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MARCH 2019

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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ENCOURAGING WORD

THE UNDESERVED GIFT OF GOD

BY PASTOR KENT SPERRY

*"Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other."*

—Isaiah 45:22

The desire of God's heart is the salvation of the lost. We learn in Scripture that God desires for all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4). And this desire is most clearly seen in Jesus, who is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2).

This desire is reflected also in the call God has given us. And what a great call this is. After receiving His grace and mercy through faith in Jesus, He calls us to carry the message of the gospel to others. He calls us to make disciples of all nations. He calls us to preach the gospel to the whole creation.

This is an intimidating thought to most of us. We don't feel worthy of such a calling. We think that a call like this is better suited for those who surpass us. What we fail to understand is that, just as we are saved by the grace of God, so too are we called by God. We see this in the words of Paul, spoken to his young colleague Timothy: "... share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own

purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (II Timothy 1:8-9 ESV).

Just as our goodness and efforts play no part in the salvation of God, neither do they play a role in the call of God. His call is not something that's given to those who are deserving. It's given to us because of His grace.

If it were given only to the deserving, if it were given only to the qualified, none of us would be worthy of God's call. None of us would be worthy because, as Scripture tells us, none of us are good. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

The call of God is an undeserved gift, an unmerited blessing that He offers us. We bring absolutely nothing to the table. We neither deserve it, nor are we qualified for it. Yet, for His own purpose, He has chosen us to carry out this great task.

What, then, should our response be to the call that God has placed upon our life? Instead of rejecting it on the basis of our unworthiness, we should receive it as a gift and a blessing of God. Instead of rejecting it because it seems to be a burden, we should receive it for the benevolence that it is.

Sperry serves Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.

The reason Lent is so long is that this path to the truth of oneself is long and snagged with thorns, and at the very end one stands alone before the broken body crowned with thorns upon the cross.

—Edna Hong

The grinding power of the plain words of the Gospel story is like the power of millstones; and those who read them simply enough will feel as if rocks had been rolled upon them.

—G.K. Chesterton

So that's what I see reflected in the mirror of Christ's crucifixion: my death. My rightful punishment. My sin and its just consequence. Me. And precisely because it is so accurate, the sight is nearly intolerable.

—Walter Wangerin

To live in the light of resurrection—that is what Easter means.

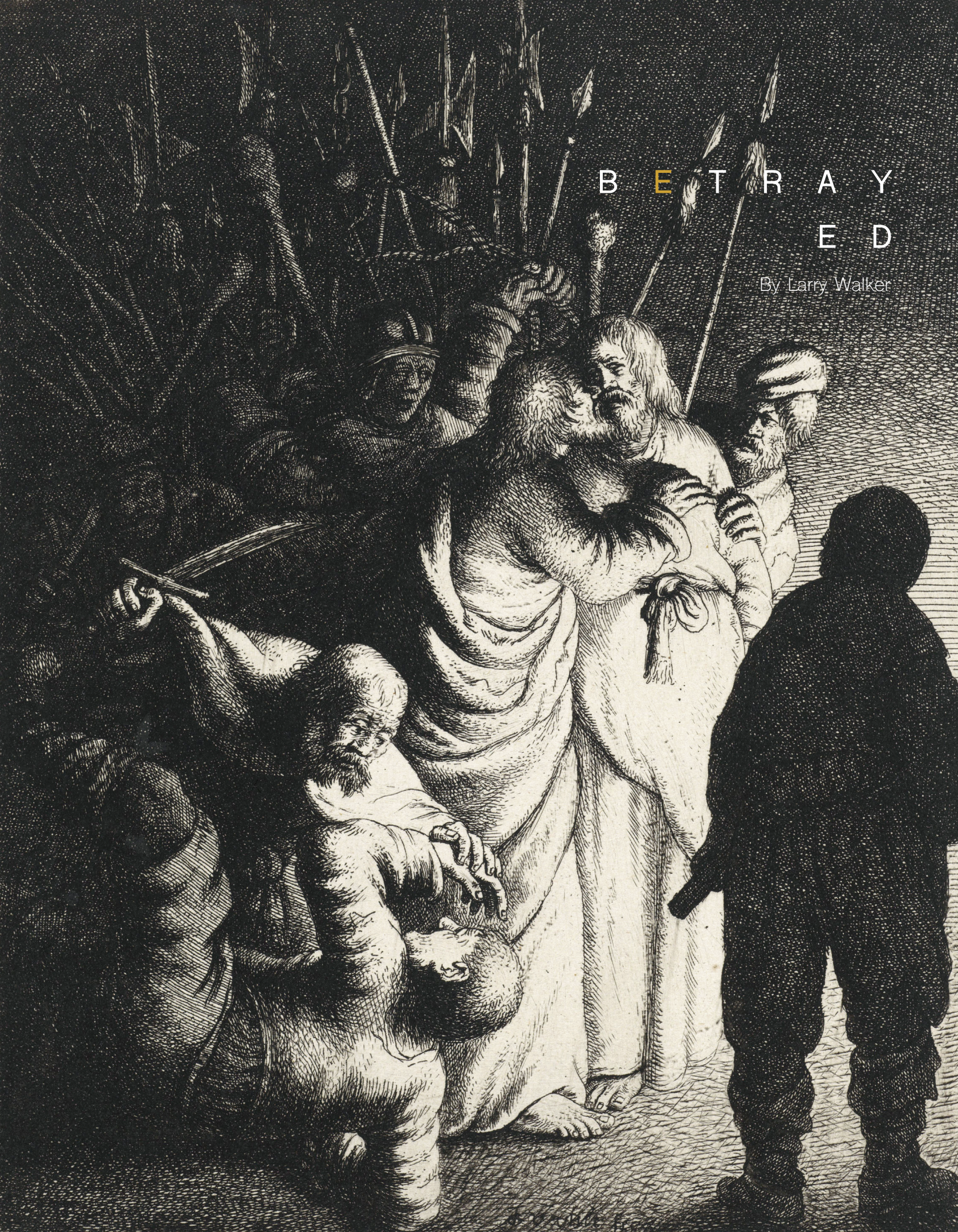
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Unless something very real indeed took place on that strange, confused morning, there would be no New Testament, no Church, no Christianity.

—Frederick Buechner

BETRAYED

By Larry Walker



"Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:14–16, ESV).

Is there any emotional experience more hurtful than betrayal?

My mother told me a story from our family history, years ago. Her mother's family in Norway had adopted a son. He was raised as one of the household.

Then they decided to emigrate to America. They calculated that they had money to bring all the "blood" children along. But the adopted son—there was no money for him. He'd have to stay behind.

When they sailed out of the harbor in Trondheim, according to the story, they could see him down by the docks, beating his head on a rock.

Imagine the pain that young man felt. Where do you go for comfort, when the very people who are supposed to be your comforters have chosen to cut you out of their lives, to treat you as nobody?

That's the nature of betrayal, the reason it hurts so much. An enemy can't betray you. An acquaintance or a stranger can't. Betrayal can only come from those who are close to us, people from whom we expect better things.

In 2006, a wicked man murdered five little Amish girls in Nickel Mines, Pa. The world marveled when, within a few hours, members of the Amish community went to visit the killer's wife, to comfort her.

That's a genuine and moving example of forgiveness. When I search my heart to see if I could do the same thing, I can only say I hope God would give me grace to follow their example. But that holy act wasn't forgiveness of a betrayal. The murderer was not friend or family, not someone they had trusted.

The closer a person is, the harder it is to forgive them.

"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me," says David in Psalm 41:9. Like so much in the Psalms, it's a prophecy of Jesus Christ's coming experience. Judas was Jesus's "close friend"—Jesus had placed him in a position of trust, made him group treasurer. He could reasonably expect loyalty and support from Judas. Jesus wasn't surprised by the betrayal, of course. But I don't think that made it hurt less.

Like everyone else, I have my own betrayal stories. But, if I'm honest (let's try that!) there are other people who can tell betrayal stories about me. I can complain about being hurt, but I can't say I never hurt anyone else. I can't claim I didn't have it coming.

We're all betrayers. Adam was the first—he'd received

every good thing in a perfect home from God. And in return, God got disobedience from him. Each of us has done the same thing, ever since.

What's the answer to betrayal? Must the pain and separation go on forever? Reconciliation is hard—apologizing is hard and painful. Accepting that apology is hard, too, because the grounds for trust have been destroyed and the pain lingers. And that's only in the realm of human relationships. Our cosmic betrayal of God, a betrayal that's borne poisonous fruit in innumerable acts of evil and unimaginable suffering, demanded a reconciliation far harder than that.

Such a betrayal calls for a reconciliation beyond our powers. Only God could do it. The apostle Paul writes in II Corinthians 5:18-19 (ESV): "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Here I find myself stuck for words, even though I write for a living. How do we express the cataclysm, the dislocation, the upheaval of the laws of the universe, that went into God reconciling Himself to all these betrayers, from Adam to Paul to you and me?

Among human beings, reconciliation usually involves two people coming together, each confessing sin against the other. But our reconciliation in Christ is something else entirely. All the evil is on our side. We are the betrayers. We are the traitors. We are Judas. It is for us to surrender unconditionally, to lay our heads on the ground and beg for mercy—without excuse.

But putting it that way makes it look as if some of the initiative has to be ours. Thank God, that's not true. If God were waiting for us to make the first move, we'd be hopelessly lost. No, God took the first step and the last. God started and finished the reconciliation. The only answer is Jesus, a Gift to be received. The only answer is the cross.

Thanks be to God, who is faithful when we are not.

Walker is a Norwegian-English translator who attends Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. "Gevangenneming van Christus" ("The Taking of Christ"), Jan Georg van Vliet, 1628-1637.

“And they all left Him and fled” (Mark 14:50).

I'm sure the disciples had questions swirling through their minds. *What just happened? Why didn't He stop it? Why did He tell Peter to put away his sword? Why did I desert my Master and run away?*

But Jesus knew. He knew He'd have to go on this journey, alone.

He had tried to tell His disciples what was going to happen. Earlier that week, He was pretty clear. “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion” (Matthew 26:2).

The disciples were aware of the increasing threats against Jesus. As Jesus considered traveling back to Judea because His friend Lazarus was sick, the disciples responded, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?” (John 11:8). When Jesus explained His reasons to go, Thomas bravely stated to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him” (John 11:16).

Just after celebrating the Passover meal, Jesus tried to warn them again about what would happen, and what their response would be. “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered’” (Matthew 26:31).

The disciples vowed their loyalty to Him. “But Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.’ All the disciples said the same thing too” (Matthew 26:35).

Later that evening, it happened, just as He said.

“... Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people” (Matthew 26:47).

And with a kiss, He was betrayed.

“Therefore He again asked them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ And they said, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way.’ To fulfill the word which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one’” (John 18:7-9).

Peter drew his sword in defense, and cut the ear off of a slave. Jesus told him to put the sword away, asking, “The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

It was then that “all the disciples left Him and fled” (Matthew 26:56).

But He asked the crowd to let the disciples go. He told the disciples not to defend Him.

He chose to be abandoned by man.

Jesus knew the time had come. After the Passover meal, He and His disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane. As He walked further ahead with Peter, James, and John, He said, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me” (Matthew 26:38).

He knelt down and prayed just a stone's throw away from them. He prayed, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:42-44).

The cup was God's plan for Jesus to be arrested, mocked, beaten, and crucified. Jesus had to choose to do the will of His Father, knowing the suffering that would take place. This surrender culminated as Jesus was on the cross. “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

In that moment, something happened that our human minds cannot comprehend. God the Father turned away from God the Son.

He chose to be abandoned by God.

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

Here lies the reason Jesus chose to be abandoned by man and by God—love.

We have sinned. The penalty for sin is eternal death. He was perfect. As both man and God, He had never sinned. He didn't have to die.

When Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, He asked him, “Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53).

At any moment He could have abandoned us to suffer eternally in hell for the sins we have committed. But He chose not to, because He loves us that much.

He chose to be abandoned, so that we didn't have to be abandoned.

Arneson is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn. “Christus in de hof van Gethsemane” (“Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane”), Rembrandt van Rijn, 1655-1659.

A B A N
D O N E D

By Lisa Arneson



“Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am he’” (John 18:4–5).

‘Then all the disciples left him and fled.”

Reality began to fracture that night in Gethsemane. Strange things had been going on, and they weren’t just the “fish and loaves” variety of strange. This was a whole different, almost surreal level of weird. A prayer so fervent the supplicant bled ... a crowd knocked from its feet by a name ... an ear imprecisely amputated and swiftly reattached ... Christ’s most fervent followers fleeing into the darkness (one entirely naked, Mark 14:51-52), and He, undaunted, stepping out of it ... What, exactly, happened here? What took place to turn normal so abruptly and decisively on its head? This was the night that God was arrested by men.

The disciples were embarrassingly unprepared. Jesus had warned them not only once (Matthew 16:21), or twice (Matthew 17:22-23), but more than three times (Matthew 20:17-19, 26:12, 26:31-32, etc.) that He was to die—and He warned them in detail. It would be in Jerusalem. The authorities of the church would do it. He’d be mocked, flogged ragged, and nailed up to bleed out on a cross. And on the third day after His death, impossibly, He would be raised to life. Twice already they’d wept over the coming separation from their rabbi, and even as He was being taken into the hands of His captors, He reminded them: “But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matthew 26:56a). And yet, Matthew’s account of Jesus’ arrest concludes with the words, “Then all the disciples left him and fled.” That’s the second half of the verse above. “Remember the prophecies,” He said ... and they ran.

What do you do when your idea of who God is and what He ought to be doing in your life meets face to face with the reality that His ways are “higher than” yours, and His thoughts are “higher than” yours, to the extent that “the heavens are higher than the earth” (Isaiah 55:9)? How do you react when you’re hurting, and you want Him to make you stop hurting, and instead He just hurts *with* you? Instead, He just dies *for* you? I know the answer, for me. It’s familiar, pathetic, and practically written in the book of Matthew: “Then [he] left him, and fled.”

I sometimes wonder what the disciples thought of Jesus in those times that He appeared to be so meek—these fishermen, businessmen, and brothers. Was there an awkward pause when the Lord requested a donkey for his “triumphal entry”? Did all weep grateful, manly tears as He bent, towel-clad, to bathe their road-battered feet, and without an eyebrow raised? I don’t need to wonder about how they reacted to His crucifixion: They were terrified and, having forgotten the promises of the resurrection, locked themselves in an attic (John 20:19, Mark 16:11).



This is what I find so remarkable about the confrontation in Gethsemane: In that very moment, all the disciples’ and the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ false images of the kingdom of God began to topple over, insufficient, to the ground. The disciples expected a skirmish, but Jesus surrendered. The sacerdotal lynch mob expected to take him by surprise, and by force; they found Him waiting and submissive.

Nor did He run, or attack the men who came to take Him

A R R E S T E D

By Seth Skogerboe



into custody. In fact, Jesus only raised His voice once, and that was to rebuke Peter's impulsive attempt to defend Him with violence. In summary of the extent of this absolute paradigm upheaval, consider what are maybe my favorite verses from any of the Gospel accounts of the arrest: "Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am'" (John 18:4-5a).

"Knowing all that would happen to him, [he] came forward ..." Every courageous act or sacrifice for love ever made paled in comparison—or burned hotter and brighter in likeness—to those few steps. "Whom do you seek?" God, enfleshed, asked His puny creations as they confronted Him with the sticks and stones He'd spoken into

existence millennia before. "Jesus," they said, eyes dark and hearts hard to their unwitting confession of desperate need: literally, "God to deliver, God to rescue; God is salvation." So He told them His name. "I am." What prodigal, inexplicable grace it is that those words prostrated the hearers instead of vaporizing them where they stood.

Please, don't stand up again. If you can begin to grasp, to be leveled by, the import of that claim, don't stand like those men did (in what may be the single most idiotic display of arrogance in recorded history) to arrest the One whose name alone had knocked them to the ground. Keep your face to the earth, and let your pride be buried in it. Stay at His feet, and off of your own, and raise up your hands in worship. The kingdom Jesus established on a hill the following day, and that

is coming again in power, is as far beyond our comprehension as that love somehow bound in the meager frame that "came forward" that evening in the garden.

Skogerboe, a member of St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill., is a short-term missionary assistant serving in Cuenca, Ecuador. "Arrestatie van Christus" ("The Arrest of Christ"), Jan Luyken, 1703.

B E A T E N

By Pastor Jan Horne



"They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again" (Matthew 27:28-30).

If we had only known." It may be too kind to put words like those into the mouths of the soldiers that day while they were enjoying a cat-and-mouse game with Jesus. Knowing something is one thing, believing it is quite another. The soldiers were extremely cruel as they beat and mocked Jesus, applying many of the tricks which they no doubt had used with other unfortunate prisoners in the past. Anything to have a good laugh! They were bullies run amuck.

There are different ideas about how to take care of the problem of bullies. Some choose to ignore the behavior as just kids' stuff, believing they'll outgrow it. But others deal with bullies head on. Our granddaughters attend schools which actively identify and confront bullying and strive to create the type of environment which teaches kindness and consideration.

The soldiers of the Roman Palace Guard show us that part of their job description was to make life as miserable as possible for those who were about to be executed. In much of today's world, you have to prove yourself—that you can handle the job or that you can be as tough as you need to be to reach your goal—with the understanding that you should show sympathy, or even humanity, to the less fortunate. But on the day of Jesus' arrest, there was a crowd standing around the Praetorium which seemed to appreciate the kind of entertainment that only bullies can offer. Jesus subjected Himself to the cruelty and humiliation and "said not a word."

What about these soldiers? Shall we give them the benefit of the doubt? Shall we assume that if they had only known who Jesus was, they would have acted more humanely, more sympathetically? Only God knows. They did not know that Jesus was truly the Son of God, that He was the One who came among us to provide salvation to all who believed in Him. They had no idea, and most likely they had no real interest in learning about Him, either. Perhaps they were afraid of the repercussions if they didn't do as they were commanded, so they just did their job.

What seems strange to us is that in Jesus' case, the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate had simply washed his hands of the whole affair. Jesus was one of his subjects. It should have been his responsibility to at least provide Jesus with a fair trial. But the people had spoken; was Pilate afraid to stand up to them?

Many of those in the crowd no doubt had seen Jesus extend His loving hands to heal those who had special needs, those who might not have survived without His compassionate touch. Therefore we find it hard to believe that no one in the crowd stood up to speak on behalf of our Lord. Instead, they let Jesus be whipped and poked with a horrible extension of evil. The mob mentality can be a powerful force both for good and evil. These were the same people who would stand at the roadside watching Jesus struggle with the terrible weight of the cross on the way to Golgotha. They would watch and not even lift a finger to help ease Jesus' inhuman suffering.

We long for justice. We declare that we trust in God and depend on Him to provide us with a sense of justification. The motto, "In God We Trust," is found on our currency, some state flags, license plates, and even over the tribune in the U.S. House of Representatives. Our population comes from many different backgrounds and religious convictions; it's amazing that we get along as well as we do. But in recent months we have been tested severely. In Iowa, for instance, our national debate on immigration has been made more personal to us in the case on a young woman who, while out jogging one evening, was allegedly abducted and killed by a young man illegally residing in the state. All public evidence points to the guilt of the young illegal immigrant. We do believe in the presumption of innocence. However, many are getting impatient for the wheels of justice to turn.

In the case of our Lord, His innocence was never assumed. "He said not a word" in His own defense. The soldiers and the crowd did not understand what was taking place right before their eyes.

Today we understand what our Lord was providing for us through His suffering and death. We give thanks to our loving God for the plan He has for our salvation. He never gives up on us. His love for us is infallible.

Horne, Robbins, Iowa, currently serves as a supply pastor for area congregations. "Gevangenneming en wegvoering van Christus" ("Imprisonment and Conduct of Christ"), Willem Outgertsz Akersloot, 1624.

“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.”
(Matthew 27:50).

We read the account of Jesus’ crucifixion and death in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew proclaims throughout his Gospel that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. We see clearly in the Gospel how Jesus’ life and death are the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Matthew, a former tax collector, was an ambassador for Christ to the Jews, and to us. How marvelous that we serve a sovereign God who is in control. All of Scripture was pointing to this moment in time. The Messiah who was foretold long before had come. He lived and breathed and proclaimed truth. Our Messiah was born humbly to a virgin in a stable. He grew up a carpenter’s son in the unpopular city of Nazareth. He was betrayed and abandoned by His followers, arrested though He had committed no sin, and beaten and mocked though He was God.

After having been betrayed and beaten, Jesus made his way toward Golgotha. The King of kings, bloody and wounded, walked the grueling path toward His death. Those battered and pierced feet had once walked on water. Those arms, drenched in His own blood, once held little children close to His heart. The same person who now stumbled to the cross had made lame men walk. Our Christ, who once proclaimed truths loudly to thousands, in strength and humility fulfilled His promise. His promise to redeem. His promise to restore. His promise to save.

In an excruciating death that was reserved for the vilest of criminals, our Christ suffered in order to save even the vilest of men. In this agonizing death we have a hope which we may look to for assurance and peace. Christ’s death is the ultimate fulfillment of what is necessary for our relationship with God to be restored. There had to be a perfect sacrifice. As a lamb led to the slaughter, Christ silently submitted to God’s will. Refusing the aid of gall to numb the pain (27:34), Jesus fully experienced the weight of all the sin of mankind. Because of His death, we can look back and rejoice.

We weep that our Lord endured such an unthinkable death on our behalf. Our perfect and holy Lord was crucified. He endured the hate and contempt of the Jewish leaders as they haughtily threw their insults at Him. Even the two robbers who hung beside Jesus “reviled him in the same way” (27:44). Forsaken by man and by His Father,

Jesus yielded up His spirit. He drew a last breath and He died.

Like the darkness that spread over the land of Egypt long before, darkness spread over the land that day. The Hebrews killed a lamb so that the Lord would pass over their house and save them from death. Jesus, the ultimate Passover Lamb, was killed for the salvation of all mankind. “He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5). Yes, we weep. We weep and we mourn. Yet, too, we rejoice!

The centurion who witnessed all that had taken place that day proclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (27:54). We also proclaim this truth. We rejoice in the marvelous love that was displayed on that day. We rejoice in the love our Jesus has for us, which compelled Him to endure such agony. In His death, He displayed an unimaginable love for all mankind. A love for the revilers and mockers. A love for you and me. Praise Jesus!

When Jesus died, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split” (27:51). This was not the death of an ordinary man. This was the death of our Messiah. Our Redeemer. Our God. In His death, “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

In this season of Lent, remember the remarkable love of Jesus displayed through His crucifixion and death. Dwell on all that He endured for our sake. Rejoice and rest in the fulfillment of His promise to redeem us.

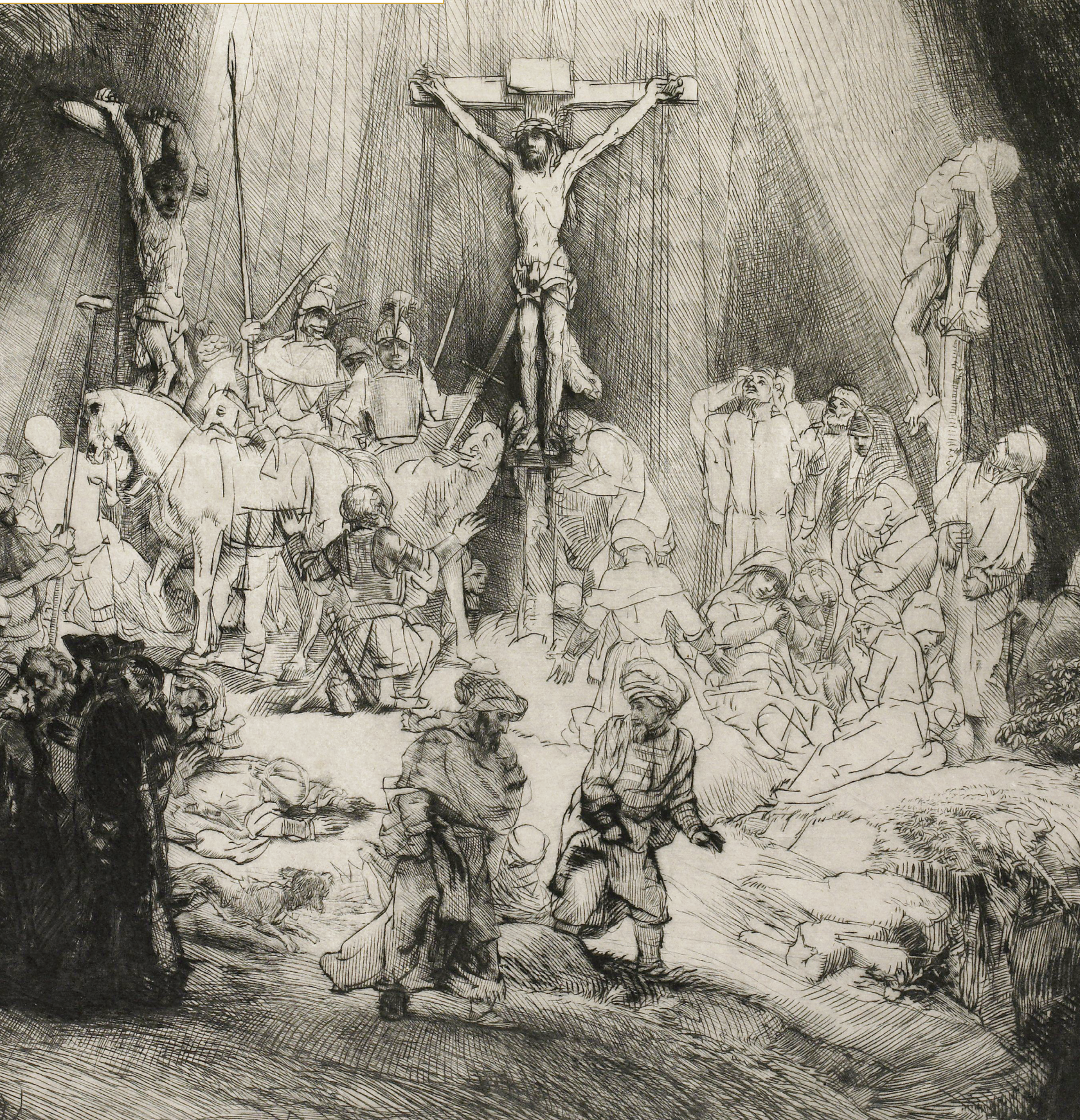
“My faith has found a resting place, not in device nor creed. I trust the Ever-living One. His wounds for me shall plead. I need no other argument, I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me” (*My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*, Eliza E. Hewitt).

Kneeland, a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., is a dorm assistant at AFLBS. “The Three Crosses,” Rembrandt van Rijn, 1653.



C R U C I F I E D

By Alisha Kneeland





R A I S E D

By Rollin Varness

A few years back my wife and I went to see a play titled “Fish Eyes” by Ted Swartz and Lee Eshleman. It spanned three years of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection as seen through the eyes of His disciples, Peter and Andrew. We often elevate Jesus’ followers to a level that would be unattainable by anyone today. The play was admittedly a loose translation, but it poignantly demonstrated that despite the first-hand knowledge of the teachings and miracles of Jesus, the disciples were ordinary, largely uneducated men who were often clueless and full of doubt. Lord, help me take comfort that God uses ordinary men and women.

As we rejoice and celebrate the resurrection in the

24th chapter of Luke’s Gospel, we can hardly help but notice the status of the disciples. While they hid, fearful of their lives and despondent over the loss of Jesus, the promised one, it was the women who braved the trip to the tomb to bring spices for Jesus’ body. Met by two men whose clothes gleamed like lightning, they were told that Jesus had risen from the dead. And they reminded the women of His words, “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again” (vs. 7). They remembered. There is power in God’s Word. Lord, help me to know and rely on your Word.

The disciples? Still clueless, they didn’t believe the



to Emmaus. Jesus asked what they were talking about. After what must have been a lengthy discourse, Jesus declared them foolish for not knowing and believing the Scriptures which He then shared with them. There is power in God's Word. Their eyes were still not opened to the truth until they broke bread together. Divine revelation was needed. Lord, remind me of your words and help me to expect divine revelation from You.

As these men were sharing with the disciples all they had experienced—imagine their excitement—Jesus appeared to them. The disciples were still unsure, even after witnessing His hands and feet, and watching Him eat a meal of fish. I love to imagine the tone of voice Jesus used when He said, “This is what I told you while

So now we are ready for the super heroes we think of in the Book of Acts. They needed one more thing, the power of the Holy Spirit given them at Pentecost. Here now are the bold witnesses of Christ's saving power through His shedding of redemptive blood and resurrection from the grave. Here now were bold and fearless men driven to do miracles and share the good news even under fear of death. They were still ordinary men, but they now understood and claimed the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Lord, help to me die to self and claim the power of the Your Word and Spirit.

There was no stopping the disciples. After all they had experienced during His ministry, and after being given knowledge of the Word with the Spirit at work in them, they were ready for

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead ...’”
(Matthew 28:6-7).



women. Verse 8 says the women's words made no sense to them. It was Peter who decided to check out their story. But upon finding the empty tomb and linens lying by themselves he “wondered what happened.” Lord, help me to always seek after you.

Jesus then appeared to Cleopas and his companion as they discussed the events of the past three days on the way

I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (vs. 44).

They were excited and amazed but it still took the Lord to open their eyes so they could understand the Scripture. There is power in God's Word. The disciples finally got it! Now everything made sense. They had a lot to process. What was next? Jesus told them to stay put and wait to be “clothed with power from on high” (vs. 49). Lord, Your patience is evidence of your great love for me. Help me to wait on You for Your perfect wisdom and timing.

anything. Am I that willing and obedient servant of Christ? We are promised the Holy Spirit alive within us as we confess our sin and trust in Jesus' blood for forgiveness. What is to stop us from being super heroes for Jesus? Lord, help me to not limit the power of the Holy Spirit, but to boldly live your Word out in my life to Your glory and honor.

Varness, Morris, Ill., is a member of Fox River Lutheran, Sheridan, Ill. “Christ Appearing to the Apostles,” Rembrandt van Rijn, 1656

The call to serve one another

Work team installs new roof at Triumph Lutheran Church

Sub-zero temperatures are a great reason to escape the Midwest and head to sunny Arizona. An even better reason is the opportunity to serve a fellow AFLC congregation in need of a new roof.

A group of six men from St. John's Lutheran of Schwer, Milford, Ill., traveled the 1,700 miles south to Nogales, Ariz., Jan. 21-28 to serve the members of Triumph Lutheran, whose church building was in desperate need of a new roof.

When Journey Missions department head Jon Nelson was first in contact with missionary Darwin Jackson, on loan to World Mission Prayer League, the original plan was a short-term trip to serve the congregations across the border in Nogales, Mexico. But as plans progressed, the need at Triumph Lutheran became the priority.

At the same time, a work group from St. John's Lutheran of Schwer volunteered to serve wherever there was a need. Then, funding for the roof supplies was met, as well as a team of hosts who were willing to house and feed the group for a week. When the team organizer from Milford had to bow out at the last minute due to health issues, another team member filled his spot. It was arrangements like these that made it obvious that God was in the midst of providing for each detail.

"It was a dream come true to see an intergenerational group from one congregation desire to serve another congregation," said Nelson.

The week-long project was completed in four days. Each morning, the team met for breakfast and devotions at one of the homes adjacent to the church. Then they headed up the hill to work. Congregation members served the team lunch and dinner each day. And each evening the team heard from various people involved in the history of the congregation, including Pastor Ted Kennedy, who has served the church since his ordination in 1979, and Darwin Jackson, who shared his personal testimony and how God called him to mission work.

When the work was completed, the congregation and the team joined together to dedicate the new roof to God's work, asking Him for a fruitful ministry marked by service and love for their community.

—Ruth Gunderson



TOP: The group worked to cut around the church's cross, which can be seen from the highway. ABOVE: (From left) Ruth Gunderson; Heidi, Jon and Jeremiah Nelson; David and Miriam Ramse; Pastor Ted and Karla Kennedy; team members Paul VanHoveln, Matthew Schaumberg, Bob Buhr, Andrew Mussard, Quentin Schaumberg, and Austin Kregel; and missionary Darwin Jackson.



TOP: It was a team effort to prep and install the new steel roof at Triumph Lutheran.

MIDDLE: Andrew Mussard and Austin Kregel remove a swamp cooler from the roof.

ABOVE: The team and congregation dedicate the new roof following the Sunday service.

LEFT: The team works on the roof above the sanctuary.



ARC hosts Side x Side, Sno-Daze youth camps

The ARC hosted more than 180 youth and 100 adult counselors during Sno-Daze and Side X Side youth camps in February. Both camps supported the ARC theme of “God of Wonders,” taken from Psalm 40:5.

Students enjoyed afternoon activities of snow tube sledding, broomball games, indoor lawn games, basketball, crafting, board and card games, and fellowship with hot cocoa and shopping in the canteen.

My wife and I remember bringing our youth group on a youth outing to Side X Side and Sno-Daze. This retreat brought fresh memories of the lives that were touched for Jesus. It was amazing to see one of our former youth group girls now attending as our camp nurse. Along with her husband, they have a phenomenal relationship with Jesus and are ministering to the youth in our AFLC.

As I have been plowing snow in recent days, I have reflected on these amazing youth camps and the difference they make in the future of the youth who attend them. I challenge you to be the light to the youth in your community. Our churches, communities, and schools are looking for adults to support, stand up for, listen to, understand and point youth to Jesus. These youths will grow up to be leaders in our communities and churches and will shape and grow our AFLC.

Thank you to the youth ministry team and Pastor Jason Holt, who effectively planned and executed the camps and supported the spread of the gospel. I also want to thank Val and the ARC staff for their countless hours of service for every camp that enters through our doors.

—Kirk Rautio, ARC executive director

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

REJOICE IN HOPE

0

n May 14, 2018, Ruth Horn went home to be with Jesus. She was 102 years old. We believe the words of David when he writes, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Ruth started attending Stillwater Lutheran Church in rural Kalispell, Mont., when she and John Horn were married in 1941. Through the years Ruth taught Sunday school and provided rides for countless neighbor kids. She organized vacation Bible schools of up to 120 students. When the church was struggling to remain open and was without a pastor, Ruth held confirmation classes in her home. She was a faithful member and officer of Stillwater's WMF and an early member of the church choir. She loved to study God's Word and rarely missed Bible study at our church. In later years she hosted a weekly women's Bible study in her home and in her assisted living apartment in Kalispell.



Ruth Horn

Ruth was always interested in the work of the AFLC, and many of you remember John and Ruth from their regular attendance at AFLC Annual Conferences.

One of Ruth's passions was supporting Kalispell's Hope Pregnancy Center. She believed that babies, even the unborn, are so precious. Hope Pregnancy Center is "dedicated to providing life-affirming reproductive health care services and referrals; alternatives to abortion and new parent education in a caring and respectful environment."

Over the years Ruth made hundreds of baby quilts for Hope Pregnancy Center. Those beautiful hands were always busy, even in the later years when her feet were tired and worn.

Thank you to all the faithful quilters out there. Many of you have sent quilts to the Alaska Mission and the Miriam Home in Brazil. Many quilts have been made for the AFLC Bible school, for the Association Retreat Center, and the mission house in Wisconsin.

Thank you, ladies. Whether you are sewing up a storm or storming the gates of hell with your prayers, you are creating a story much like Ruth's. Our hope and prayer are that when you leave this earth you, too, will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Submitted by members of the Women's Missionary Federation at Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.



i

2019 WMF Convention

June 11 • Spruce Lake Retreat Center • Canadensis, Pa.

The WMF will host the 2019 WMF convention on June 11 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center in Canadensis, Pa. The theme for the day will be "Faithful to All Generations!" from Psalm 145:4.

Please use the online form for the AFLC Annual Conference to register* for the WMF Convention. The registration cost is \$20. The form can be found at aflc.org/conferences. Registrations can also be made by calling the AFLC at 763-545-5631.

Registrations for housing and meals must be made directly with Spruce Lake Retreat Center. Call 800-822-7505 to reserve a room and register for meals.

**Registration is required for all attending the convention.*



The days come and go here in Uganda the same as anywhere in the world. The sun goes up, and the sun goes down. The length of daylight doesn't fluctuate much here, though, and the only change of seasons is from rain every other day to the dry season, which can last for months on end.

One typical day for us started with a simple run into town on some errands. When we arrived back at our home, we had a knock at the gate. It was my friend, who brought us a live chicken. That wasn't the unusual part, though, because he also brought his son, who was in rough shape. As I drove him to the clinic to get his boy medicine, the importance of living in the reality of the resurrection and the promises that are given to us through baptism became very real to me.

Paul writes in Romans 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." God has already promised us newness of life because Easter truly happened. He has already promised us eternal life. Why is it, then, that we live life as if our

THE RESURRECTED LIFE

BY PASTOR BRENT RAAN

time is so valuable that we cannot give up a minute to be used by Him?

I am happy that the Lord brought this to mind so early in the day because as it progressed, there were more people in need who reached out for help. We were able to show God's love to people who simply needed to know that someone loved them and were there for them. Then there were new faces to show the love of Christ to through hospitality and kindness.

I believe this is exactly the kind of work God calls us to when He asks us to love our neighbor, when He calls us to give out a cup of cold water, or when He even asks us to love our enemy. So often I get caught up in my own schedule and I miss opportunities to love those around me. I pray that through this season we may ask God to



Isaiah Raan is baptised by his father, Brent.

open our eyes and give us the ability to live our lives with the promise of our life in heaven. This may cause our plans to be disrupted and a change in our priorities. But I think it will grant us greater joy and freedom in life, as well.

Maybe, as you are reading this, you are struggling to hold your plans out to God with

open hands. Maybe it is hard for you to grasp the significance of the resurrection. May all of us remember that Easter happened to bring us life. And may we proclaim that life, rest, and freedom to those who are caught in darkness.

Raan and his wife, Emily, and three children are a AFLC missionaries serving in Jinja, Uganda.

Osier accepts call as AFLBS dean

Pastor Adam Osier has accepted a call to serve as dean of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (AFLBS), a role he will begin on July 1.

As dean of AFLBS, Osier will be responsible for setting the direction of the school's program, coordinating and supervising staff on student support and ministry teams, and fostering the academic and spiritual development of the Bible school. He will also teach approximately half-time at AFLBS.



Adam Osier

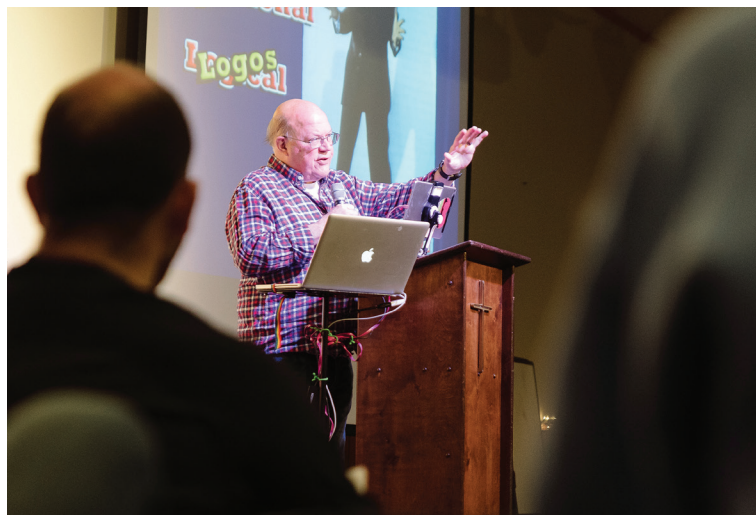
Pastor Osier is a graduate of both AFLBS ('05) and the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary (AFLTS, '12).

"It was at AFLBS that God opened my eyes to the beauty of a Christ-alone gospel," said Osier, who is from Valley City, N.D. "During my three years [at AFLTS] I was again blessed by the Bible-rich, gospel-centric teaching of the faculty. Those years were deeply formative in preparing me to preach the gospel in the congregations to which I've been called."

In addition to his time as a student in both of the schools, Osier served on the staff as both a dorm assistant and a resident head, and also served as athletic director from 2008 to 2011.

Osier currently serves as assistant pastor at Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pa., a call he took in 2014. Previously he served congregations in Wadena, Minn., and Bluegrass, Minn. He is married to Courtney (Jacobi, of rural Wheatland, Iowa), also an AFLBS graduate and former employee of the schools. Together they have two children, Jacobi (8) and Kaia (6).

"Pastor Osier loves AFLBS and the past, current, and future students of our AFLC Bible college," President Wade Mobley said. "He is a capable teacher with a solid family. The Osiers have exposure to and experience with most every aspect of campus life, including academics, athletics, and residential life. He is a valuable addition to a strong team of leaders teaching, discipling, and loving students."



Youth Ministries hosts Youth Worker Weekend

Duffy Robbins, a youth ministry professor and speaker from the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, led training on "Engaging Culture" for AFLC youth workers Jan. 18-20 at the Association Retreat Center.



Hoff brings mission focus

Pastor Nathan Hoff, of San Pedro, Calif., was the featured speaker at the AFLC Schools annual missions conference Jan. 21-22. The conference theme was "Missions: the Heart of the Trinity."

Seminary gives internship assignments

Seminary internship assignments have been announced for nine senior seminarians from the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. The year-long internships will begin in June.

- **David Handsaker** is assigned to Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore., under the supervision of Pastor Richard Gunderson.
- **Kevin Hall** is assigned to Prince of Peace Lutheran in Beulah, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Kent Sperry.
- **Micah Klemme** is assigned to Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Nick Dyrud.
- **Andrew Kneeland** is assigned to St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif., under the supervision of Pastor Scott

Stroud.

- **Brian Lunn** is assigned to Living Word Free Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., under the supervision of Dr. Nathan Olson.
- **Bryce McMinn** is assigned to Spruce Free Lutheran and Rose Free Lutheran, Roseau, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Todd Erickson.
- **Seth Moan** is assigned to Christ the King Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Tim Johnson.
- **Erin Tormanen** is assigned to Our Savior's Free Lutheran and First English Lutheran of Lostwood, Stanley, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Rodney Johnson.
- **Brian Westerbur** is assigned to Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., under the supervision of Pastor Steve Carlson.



FLY

FREE
LUTHERAN
YOUTH

I

have attended multiple FLY Conventions and heard many different people

respond to their time at FLY over the years. Something that I never get tired of hearing is how God has used FLY in the lives of many teens across the country. This event consistently impacts churches, youth groups, and individual souls every year it is held. Hearing the responses of teens can be not only a reminder of FLY's impact as an event, but more importantly how God is choosing to bless those who attend it.

In Matthew 18:20 Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

At FLY we get to see the Holy Spirit work in many students' hearts. The opportunity for these students to gather together and grow in the name of Jesus Christ is something that they do not take for granted. We heard back from students from Christ Is Lord Lutheran, La Crosse, Wis. Here are a few of their thoughts.

"FLY has brought me out of my comfort zone to meet new people, and it also has shown me that I am not alone in my faith and there are millions around the world who believe what I believe," said Madison Trussoni.

Being surrounded by so much noise and feedback from the world can be extremely exhausting and confusing

MAKING AN IMPACT

BY CALEB HOLT

for students. FLY exists to be a tool for our congregations. As such, it gives students an experience founded in God's Word, involving His people, which is unique.

"FLY is a great experience to go with thousands of other believers and worship God. It's life changing," said Anders Unverzagt.

Another beautiful aspect about FLY is that some students meet Jesus there for the first time, while others are encouraged in their faith walk during the week. That is something for which we are extremely grateful.

"Every year I go, there is always something new that comes into the light, even if it's from a topic I have heard many times before. I feel like it's one of my favorite moments to reflect and apply the teachings to my life," said Aidan Meinertz.

Zofeyah Unverzagt wrote, "Before I went to FLY for the first time I was a believer, but God really grabbed a hold of my heart there and told me I was His child. I will never forget the memories I've made, or the way God has stretched me there."

A word that continues to surface from those who attend FLY is "impact." As we look at all of the distractions in our world today and many directions that these students are being told to go, we praise God for the chance these students have to be impacted positively for God's kingdom.

"FLY has made such an impact on my life! It has taught me who God really is, and it has helped me so much with my walk with the Lord," wrote Rachel Swanson.

Please pray for our congregations as they continue to prepare to send their youth to FLY, for the FLY Committee as its members continue to plan, for every staff member and volunteer as they use the gifts God has given them, and most importantly please be praying for many students to come and hear about our Savior Jesus Christ. Pray that the Word of God would transform them during their time at the 2019 FLY Convention.

Holt, a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn., is the devotional secretary for the 2019 FLY Committee.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Members of **Calvary Free Lutheran**, Mesa, Ariz., recently voted to call interim pastor Dan Giles for another year as they continue to search for a permanent pastor.

A total of \$3,076,432 has been given or pledged to be given toward the future **Student Life Center** at the AFLC Schools' campus in Plymouth, Minn. The center, which is estimated to cost \$8 million, will house a gym, classrooms and offices. Members of the AFLC Schools Corporation authorized the bidding process to move forward once 50 percent of funds have been raised in cash and an additional 20 percent has been raised in pledges. Architectural, civil engineering, and structural plans are nearing completion.

Pastor Andrew and Alexis Olson, AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators, are nearing the end of a two-year training and deputation period as they plan to begin work in Bible translation on Ukerewe Island in Tanzania. The Olsons, who hope to begin work in Tanzania in April, are still raising monthly support and are in need of funds for household items. Visit theyneedthebible.org for more information.



Reiner Lutheran Free Church, rural Goodridge, Minn., received new members on Jan. 27. Pictured (from left) are Rodney and Patti Carlson, Robbie and Sadie Miller, Ryan, Kacey, and Maggie Stromlund, and Pastor Alex Amiot.



Gertrude Franzen

Gertrude Franzen, 97, of Hastings, Neb., died Feb. 1 at her home. Born Aug. 11, 1921, in Minneapolis, she was the daughter of Conrad and Ruth Ellen (Bracken) Larson. She married Howard Franzen Dec. 26, 1941. He preceded her in death.

She graduated from South High School, Minneapolis, in 1939 and attended Augsburg College in Minneapolis, where she met Howard Franzen. When both her parents died at a young age, she assumed guardianship of her younger brother and sisters, and after her marriage to Howard, they became a new family. Following Howard's ordination in 1947, he entered the ministry and then became military chaplain. In 1958, the family moved to Hastings, Neb., where he served AFLC congregations in Fairbury and Deshler, Neb. She worked as the accessions registrar at the Hastings Museum.

Surviving are her children, Gail Franzen, Hastings, Neb., Eric (Naomi) Franzen, Weston, Mo., Mark Franzen, Hastings, Anne (Stu) Wheeler, Hastings, and Mary (John) Costello, Omaha, Neb.; ten grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; and one sister, Doris Walen.

The service was February 13 at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Hastings, with Pastor Steven Peeler officiating.

District hosts Midwinter Bible Conference

During the first weekend of February the Northwestern Minnesota district AFLC congregations gather for a Midwinter Bible Conference. One pastor organizes the event, another congregation hosts, and a speaker from outside of the district is invited to lead three sessions. This February Pastor Steve Berntson from New Hope Free Lutheran of Jamestown, N.D., was the featured speaker. Berntson led conference attendees through part of the fourth chapter of John on Friday evening and finished the chapter during two sessions Saturday morning. Westaker Free Lutheran in Newfolden, Minn., hosted the event and provided refreshments throughout the event as well as Saturday's lunch.

District Bible conferences were once common throughout the AFLC, but are now a rare breed. Scarcity has a way of revealing value, and this kind of district gathering is certainly a gem. It is a precious time under God's Word as believers from fellow AFLC congregations gather for teaching and fellowship.

—Pastor Alex Amiot, Thief River Falls, Minn.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 31, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$62,249	\$62,249	\$49,379
Evangelism	20,169	20,169	12,162
Youth Ministries	17,422	17,422	20,482
Parish Education	25,185	25,185	20,920
Seminary	36,632	36,632	41,232
Bible School	63,389	63,389	58,968
Home Missions	49,789	49,789	53,208
World Missions	100,473	100,473	53,588
Personal Support	51,062	51,062	67,309
TOTALS	\$426,369	\$426,369	\$377,248

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

JANUARY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Ruth Claus

AFLTS

Pastor Einar Unseth

Vision

Pastor David
Keippela

World Missions

Jeanette Larson

Dallas Grieger

Bernard Breidenbach

THE MAN WHO MISSED EASTER

One of the disciples missed Easter ... and found it one week later. His name is Thomas, called Didymus, the twin.

Mary was the first to whom Jesus appeared on the first Easter. Then He appeared and stood in the midst of the others. He showed them His hands and His side, the marks of His suffering on the cross, and they rejoiced. But Thomas was not with them (John 20:24).

The other disciples reported to him what they had heard and seen: "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas replied bluntly, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (20:25).

Thomas wasn't afraid to ask questions. He was the one who said to Jesus that the disciples didn't know where He was going and didn't know the way to follow Him (14:5). This is not necessarily a negative comment, is it? Teachers appreciate students who let them know when there is something they don't understand. There are those, however, who almost seem to become permanent questioners, and their questions are more like challenges than actual inquiries for answers. I have known people like this, and perhaps you have, too.

It was a week after Jesus' first appearance when He appeared again to the disciples. "Peace be with you," Jesus said, the same words He had spoken a week earlier, but now Thomas was there—his first Easter experience. I wonder if this second appearance was especially for him.

The harsh words of Thomas were like an open book to Jesus, for He is the great heart-knower. There were no accusing words spoken by the Savior in response; rather, He simply provided the proof that

Thomas demanded, and all of his walls of doubt and denial were demolished. God's Word does that. "My Lord and my God!" he exclaimed in surrender and faith.

A prominent Bible teacher told of meetings that he conducted on a major university campus sponsored by a campus fellowship group. The attendance was strong, and one young man attended night after night. Following the meetings, he brought one question after another to the speaker. The questions were laid to rest as clear answers were provided, but another question came to mind each day. The message of the crucified and risen Christ was proclaimed. On the last night, to the surprise of the speaker, the young man knelt and prayed to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

"Were all your questions finally answered?" he was asked.

"Oh, no," he replied, "I still have lots of questions, but I came to Jesus because I discovered that I needed Him."

The spirit of Thomas is alive and well in our world today. Prove it! Show me! We should be grateful for those who take the time to listen to our Thomases and to try to answer their questions. These defenders of the faith, or apologists, are used by the Spirit of God to remove intellectual obstacles and show that the barriers to belief are not insurmountable. This is sometimes called pre-evangelism, and is part of "making a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15), and a few have a unique giftedness for this ministry.

We cannot respond to our Thomases with nail-pierced hands and spear-wounded

sides. Thus, we can be glad that Jesus had a last word for Thomas and for us today, too: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (v. 29). John concludes his Gospel account by writing that there are many things not included in it ... "but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (v. 31).

Many years ago, I read a tract that summarized the doubts of many with the words, "seeing is believing." The message we are privileged to proclaim is the opposite: "believing is seeing." And so it is for those

The harsh words of Thomas were like an open book to Jesus, for He is the great heart-knower.

of us who believe what Thomas believed without seeing what he saw. Multitudes across the centuries have heard the message of the gospel and have come face to face with the crucified and risen Christ.

This may happen in your heart and life, too, dear reader, even if you have missed Easter year after year. He is waiting to meet you by His Spirit through the Word, so that you might also respond in faith, "My Lord and my God!"



Pastor Robert Lee

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

TO SEE WITH HIS EYES

BY SARAH NELSON

Seeing beyond the adjectives. It is a hard thing to do sometimes. Especially for those of us who appreciate descriptions, labels, and pictures. Adjectives can be helpful. Sometimes they can, without trying, do harm. Instead of painting a more vivid image, adjectives can muddy up the beauty that we are meant to see.

The Lord has been teaching me just how much I have relied on descriptive words rather than concrete ones. Some of those words are mine, and some are from others.

A family member is currently undergoing some intensive help for issues he faces due to brain trauma. If you saw his name on a clinician's sheet, you would see a list of acronyms for health diagnoses. The list is long and can appear to be overwhelming. Especially if you are the caregiver.

As my loved one is receiving help, I

have had the rare experience of being able to spend extended time alone. Time to read. Time to pray. Time to rest. Time to think. During these hours, I have been convicted that when I describe my loved one to others, I often add his list of diagnoses and adjectives to prepare people for what to expect. Sometimes it is necessary to do so, so that people who are in his life will better understand some of the challenges he faces.

Sometimes, though, I add the adjectives and labels to his name so that people will not think I am a lax parent who has never taught her child right from wrong. Proudful—that is often my adjective. I pray that as I learn to see my child for who he is, not in spite of his diagnoses, that my adjective would go from proudful to accepting. From accepting to loving. From loving to delighting in the child whom the Lord has chosen to place in my life, family, and community.

Recently my husband and I taught a group a Bible lesson on David being chosen

to be the new king of Israel. He was not the likely candidate. David was young in years, a shepherd of sheep. Yet, we read that when Eliab was considered, the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (I Samuel 16:7b).

May the Lord give me eyes to look at not just my child's heart, but other peoples' hearts, too. I don't want to be limited by man-made adjectives and classifications. I want the Lord's eyes of love, hope, and healing. May He give each of us eyes to see people how He sees them, precious souls for whom He came and gave His life.

Nelson is a member of Badger Creek/Oiland Lutheran parish, Badger, Minn.