cried, "Why this waste?" she had one thought: worship.

Extravagant worship of the long-awaited Messiah.

Caution isn't a bad thing. As Jesus implies, though, there is a time for caution and a time for worship, "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have me" (v. 11). He chastises the disciples and upholds Mary. She was not worried about what others would think of her behavior, and she was not anxious about how she could have "better" used this costly item.

To put her motives in perspective, recall that earlier in her recorded story, Jesus raised her brother from the dead (John 11:32–44). She was focused on the One with power, even over death itself.

Jesus' fame at this time had grown significantly due to his authoritative preaching, bold claims, and miracles—including raising two others from the dead: a widow's son and Jairus' daughter. While the raising of Lazarus wasn't unique in his ministry, Jesus had been revealing himself and his authority over and over again. If there was any question about his identity as the Messiah or his God-given power, surely this should have cleared it up. But many, including some of his disciples, were still uncertain. They were cautious, or worse—hostile—toward him.

But not Mary. As Jesus said of her earlier, when she sat at his feet listening, "Mary has chosen the good part" (Luke 10:42). She heard his teaching, saw his miracles, and believed in him, to the point that we see her here, in the final week of Jesus' earthly life, offering up this costly perfume to her Messiah. Jesus said, "She has done a good deed to me" (Matthew 26:10). Honoring him is good and right for believers.

That is the surface story of Mary's worship. But Jesus goes further, foreshadowing his death. He says, "When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare

me for burial" (Matthew 26:12). Later in the Gospels, we see other women intending to use perfumes and spices to anoint him after his death, as was customary (Luke 23:56 and Mark 16:1). But burial isn't the only reason in the Bible for someone to be anointed.

While the word "anoint" doesn't appear in the Matthew account of Mary's homage to Jesus, we see it in John 11:2. The Greek word is *aleiphō*. In the Old Testament's Hebrew, it is *māšah*, meaning "to anoint, consecrate."

This was practiced in Jewish culture for significant reasons. Kings, priests, sacrifices, etc., would be anointed as a form of consecration. This sets these things apart for a special, holy task. Jesus is King, Priest, and the sacrificial Lamb needed to achieve the forgiveness of sins. He is the Anointed One, or rather the *māšiah*.

Messiah.

Like Mary's perfume, Jesus is a fragrant offering, the aroma that pleases a holy God who demands we be holy as he is holy (Leviticus 11:44). We cannot be holy. But through his life, death, and resurrection, the Anointed One won holiness for us.

Mary, though she may not have understood fully what he was about to do, knew Jesus came for a purpose and prepared him for what was yet to come.

This Lenten season, as we consider the events leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection, it is appropriate to reflect upon our shortcomings. Personally, I was convicted as I read Matthew 26:6–13. I would have rolled my eyes and chided Mary for not being more cautious. "Why this waste?" My heart echoed with the disciples' criticism.

Again, caution is not a bad thing. The disciples were right; we are called, as followers of Jesus, to not only be wise with what we've been given but also to bless others with our resources. Managing our time, money, and energy well helps with that aim. We still have the poor with us today, as Jesus said. We also still have the resurrected Messiah with us. And as Jesus told Mary, it is a "good deed" to honor him. For those of you reading who, like me, see yourself in the disciples more than in Mary, join me in repenting to the giver of forgiveness and holiness this Lent.

Lord, have mercy. And prepare my heart, and all our hearts, to worship you come Eastertide like Mary did—extravagantly.

*McCarlson, of Sauk Centre, Minn., is a 2010 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College. "Mary Kisses the Feet of Christ" by Bernard Picart, 1683–1733, Rijksmuseum.*

# The Passover

*true body and blood*

By Nathan Dalager

**M**atthew interrupts his Gospel account of the Festival of Unleavened Bread with these words: “While they were eating ...” (26:26). Even as the Jewish authorities set the wheels in motion to have him killed, Jesus sat down one last time with his disciples for supper. This, however, was not just any meal but one that completely framed the remarkable events to come—the most important weekend in all of history.

The first thing that leaps out from this account is that the plot the Jewish authorities enacted had roots that ran far deeper than any of those men could have possibly imagined. The religious leaders acted in a secretive and even hasty manner as they schemed to bring Jesus to the cross. But Jesus made it clear that even though his enemies worked furiously to bring about his death, this plan had been in place for a millennium.

As Jesus and the disciples gathered around the table that evening, it was the Passover. This holiday is celebrated every year among the Jewish people in remembrance of the events 1,500 years before Jesus’ time, when God stepped into history and saved his people from their captivity in Egypt. Their salvation had been sealed that night by the blood of a slain lamb, which covered them from God’s terrible wrath. The angel of death passed over the houses of those who were marked with the blood of a lamb.

Since we don’t generally celebrate Passover in modern times, it is easy for us to forget the main course of Jesus and his disciples’ last meal together: it was a Passover lamb. They were eating the flesh of a lamb in remembrance of God’s saving work for his people 1,500 years before. But then Jesus took that ritual, that meal, and demonstrated to his followers what was really happening. As Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, he pulled back the

curtain on the whole story of salvation. Once again, God was stepping into history to save his people.

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’” (vv. 26–29).

The disciples didn’t fully understand what was happening that evening, but Jesus showed them the underlying truth—instead of remembering a young sheep as God’s salvation, they should remember him.

The blood of the lamb covered their doorposts as God rescued them from Egypt. That was an important event in the history of God’s people. But on this night, Jesus revealed to his disciples that their complete salvation was now being fulfilled in him. His blood would soon be poured out to cover their sins and to bring them into the kingdom of their Heavenly Father.

This plan had been in motion since before the world began and would culminate with Jesus’ blood shed for their salvation. He was the true and ultimate Passover Lamb.

But unlike the lamb on the table before them, his story would





not end with his blood being spilled. Death would not be the end. Another chapter, even further on, would record a new feast with Jesus and his followers. Jesus promised that he would join together with them, finally, in his Father's kingdom. This was very good news for those men who were gathered together with him around that table.

Of course, that good news went beyond those men gathered in that room. Jesus was speaking to the disciples, but he was speaking to others as well. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many ..." Jesus says there are many who share in the blood of the covenant. Throughout the entire history of the Church, believers have shared in the same covenant by sharing in the body and blood.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat

this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Corinthians 11:26).

When we gather around the altar and take communion, we are sharing in the same body and blood of Jesus that he gave to the disciples that evening. We are sharing in the same promise of forgiveness and the same certainty of being together in his Father's kingdom. Through the finished work of Jesus, we will join in singing praise to the Lamb who was slain, the one who gave his body and blood that we might be redeemed.

*Dalager, Moorhead, Minn., attends St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. "The Last Supper," by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, 1664, Rijksmuseum.*

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Be sober-minded; be watchful.”

I Peter 5:6–8a

By Pastor Nick Dyrud

When was the last time you thought to yourself, “I’m not like them. I would never do that.” One of my teenagers recently recounted a conversation she had at school with some students. They were sharing their stories from the weekend—all the fun they had last Saturday night. It was a vivid contrast to my daughter’s Saturday night experience. I found myself instructing her to stand firm in faith and consider the consequences of their actions. And then I said it, “We are not like them. We would not do that in our house.”

Following the Last Supper, the disciples met with Jesus at the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30–36). I imagine it was a tense and formidable scene as Jesus revealed to his closest disciples that they would soon turn their backs on him. As he warned them, Jesus used a term we translate as “fall away”; more literally, it means “to stumble.” What should catch our attention in the story, however, is Peter’s response to Jesus. He said arrogantly in front of his closest friends, “Well, you might stumble, but I wouldn’t do that.”

And what was Jesus’ answer to Peter’s bold assumption? “Peter, not only will you stumble, you will do it repeatedly” (my paraphrase).

In fact, Peter would soon curse Jesus—that very night, as Jesus sat chained in prison. Peter declared to a little girl who identified him as Jesus’ disciple, “I don’t know what you’re talking about” (v. 70).

It is obvious that fear sharply influenced Peter’s behavior. We have all certainly experienced something like this. Every Christian, on some level and at a certain point in his or her life, will face the pressures that come from society to deny, deflect, or at least downplay our relationship with Jesus Christ. Why would Peter so quickly go from claiming, “I will die with you, Jesus,” to, “I don’t know the man”? What happened?

Deep down inside each of us, we know why.

If we are honest, we will concede that Peter’s response that night mirrors our life experiences in some way. Our world is broken by sin and populated with people who live in conflict with God and with each other. By living by faith and not hiding our beliefs, we have all faced the tension between conformity and fitting in versus standing out and standing strong for Christ. What might people think of me? What will they say about me? What will they do to me? Maybe in some circles we feel bold in our faith, but

I wonder if that boldness would still be there if the stakes were higher.

Ultimately, turning our backs on Jesus comes from a place of pride and arrogance. For Peter, his downfall was an attitude of self-righteous confidence. He really believed this could not happen to him. He reasoned that he had enough strength, enough faith, and the sheer willpower to stand beside Jesus to the death.

The arrogant attitude that distinguishes our capabilities of sin and depravity can be the stumbling block that leads us to approach any situation in life with our guard down, unprepared spiritually to face the enemy’s schemes. We are all subject to this way of thinking and, therefore, acting.

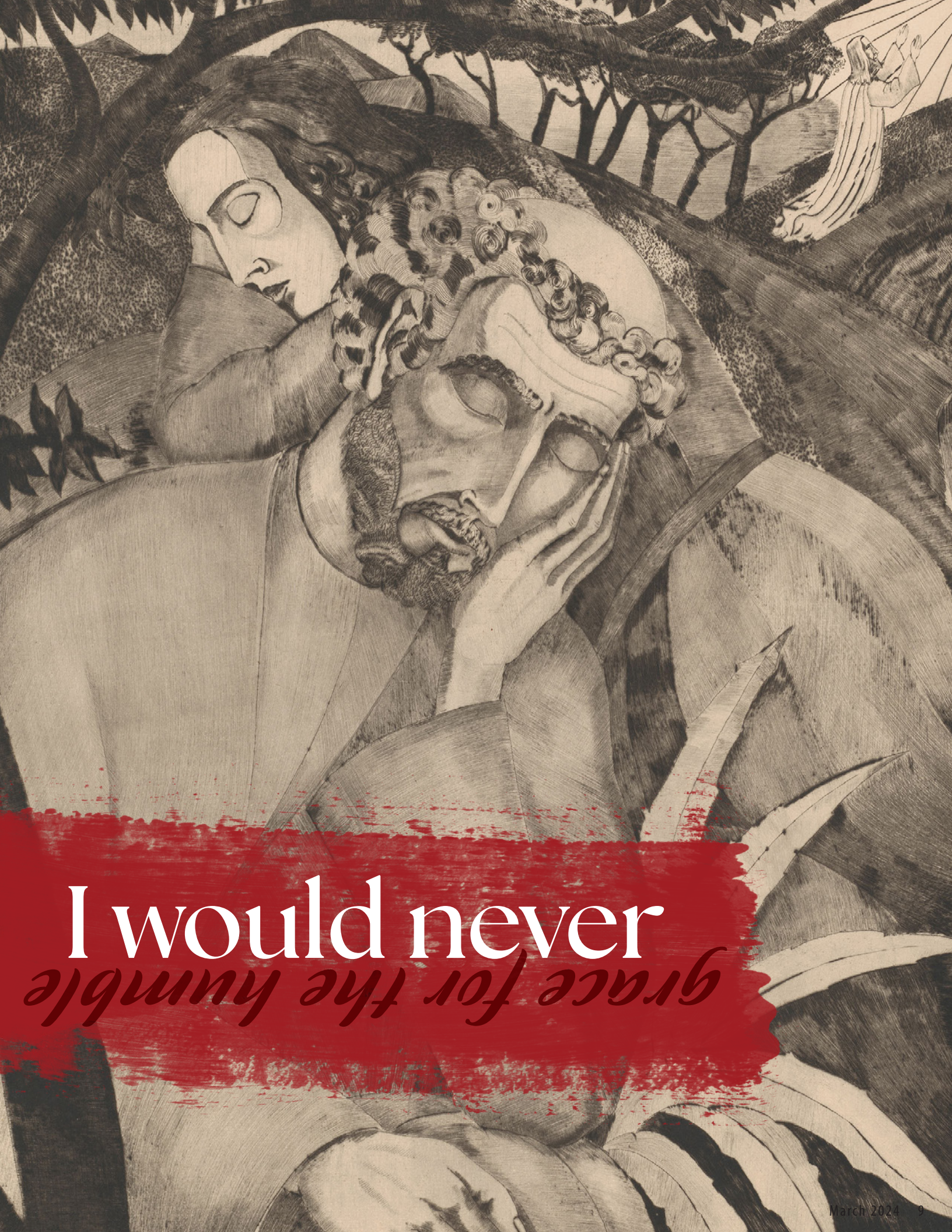
Consider what Peter later writes, “Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (I Peter 5:9, ESV). I wonder, did he have his betrayal in mind as he wrote to the early church, “stand firm” in your faith?

We know that Peter fully repented for his denial. Remember, there is always hope for our souls, no matter how far we’ve walked away or how sharply we have turned our backs on God. John, in his Gospel, records Jesus’ reinstatement of Peter, the moment he looked Peter in the eye and offered encouragement and restoration, healing and forgiveness (John 21:15–19). Beyond that, Jesus also reestablished Peter as a foundational leader in the Church despite his failures. There is no arrogance that is too great for the grace of God. Sure, God opposes the proud. But all the more, he desires to lavish grace on the humble.

Peter’s story should be an important reminder for each of us. We are no different than our neighbors when it comes to sin and brokenness. They are like us. We are like them. Pride and arrogance dwell within every one of us. Sin takes on many different forms, and if we are not careful, it will get the best of us. It’s only God’s grace and forgiveness that set us apart.

*Dyrud serves Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. “Christ on the Mount of Olives,” by Lodewijk Schelfhout, 1924, Rijksmuseum.*





I would never  
*grace for the humble*

# Our failures

*the gospel*

By Pastor Mark Molstre

Think with me about people in the Bible who have famously failed. I am not talking about Judas, Jezebel, or Cain—unrepentant sinners. I am thinking of the people we read about who were “God’s best,” those who trusted God, but Scripture records particular sinful failures in their lives. For instance, Abraham famously failed when he lied about Sarah being his sister and not his wife. Moses famously failed when he killed a man. David slept with another man’s wife and then had that man killed.

Maybe one of the most spectacular of such failures is from the life of Peter. Peter was a disciple who spent three years following Jesus, years in which he witnessed the miracles and heard the message of truth and life from the very lips of God. It was Peter who claimed to be a true believer and promised to go to his death defending Jesus. But then the moment came when soldiers arrived on the scene to arrest Jesus, and in a matter of hours, Peter defected.

In a gathering place later that night, somebody asked Peter if he was a disciple of Jesus. Peter denied it. Two other times he was asked about his relationship with Jesus, until finally Peter cursed and swore, “I don’t know this man.” Famously, Peter failed to declare Jesus the Lord.

Reading about the failures of Peter and other saints in the Bible brings me to me. Who am I but a person who fails to live and acknowledge Jesus as my Lord by loving him with all my heart, soul, and mind? Like Peter, I’ve come to trust in Jesus as my Lord and believe he is the Christ, but it’s in living in faithfulness to him where I fall far short. I can point out the famous failures of others in Scripture, but all that does is point to myself. If being faithful, obedient, and committed to Jesus is what being a Christian is all about, I’m a not-so-famous failure.

It’s in Matthew’s Gospel where we see Jesus offering us his response (the gospel) in Peter’s famous failure episode. In chapter 26, we’re told how, regardless of Peter’s claims to be faithful, Jesus knew that Peter would indeed fail by giving a three-fold denial. Jesus even predicted to his entire group of disciples, “You will all fall away on account of me” (v. 31). Yet after telling Peter and the other disciples that they would all fail him by fleeing when the soldiers came, Jesus followed with these amazing words, “But

after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee” (v. 32). Jesus basically told his disciples, “You will fail me, but I won’t fail you. After I’ve done what I need to do to forgive the world of sin, I’ll meet up with you in Galilee!”

Jesus doesn’t blink at our coming failures because our relationship with him isn’t determined by our actions or based on our faithfulness, but by his. What is the gospel? The gospel is Jesus coming to do in my place what I need to do but can’t. In my place, Jesus lives the life I should be living, and, in my place, he pays the price I deserve to pay for my sin. Jesus didn’t forsake Peter or the disciples; actually, everybody would forsake Jesus.

Even the Father was going to forsake Jesus. We remember that on the cross, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). This was the





plan all along—that Jesus would be the forsaken one, the one who would die the death we should have died and take the penalty upon himself so that we could be saved by pure grace.

When Jesus predicted Peter’s failure, as well as the coming failure of the other disciples, only to follow up by saying, “I’ll meet up with you in Galilee,” how much more clearly can Jesus say to each of us that our salvation depends not on our commitment to him but on his commitment to us? Jesus knows it’s in our nature to fail and that we can do nothing but fail, even if we are numbered among “God’s best,” like Abraham, Moses, and David. Yet, the gospel has nothing to do with my failures and everything to do with Jesus taking our failures to the cross. That gospel truth set Peter free from the guilt of his abandonment. It also

set Abraham, Moses, and David free. It is there for your failures, too.

Consider the words of the old hymn, “Rock of Ages,” by Augustus Toplady:

*Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress.  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

*Molstre serves Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D. “Christ Appearing to the Apostles,” by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1656, The Cleveland Museum of Art.*



# Humiliation

*mediation*

By Alisha Kneeland

Jesus wasn't just another rabbi. This was a man disrupting the foundation of society. The religious leaders in Israel knew that. They feared him. After three years, the number of Jesus' followers had grown, and the time came to put a permanent stop to this craze. What began as a nuisance was turning into an extreme threat to their power. Action was required by them to extinguish the popular new movement that was sweeping through Israel. Assassination was their goal. They must kill Jesus.

Pilate, the Roman governor of the region, was called upon to make an authoritative decision regarding the life of this alleged criminal. The problem, however, was that Jesus wasn't a criminal, and Pilate knew this. Yet he didn't act justly. Instead, he acted out of fear of men. The ones who orchestrated Jesus' arrest in cover of darkness now created a case against him. Using false witnesses and a mob to intimidate Pilate, they did everything in their power to bring an end to this threat. Pilate proceeded to act out of cowardice. Mistakenly putting Jesus' life in the hands of the people, Pilate gave them the option to release either Jesus or Barabbas, a notorious criminal. The crowd was persuaded by the religious leaders to release Barabbas.

Jesus was falsely accused, ridiculed, reviled, beaten, and ultimately killed in the most excruciating way. Darkness fell over the land as the Light of the world yielded up his spirit. What a helpless situation. Jesus was brought down so low.

This is the historical account found in Matthew 27. However, in light of Jesus' resurrection, we know that this is not the full story. "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isaiah 46:8–10, ESV). God, who is sovereign, works through the events of history for his own purpose.

On the surface, this poor Jewish rabbi was under the authority of the government and religious leaders. His life was in their hands. But the reality is that his life was in his own hands, and he willingly gave it up. Nothing was done to him that he didn't allow. "No one takes it from me, but I lay

it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (John 10:18).

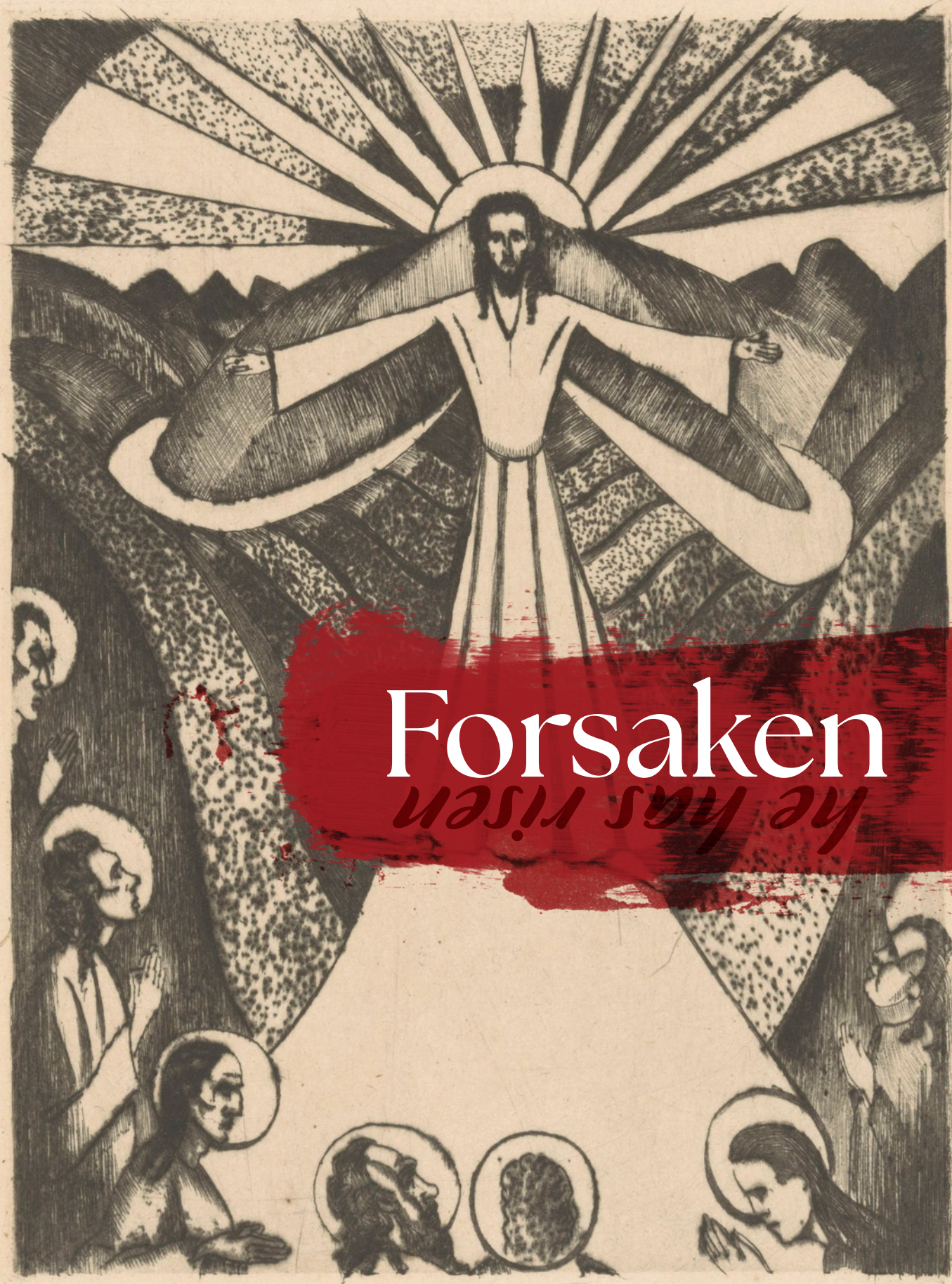
Why would Jesus submit to such cruelty? Why would the creator of the universe consent to this humiliation? It is for your sake and for my sake. It is for the sake of the Roman soldier who hammered the nails, and for the sake of the crowd who screamed, "Crucify him!" It was for the sake of the whole world. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8). Christ's submission to these human authorities was his submission to his own Father, motivated by his love for us.

And this is significant: when Jesus died, "the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). The Most Holy Place in the temple, where God's presence dwelt, was closed off to everyone by this great curtain. The High Priest was the only one who could go behind the curtain and only once a year on the Day of Atonement, when he made a sacrifice for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:34). Hebrews 9 explains to us how Christ's death was the ultimate sacrifice. When Christ died, "he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (v. 12).

The tearing of the curtain signified the end of the old ways. Jesus' death allows each of us to draw near to God's presence with confidence and assurance. Jesus, the Great High Priest, is the ultimate mediator between God and man. Knowing what we know now, we can read the passages of Scripture describing Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, not with despair but with triumph, knowing why this was necessary for God's plan of redemption to be complete.

*Kneeland, Prescott Valley, Ariz., is a 2015 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College. "Descent From the Cross by Torchlight," by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1654, Art Institute Chicago.*





# Forsaken

*he has risen*

By Seth Skogerboe

“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” Those were Judas’s words within hours of turning Jesus over to the religious authorities, who would take him away to be tried and—we know, and Judas likely suspected—crucified.

The authorities responded with a question: “What is that to us?” (Matthew 27:4).

In other words, what do we care? They even told him, “See to it yourself.” These authorities should have known how Judas could be forgiven. It was, in the most meaningful sense, their area of expertise—but they fatally neglected it. The betrayer came to them repentant and sought forgiveness, but he was seeking it from the wrong source.

He couldn’t “see to it himself,” although he tried: “he departed, and he went and hanged himself” (v. 5). He died in his sin. And what is that to us?

Matthew 27 is full of questions like that. Explicit questions: “Are you the King of the Jews?” “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” “Whom do you want me to release for you?” “Then what shall I do with Jesus who called Christ?”—and then, with little pause and apparent confusion, “Why? What evil has he done?”

And implicit questions: Why don’t you fight back if you are who you say you are? Why don’t you answer? How will you rebuild the temple if you’re dead? Why don’t you get down from there and save yourself?

All these questions echo David’s question in Psalm 22:1, and Jesus quotes him outright: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 46).

In ourselves, we can’t find good answers to a question like that. We “see to it ourselves,” offering answers that leave the questioners hanging: I guess he isn’t who he said he was. I guess he isn’t listening. He can’t do what he says. He can’t save anyone.

We answer hopelessness with hopelessness. But Jesus would hang for us in our place to give us a better answer.

Matthew 28 offers a conclusive response to the question that David asked, that the crowd jeered, and that Jesus made incarnate. It is delivered, as it had often been before, by an angel to shaken onlookers: “Do not be afraid, for I know that

you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (vv. 5–6).

In this answer, all other questions are answered, beginning with those of the prior chapter.

The crowd and Pilate asked questions of Jesus like we ask today. Are you the king of anything? Don’t you hear what everyone says about you? How can your temple be rebuilt? What evil have you done? Why don’t you fight when I expect you to? Why don’t you come down here and behave the way I expect you to?

In dying and living, he answers us. Yes, I am King of everything, living and dead. Yes, I hear, and I am a sufficient answer. I have done no evil, but I have swallowed up evil. I always fight for you. I am making you my temple, unexpectedly and eternally bringing you up by my coming down.

Looking back again at Jesus’ trial, we find two phrases from earlier in Matthew 27. When Pilate turns Jesus over to the crowd, trying to wash his hands, he says something that sounds eerily familiar: “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” Are these not the distorted words of Judas’ conversation with the religious authorities less than a day prior? This time, however, the crowd’s answer—by the grace of God—ironically speaks both of death *and* life to come. “His blood be on us and our children!” they say.

These words condemn them, but are they not also the very gospel that the crowd was failing to hear? The gospel for Barabbas and each one of us, his children? Is this not what Jesus means when he tells his disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”? These words declare that his blood is on us, his name covers us, and in this he gives us his life.

“Why have you forsaken me?” The question that David asked, that everyone asks, and that Jesus asked had a final, blood-bought answer on the cross: love, and only love.

There is no greater love than the answer Jesus gives with his body on the cross for yours. He was buried for you. And he has risen to a new life that he invites you to join him in. He hasn’t forsaken you; he forsook himself for you. You have sinned by betraying innocent blood, but he spilled it willingly to put an end to all your sin.

“And behold,” he says, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

*Skogerboe, a 2018 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. “Christ With Spread Arms,” by Lodewijk Schelfhout, 1915, Rijksmuseum.*



# What does the president do?

BY PASTOR MICAH HJERMSTAD

I remember the first time I fielded the question, “Pastor, where do you work?” It came from a sweet 8-year-old girl. When I replied that I worked at the church, she doubled down. “Well, I know you work there on Sundays, but where do you work the rest of the week?”

We all ought to be able to clearly explain how we spend our time, including the AFLC president. People are often curious about what I do and how I spend my time. Here’s how my office spends its time serving you, the congregations.

One of my primary responsibilities is to visit congregations. These visits are usually requested by the congregation. Sometimes I preach for a pastor who is ill or recovering from surgery, or I visit congregations without pastors. I preside over installations and celebrate anniversaries, and other times I visit congregations going through various forms of turmoil or conflict. In any situation, I represent and promote the AFLC and encourage the congregations I visit.

I also spend a lot of time with pastors. I am unofficially the “pastor to pastors.” In some ways, that description fits. In other ways, it doesn’t reflect reality. But I very much want to be an encouragement, however that looks. One goal that Dr. Jason Holt (my presidential ministry associate) and I made for this year was to make sure that every pastor gets a phone call or visit from one of us. We want to be a resource and a prayer partner for our pastors.

There is a lot of office work in this position. I couldn’t begin to count how many phone calls, emails, and texts I’ve exchanged with call committees. That’s a really good thing because we want to have a good, open line of communication. There are a lot of congregations without pastors. We do also receive a modest number of inquiries from other congregations and/or pastors who are looking at the AFLC as a potential new home. Most of them end up not being the right fit, but a few have been added to our rosters in recent months. Please continue to pray that God will provide pastors for our congregations, and pray for wisdom for members of the Coordinating Committee as they review various congregational and clergy roster applications.

Finally, I spend a lot of time on various projects. Here are a few that I’m particularly excited about.

- I work closely with the Development department, and we recently tasked the Foundation Board with advisory and oversight responsibilities for development. We’re working on a significant restructuring and renewal of our mission and purpose.

- My office has been working on updating our promotional materials (coming soon) and creating a presence on various social media platforms. We are so grateful for Kirstie Skogerboe’s leadership in that work.

- We plan and execute several events, including the upcoming Annual Conference. We’re gathering June 12–15 on the FLBCS campus in Plymouth, Minn., and I invite you to come! There are some unique and exciting opportunities and celebrations being planned, but I’m actually looking forward to the business of the conference. Our whole purpose at headquarters is to serve, equip, and encourage the congregations, and the conference is where we hear from you. The more congregations represented, the better. And feel free to send as many people as you want. If you can’t be there for the whole conference, come for whatever time you are available. Give your pastor that Sunday off so he can enjoy the conference. What a blessing it is to gather with other believers, worship and pray together, and hear how God is at work in the AFLC.

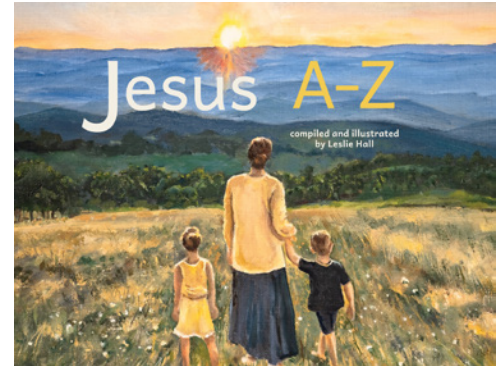
I tell people that it is literally my job to hear from you, so please don’t ever hesitate to contact me with questions, comments, or concerns. That’s what I’m here to do, and I love this work. May God continue to protect, bless, and lead our congregations.

## 2024 Annual Conference

- **When:** June 12–15
- **Where:** Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary  
3134 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.  
Plymouth, MN
- **Theme:** His Word Does Not Return Empty
- **Register Online:** Opens Feb. 29  
[aflc.org/about-us/conferences](http://aflc.org/about-us/conferences)

*Hjermstad is the president of the AFLC.*





Look for a companion coloring book, which will be published later this spring. Visit the website to order the book and access free sample coloring pages: [ambassadorpublications.org](http://ambassadorpublications.org)

# Helping children grow in faith.

BY MARIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

**W**hat is an Unspeakable Gift? How can Jesus be the Bread of Life and a Vine? And Jesus is I Am and Alpha who? What does that mean? With big words, metaphors, and strange names, these might be some of the questions children ask when you read to them our newest publication. *Jesus A-Z* journeys through all the letters of the alphabet, connecting each letter to Jesus in both the Old and New Testaments through vivid illustrations and descriptive names. The goal of the book is to help children grow in their faith—to know Jesus, understand his love for them, and trust in his promises.

How the book came to be written is a beautiful story. When Leslie Hall couldn't sleep at night, she would recite the names and titles of Jesus in alphabetical order, prompted by a sermon she couldn't forget. Focusing on Jesus, she found the peace and rest of Isaiah 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (KJV). Leslie used the idea of names of Jesus A-Z to make coloring pages for Sunday school kids. Later, she added color with pastel pencils and made a picture book. But that book was lost in a house fire! When she retired recently, Leslie decided to remake the book for her grandchildren and had a few amateur copies printed.

One of our Parish Education board members recognized Leslie's exceptional artistic skills displayed in the 26 oil paintings that provide background for the letters and Scripture verses on each page and recommended that we publish them. That board member is Leslie's son-in-law, Pastor Ryan Patenaude, father to several of her grandchildren who received her earlier edition. We are grateful to Leslie for her willingness to share her creative presentation in *Jesus A-Z*. Leslie attends Peace Lutheran, our AFLC church in Canal Winchester, Ohio.

How does this resource serve AFLC congregations? It provides a teaching tool to help children and families grow in their faith in Jesus and see his presence woven throughout Scripture. The book could be used in the Sunday school classroom and for family devotions, placed in the church library and nursery, and given to new member families with children or as a baptismal gift.

## Ambassador Publications

- **Special Event:**

We are planning to honor Pastor Robert Lee at the 2024 AFLC Annual Conference for his work on the forthcoming book on the history of the AFLC called *From Freedom to Life*. The conference will be held June 12–15 on the FLBCS campus in Plymouth, Minn. Plan now to attend and join us in celebrating with him!

- **Giving Opportunities:**

Funding is needed for reprinting *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation* and *Journey Through the Old Testament* (Level 5 Sunday school curriculum) in 2024.

- **Mission Statement:**

Parish Education serves AFLC congregations by providing biblical Lutheran educational and devotional resources to encourage faithful teaching of the Word of God in homes and churches.

Web: [ambassadorpublications.org](http://ambassadorpublications.org)

Phone: 763-412-2010

Email: [parished@aflc.org](mailto:parished@aflc.org)

*Christopherson is the director of AFLC Parish Education.*



# The ARC at 45 years.

BY KIRK RAUTIO

In 1979 a group of believers set out on a mission to create a place for the AFLC family to “come away and rest awhile.” This path was paved with prayer and hope, but also with many challenges. Most challenges were experienced and forgotten as fast as they came about as God moved mountains to overcome them. The hopeful prayers of the staff have manifested into a place that has an impact on believers and non-believers alike. It has been nothing but the work of God himself that has made the ministry of the Association Retreat Center possible. Forty-five years later, the staff at the ARC has changed, but the mission, hopes, prayers, and challenges have not. Our hopeful expectation is that all individuals who come to our campus can meet Yahweh.

Currently, the ARC is on its way to a healthy financial future. Our revenue comes from three main sources: contract groups, ARC programmed retreats, and donations.

The ARC programs for the AFLC include winter and summer youth retreats, family camp, a women’s retreat, pastors retreat, FLY Beyond (biannually), and the AFLC Annual Conference (triennially). These events make up about 16 percent of our revenue.

Contracted groups that utilize our facilities make up about 50 percent of our revenue, and donations are about 32 percent of our revenue. We hope to increase the contracted group revenue by 30 percent over the next few years. This increased revenue will allow us to keep the ARC programmed retreats for the AFLC affordable. Our ultimate goal is to reduce fees for youth retreats so that they are nearly free.

Another goal is to eliminate the overall debt that the ARC carries, which is currently less than \$375,000. This is a large decrease from the \$1.49 million owed in 2017. As God provides new groups to use his facilities and as we continue to manage his provisions within his will, these goals are not that far out of sight.

The ARC staff was joking recently about the number of projects we have in the pipeline. The best part of our conversation was noting that we have more materials on hand than we have staff to accomplish the tasks. The subject quickly moved to our need to recruit more staff and volunteers. Volunteers are a major part of why we have been able to accomplish so much over the last few years. We are always excited to have volunteers help us complete projects. Please reach out and see if there are any projects that you would like to be a part of.

As we look forward to the continued improvement of our finances and facilities, it is of utmost importance to remember why we are doing it. The ambition of the ARC ministry and its staff is simple: to point people to Christ. Every camp we plan, meal we serve, building we clean, and individual we get to show Christ’s love to is all for God’s glory. Without his provisions, we cannot be fruitful, nor would any accomplishment mean as much. It is only as we call on him through prayer that we continue in the steadfast hope that he has called us—to remain constant in the pure joy that is found only in him. As we press onward toward the upward call of Christ, he enables us to remain faithful to him. And he will provide the resources we need, just as when this ministry started 45 years ago. Will you stand with us in these next 45 years of ministry?

## ARC 2024 Retreats/Camps

Association Retreat Center  
2372 30th Ave., Osceola, WI  
Phone: 715-294-2877  
Email: info@arc-aflc.org

- Women’s Retreat: April 26–28.
- Family Work Weekend:  
May 24–25.
- Fire Up Camp (junior high):  
June 23–27.
- Onward Camp (senior high):  
June 23–27
- Family Camp: July 28–Aug. 3
- Young Adult Retreat: Sept. 27–29
- Holiday Shop: Nov. 2

*Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center.*



# Emergency care.

BY PASTOR JON BENSON

Every day, law enforcement officers put on their uniforms and go out to protect and serve their communities. As they serve and provide protection, they encounter a variety of stressful situations: domestic disputes, suicides, traffic accidents, etc.

Likewise, every time 911 calls come in requesting the assistance of firefighters or first responders, there are men and women in our communities who drop what they are doing in order to meet the immediate needs of members of their community. It may be a structure fire, an auto accident, or a search for a lost child. It may be to offer medical assistance and provide transportation to a medical facility. Like law enforcement officers, these men and women respond to stress-filled or stress-inducing situations.

In many communities, police and fire departments enlist the assistance of chaplains as they respond to critical situations. On the scene where a domestic dispute or death is being investigated, where someone has been critically injured, or where a family is watching helplessly as fire is destroying their home, the presence of a chaplain offering words of comfort and prayer often brings a sense of calm.

Chaplains also serve as a spiritual and emotional resource for law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical responders. Chaplains are called upon to assist them as they work through the stress that can accumulate from frequently having to work in these environments. This assistance might be offered as a debriefing after the department has just dealt with a critical incident. Or it might be in the form of a chaplain engaging an individual one-on-one over a cup of coffee.

Currently, the AFLC clergy roster includes about a dozen pastors who are serving as chaplains for their local police or fire departments. Most of these men are providing chaplain services to the agencies in their communities in addition to their responsibilities as the pastor of a local congregation.

There are also pastors on our clergy roster who are serving full- or part-time as chaplains in nursing homes, where they provide spiritual care for residents in a variety of settings: worship services, Bible studies, or one-on-one visits. They also provide spiritual care to staff members.

A couple of AFLC pastors are serving as chaplains in hospice settings. Hospice chaplains provide spiritual care to individuals and their families as they deal with end-of-life issues.

If you know a pastor who is serving as a chaplain, I encourage you to pray for him. As you pray, ask the Lord to provide the chaplain with wisdom to have the right words to say to those he is ministering to. Pray also for his spiritual strength and resilience. Being a spiritual care giver in any of the chaplain ministries that have been mentioned here can take a spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical toll on a chaplain. The chaplains you know need your prayer support.

## Institutional Chaplaincy

- **Training:** If you are looking for opportunities to be credentialed to serve or improve your skills, reach out to Pastor Jon Benson:
  - [jb6179@hotmail.com](mailto:jb6179@hotmail.com)
- **Connect:** There are currently two Facebook pages dedicated to chaplaincy in the AFLC. "AFLC Police and Fire Chaplains" is a public page providing a forum to share general information related to chaplaincy ministry. "AFLC Chaplains" is a closed group that serves as a private forum to discuss ministry concerns.
- **Luncheon:** Are you going to the AFLC Annual Conference June 12–15 on the FLBCS campus in Plymouth, Minn.? Register for the chaplaincy luncheon and hear about our ministry.

*Benson, who serves Newark Lutheran, Newark, Ill., is the director of police and fire chaplaincy.*

# Spotlight: Missions features Pastor Jore

Pastor Nate Jore, AFLC missionary to Uganda since 2006, was the featured speaker at the spring semester Spotlight: Missions conference at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary. Jore spoke on the theme, “Life on Mission,” over the three-day conference held Jan. 30–Feb. 1.

Using stories from his time in both Jinja and Nabukosi, Uganda, Jore covered themes on the purpose of missions, “Jesus Came to Set the Prisoner Free;” who God uses on the mission field, “Ordinary People;” and the authority given to those on the field, “Power From On High.”

“If you really believed Jesus had all authority, what would you do?” Jore asked Bible college and seminary students. “What if you go two by two and your primary objective is to make disciples? The sky is the limit where God might lead you.”

Jore and his family, who are currently on furlough, have announced their resignation from AFLC World Missions later this summer.



Clockwise, from above: Kade Bilden looks up a Scripture passage. Jore spoke during the Thursday morning chapel service. Wyatt Whitchurch takes part in a discussion group. Seminarian Adam Erickson talks with Levi Skogerboe and Sam Monseth. Noelle Adriance takes part in a discussion group. Members of the FLBC Student Mission Fellowship group (Kyle Gorman, Ellen Dalager, and Norabelle Kozicky) talk with Journey Missions assistant Shelby Greven about their mission experiences.





# FLBC hosts homecoming weekend



FLBCS hosted a weekend of activities for students and alumni Feb. 2–3, including a benefit concert and dinner for the Scandinavian Concert Choir tour planned for April 28–May 18. Events kicked off on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon with basketball games played against the Providence University Pilots. (At right, Caden Larson takes a jump shot. Below right, Lauren Jones takes a shot.) Alumni were encouraged to host class reunions, take part in an alumni choir singing the national anthem (above), and play in a pep band (below). A choir concert was held Saturday evening, including alumni.



PEOPLE & PLACES

**Pastor Jerry Moan** has accepted a call to serve the McIntosh, Minn., parish of Trinity Lutheran and Mount Carmel Free Lutheran, his hometown congregations. Moan has served as faculty at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., since 1995. He will begin his new call on July 1. Moan is also a member of *The Lutheran Ambassador* editorial board.

**Amy Skogerboe**, Montgomery, Ill., was one of four keynote speakers for the Lutherans for Life Y4Life conference and march in Washington, D.C., Jan. 18–20. With a theme of “Just As ... I AM,” Skogerboe spoke on “Joy Despite Brokenness.”



**Greg Schmitke**

Greg Schmitke, 64, of Moorhead, Minn., died Jan. 26. Schmitke was a member of the AFLC’s Bay Broadcasting Board, which oversees the radio ministry of KAKN Radio of the Alaska Mission, based in Naknek, Alaska. The ministry also oversees two other stations: KAKD in Dillingham, Alaska, and KIGI in Igiuigig, Alaska. Schmitke was a 1984 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, and a graduate of Brown Institute for Radio. He worked for KFNW Radio/Life 97.9, where he was an on-air personality and then chief engineer with Northwestern Media. He was a member of the Christian Motorcyclists Association. Surviving are his wife, Renate; three children, Joshua Schmitke, Ben (Megan) Schmitke, and Ruth (Anders) Gredvig; one brother, Mark; one sister, Kristi; and seven grandchildren. His service was Jan. 31 at St. Paul’s Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., with Pastor Matthew Nelson officiating.

JANUARY MEMORIALS

**Bible College**

Ruth Claus  
Barry Demsky

**Home Missions**

Pastor Michael  
Flechsig

**FLAPS**

Greg Schmitke

**KAKN**

Greg Schmitke

**Parish Education**

Eloda Knutson  
Betty Christopherson

**Lutheran**

**Ambassador**  
Ian Gunderson  
Michael Jordan

**World Missions**

Len Brown

**Seminary**

Louise Ballmann

**WMF**

Gretchen Noon  
Betty Christopherson  
Dennis Rorvig

Gudim accepts faculty position at FLBCS

Pastor Jason Gudim has accepted a call to a full-time faculty position at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, beginning June 1. Gudim, who serves Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, has served as adjunct faculty since 2013 and currently serves on the FLBCS Board of Trustees. Gudim graduated from the Bible college in 2000 and from the Free Lutheran Seminary in 2011. He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., in 2021. He is married to Esther (née Palmer), and together they have five children.



“Pastor Gudim is an experienced pastor with a long track record of teaching in our schools,” said Dr. James Molstre, seminary dean and chief academic officer. “He is loved by his congregation, and our students have appreciated his clear biblical teaching.”

Registration opens for FLY Beyond

Registration is now open for FLY Beyond, the national youth equipping conference for AFLC Youth Ministries. FLY Beyond will be held July 14–18 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., under the theme, “Be Transformed,” from Romans 12:1–2.

Students in grades seven through twelve are welcome to attend. The daily schedule will allow students to build community with fellow teenagers through Bible study, training in

apologetics, discussion groups, team challenges, afternoon recreation, and evening sessions. Speakers include Pastor Aaron Olson leading evening sessions; Michelle Olson, Brandon Fouks, Pastor Dan Hurner, and Pastor Adam Osier as daily Bible study leaders; and Tim Barnett from Stand to Reason leading the apologetics training.

Registration and more information can be found at [aflc.org/youth/fly-beyond](http://aflc.org/youth/fly-beyond).

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-January 31, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$48,720	\$48,720	11	\$46,104
Evangelism	15,269	15,269	11	9,283
Youth Ministries	13,675	13,675	9	15,027
Parish Education	12,374	12,374	7	10,780
Seminary	31,671	31,671	11	27,721
Bible College	43,777	43,777	9	43,034
Home Missions	36,672	36,672	9	30,253
World Missions	46,871	46,871	10	37,932
Personal Support	67,373	67,373	9	58,919
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$316,403</b>	<b>\$316,403</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>\$279,053</b>

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

# Beauty from ashes.

BY AMY SKOGERBOE

I am from the 9/11 generation; we saw the planes hit and the towers fall. Whether you were born or not at that time, it could be argued that you are also of this generation, as those living today will historically be most aware of what transpired on September 11, 2001, and more affected by the aftermath than those born in the decades to come. As the trauma unfolded, one central thought landed heavily on many of us watching the live coverage: our nation will never be the same. We cannot go back to how things were prior to that event, and life as we knew it until then was over. The physical reality of the Twin Towers was one of total obliteration. Thick white residue coated those fleeing down the streets and every surface in sight, creating a stark mix of red blood and white paste on the injured. The images of that suffocating, pervasive ash billowing high and pouring down the streets as though angrily pursuing those running for their lives cling to our memories and always will. It is a powerful reminder of evil, hate, death, and profound destruction.

Before 9/11, the towers had been symbols of national prosperity and, for some, personal and corporate success and security. They stood for the American dream: hard work that produced great wealth. They were tremendously beautiful in the eyes of many. They were the way things were supposed to be, but then they were ashes. Nothing substantial was left standing; no materials or structure were left to restore.

Visit New York City and the World Trade Center today, and you'll see a beautiful memorial erected where the towers once stood. Where there once were enormous piles of ashes, there is now a place of serene reflection honoring the lives of the 2,977 who died that day. Artists have crafted an entirely new structure, including

a beautiful fountain area that allows space for giving honor to those lost and fosters unity for those left behind. It serves as an invitation and also as an exhortation to come together as a people and be rebuilt. The Twin Towers are gone and will not be coming back. Something completely new with different purposes now stands in their place.

Believers, *Beauty from Ashes* is our salvation story, or more accurately, God's story told through our lives. We were utterly devastated, destroyed by our own vices and suffocated by the darkness and ash of our humanity, our lives obliterated by our sin. We were not partially incapacitated by our old nature; we were dead in it—self-made towers that had fallen and were diminished to dust by the impact of evil carried in our hearts. When God came in his mercy to find and rescue us in our ashes, there were no worthy raw materials left in us to redeem. He started over by giving us life in his Son, and we became completely new!

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

(II Corinthians 5:17). We aren't to look back at what was with any fondness or emotional attachment; we are a redeemed creation straight from his heart and hand. Isaiah 43:18 directs us to not even consider or give our attention to the old that was in us. We are to have laser-beam focus on the beautiful work God has done in us and proclaim it to a lost and fallen world. The television show *The Chosen* coined this apt description of our salvation: "I was one way, and now I am completely different. And the thing that made the difference was him." Embrace the literal *new*, original creation God has made out of you and every aspect of your life! Declare that your only way forward out of your ashes into life is through him; therefore, he receives all the credit for any beauty that is seen in you. To God be the glory!

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

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

BUILDING THE BASE \ \ \ PART 2

# Full satisfaction for our sins.

BY PASTOR J. CHRISTIAN ANDREWS

**B**ecause of our sin, our fellowship with God Almighty was broken. Creation was tainted. Death came. The account, however, does not end there. We are pointed to the woman's Seed and the love of God the Father who then sent the Son.

The events listed in the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed are a summary of how God intervened for us to change our death into life. The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, may have quoted an early creed of the Church: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5–11). This is our confession about "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

Jesus emptied himself for us, obediently and voluntarily. And in our confession, we list the events of his humiliation. In his conception by the Holy Spirit, he did not regard his divinity—equality with God—a thing to hang on to; he emptied himself and took on the form of a bond-servant, a slave. In his birth by the virgin Mary, the Word became flesh—he was made in the likeness of men. It was not enough, however, that God would become human flesh. It was necessary for us that he further humiliate himself to the point of death. His suffering under Pontius Pilate places him in the reality of history. He was crucified. He died. He was buried. His humiliation was even to death on a cross, where

he bore for us the curse. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13). He died the death we deserve for our rebellion.

For us and to the glory of God the Father, Jesus was exalted. In our confession, we list the events of his exaltation. We believe that Jesus' death was both physical and spiritual. His words from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (Matthew 27:46), express what might be called his descent into hell. However, our confession is that this descent is really the beginning of his exaltation according to I Peter 3:18b–19, "having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison." The whole of our faith rests, then, on the resurrection, which we confess to be a historical event. His ascent into heaven points us to the Third Article and the promised Paraclete. Jesus is now seated at the place of highest authority, the right hand of the Father where he was given the name above all names. He will come again to judge both the living and the dead, both the redeemed and the apostate. To Jesus will every knee bow. Every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

Our sin leaves us in a desperate place, separated for eternity from the God who made us. But now! God, in the second person of the Trinity, became one of us so that a man, a human, might suffer the consequences of human sin. Death, however, could not hold him. He was raised, exalted, and enthroned. He reigns. He will return, not as our redeemer but as our judge. To the redeemed, his promise is comfort. He has not revealed when that return will be, but as part of the promise, he has given us the Holy Spirit ...

*Andrews, a member of the editorial board, serves Immanuel Lutheran, Springfield, Mo.*