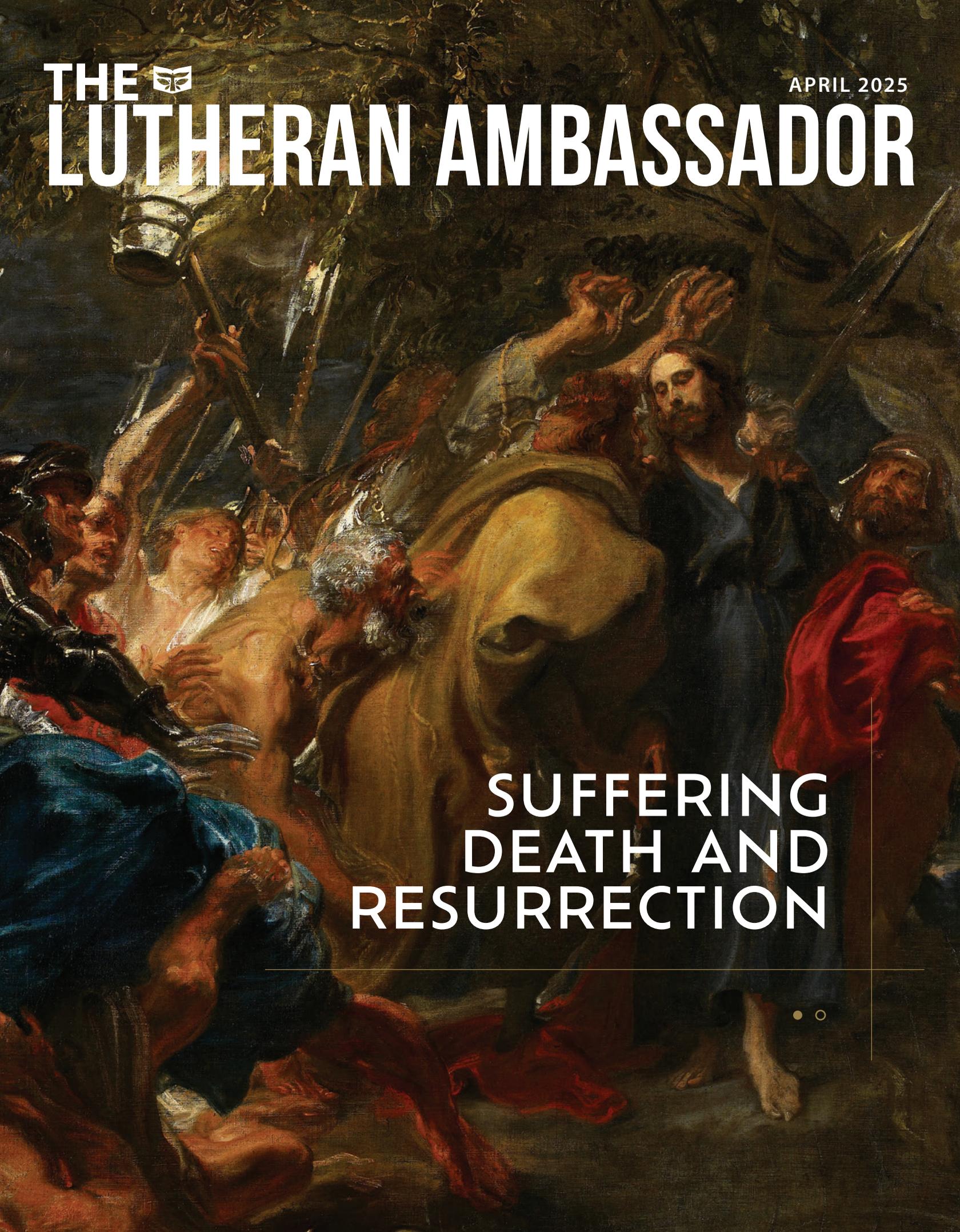


THE 

APRIL 2025

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



SUFFERING DEATH AND RESURRECTION





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Lent's minor keys.

I've found that my disposition is sometimes loosely tied to the church year. Surely, I'm not alone. With so much focus this Lenten season on our sinfulness and our overwhelming need for a Savior, these weeks in March and April can be melancholic. How many Lenten hymns are in a minor key?

But come Resurrection Sunday, I will find a spring in my step and probably be whistling "Up From the Grave He Arose" or anything to the right of hymn #96 in our *Ambassador Hymnal*.

It's appropriate for our reflection and imagination to be shaped by the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. This Lenten season, lean into the minor keys. It is appropriate to grieve our fallen condition and sinful world. Mourn what we've lost; weep for what has not yet been made right.

But know that Resurrection Sunday is coming. Clement of Alexandria said, "The Lord has turned all our sunsets into sunrises." The cross and empty tomb are much more than superficial symbols. Christ's death and resurrection reconciled us to God and gave us enduring hope.

We have structured this issue around the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Three articles are about Jesus, and three articles are applications for our Christian life. We believe these themes are worth exploring and pray they will be an encouragement to you.

Pastor Scott Olson begins this issue by wondering why Jesus did not die an ordinary death. He helps us see the crucifixion in its appropriate place by asking the question, "Why did Jesus have to suffer?" Similarly, Michele Mobley asks the question, "Why do Christians suffer?"

Pastor Nathan Olson writes an article on one of the most confusing lines in the Apostle's Creed: "He descended into hell." Many of us confess this truth every week, but have we stopped to think about its meaning? Reflecting on the loss of her father several years ago, FLBC student Esther Rabenberg writes about the experience of grieving as a Christian. "In Jesus," she writes, "we have life in death."

Pastor Tom Schierkolk then turns our attention to the resurrection of Jesus. He suffered, died, and was buried but rose again from the grave with a glorified body that will never die again! FLBC student Zach Davis applies this promise to our lives: I Corinthians 15 speaks of the resurrection of the dead and our promised resurrection bodies. Though our bodies will wear out and break down, on the last day they will become imperishable and will be raised with Christ in glory and power.

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus are historical realities that give us confidence and hope. In these weeks leading up to Resurrection Sunday, rest in Christ's demonstration of perfect, sacrificial love and his once-and-forever conquering of sin, death, and Satan on your behalf.

And don't miss the ministry update pages near the back of this issue. Use these pages as prayer guides. Learn about what several of our AFLC ministries have been up to recently and where they need prayer and financial support.

Pastor Paul Kinney tackles the next Beatitude from Matthew 5, writing about "Those who mourn" in our *In the Word* column. And Renah Thompson offers us *Something to Share* on the back cover.

As always, please let me know if you have any suggestions, feedback, or questions about the *Lutheran Ambassador*. I can be reached by email: LAeditor@afcl.org.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



The cross shows the seriousness of our sin—but it also shows us the immeasurable love of God. [Billy Graham]

“

To know Christ and to believe him is no achievement of man, but the gift of God.

[Martin Luther]

Optimism is a wish without warrant; Christian hope is a certainty, guaranteed by God himself. Optimism reflects ignorance as to whether good things will ever actually come. Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life, and every moment beyond it, the believer can say with truth, on the basis of God's own commitment, that the best is yet to come.

[J.I. Packer]

Christ went more willingly to the cross than we do to the throne of grace. [Thomas Watson]

A dead Christ I must do everything for; a living Christ does everything for me. [Andrew Murray]

BY PASTOR SCOTT OLSON



As a lifelong fan of Minnesota sports teams, I feel like I have endured my fair share of suffering. Year after year I have watched my favorite team clutch defeat from the jaws of victory in some new, historic, heartbreaking manner. But as far as suffering goes, watching your favorite teams lose in a humiliating fashion is about as inconsequential as it comes.

But the examples of suffering that Scripture shows us are never inconsequential. The Israelites suffered in captivity in Egypt. They were burdened with hard and difficult labor and were treated ruthlessly. Elijah suffered at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel. His suffering was so great that he asked God to let him die. “It is enough,” he said, “now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers” (I Kings 19:4b). And we cannot speak of suffering without mentioning Job, who was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Even this righteous man suffered. He lost his property, he lost his children, he lost his health, and his friends accused him of bringing this upon himself by turning away from God. And there are countless others whose suffering could be mentioned. We endure suffering in this life.

When God created the world, he did not intend for us to suffer. Everything that God created was good. So where did suffering come from? It was the sin of Adam and Eve that brought suffering to creation. After Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit, God said to Eve, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16). And to Adam God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you” (Genesis 3:17b–19a). Because of their sin, Adam and Eve and all their descendants would now have to suffer. We suffer because of sin: sometimes because of our own sin, sometimes because we live in a sinful and broken world.

But Jesus was not a sinner like us. Jesus was tempted in every respect yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Why did Jesus have to suffer?

On Easter morning, two of Jesus’ disciples probably had this same question. Luke 24 tells us

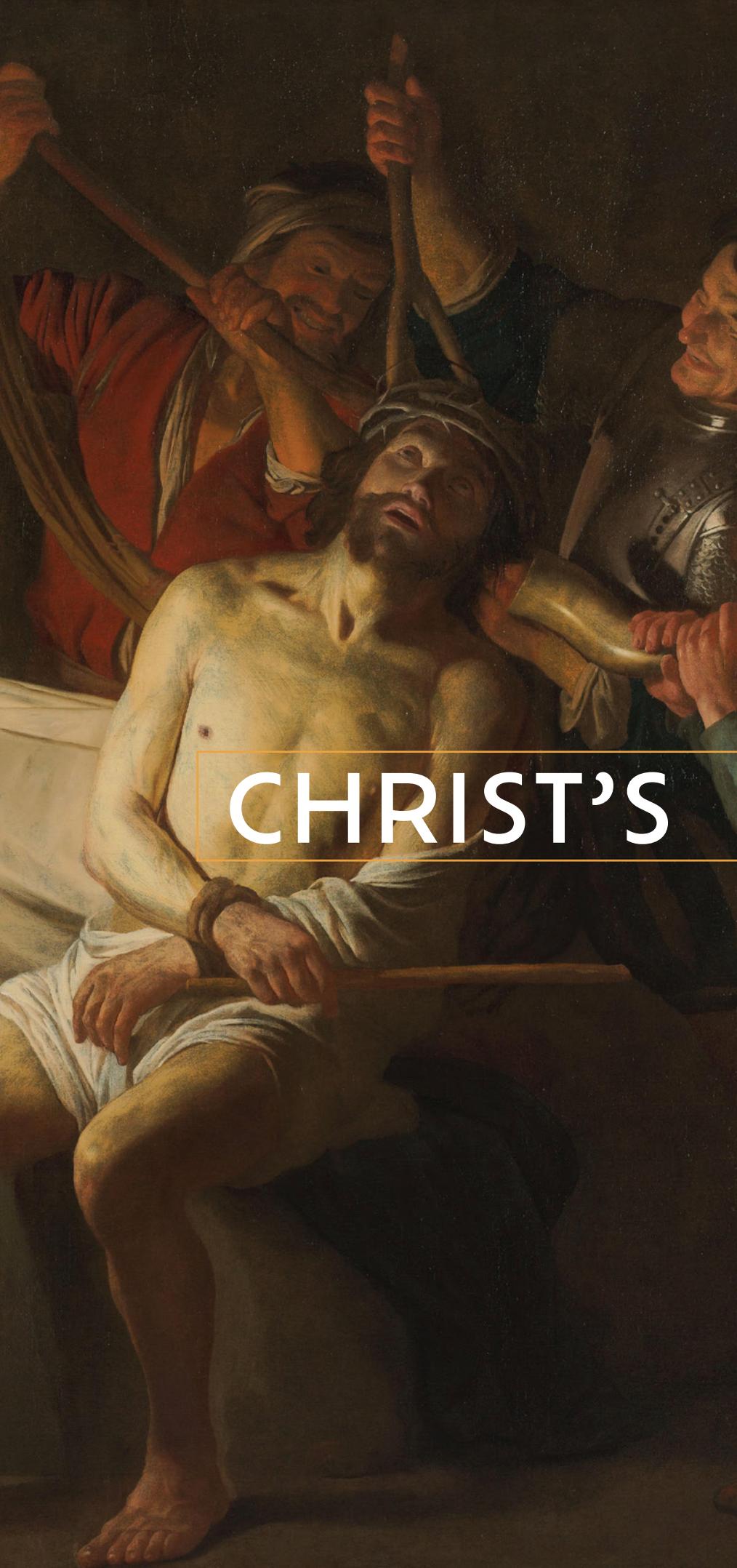
that these disciples were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and they were talking about the things that had recently taken place. Jesus appeared to them (though they were kept from recognizing him) and walked with them. And Luke says that they were sad because they had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah. Even though they had heard the report of the empty tomb and of the angel declaring that Christ had risen from the dead, they were sad. They were sad because this man they believed to be the Messiah had suffered and died. Here then, on this road, Jesus helped them to see that his suffering was necessary. “O foolish ones,” he said, “and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25–26).

Jesus’ suffering was a part of God’s plan all along. We see that if we return to Genesis 3. Before God tells Adam and Eve of the consequences for their sins, he says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (3:15). There would come a day when God would raise up a singular seed or offspring of the woman. And the serpent would strike the heel of this seed—inflicting pain and suffering. But in this moment of suffering, the seed of the woman would bruise or crush the serpent’s head. This would be a fatal blow to the serpent, and it would come through the suffering of the seed of the woman.

Isaiah 53 gives us perhaps the clearest picture of this suffering in the Old Testament. Here we see a suffering servant—one who would carry our griefs and our sorrows and would be pierced for our transgressions. The suffering and pain that we have earned through our sin, Jesus has willingly taken upon himself. He who was without sin has suffered in our place. “And with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5b). This was the will of God from the very moment Adam and Eve sinned: that he might send his Son to suffer the punishment that we deserve, and that through his suffering we might be healed.

*Olson serves Grace Free Lutheran, Bagley, Minn.
Artwork: “Christ Crowned with Thorns,” by Gerard van Honthorst, 1622, the Rijksmuseum.*





CHRIST'S

“WAS IT NOT
NECESSARY THAT
THE CHRIST
SHOULD SUFFER
THESE THINGS
AND ENTER INTO
HIS GLORY?”

“I WILL PUT
ENMITY BETWEEN
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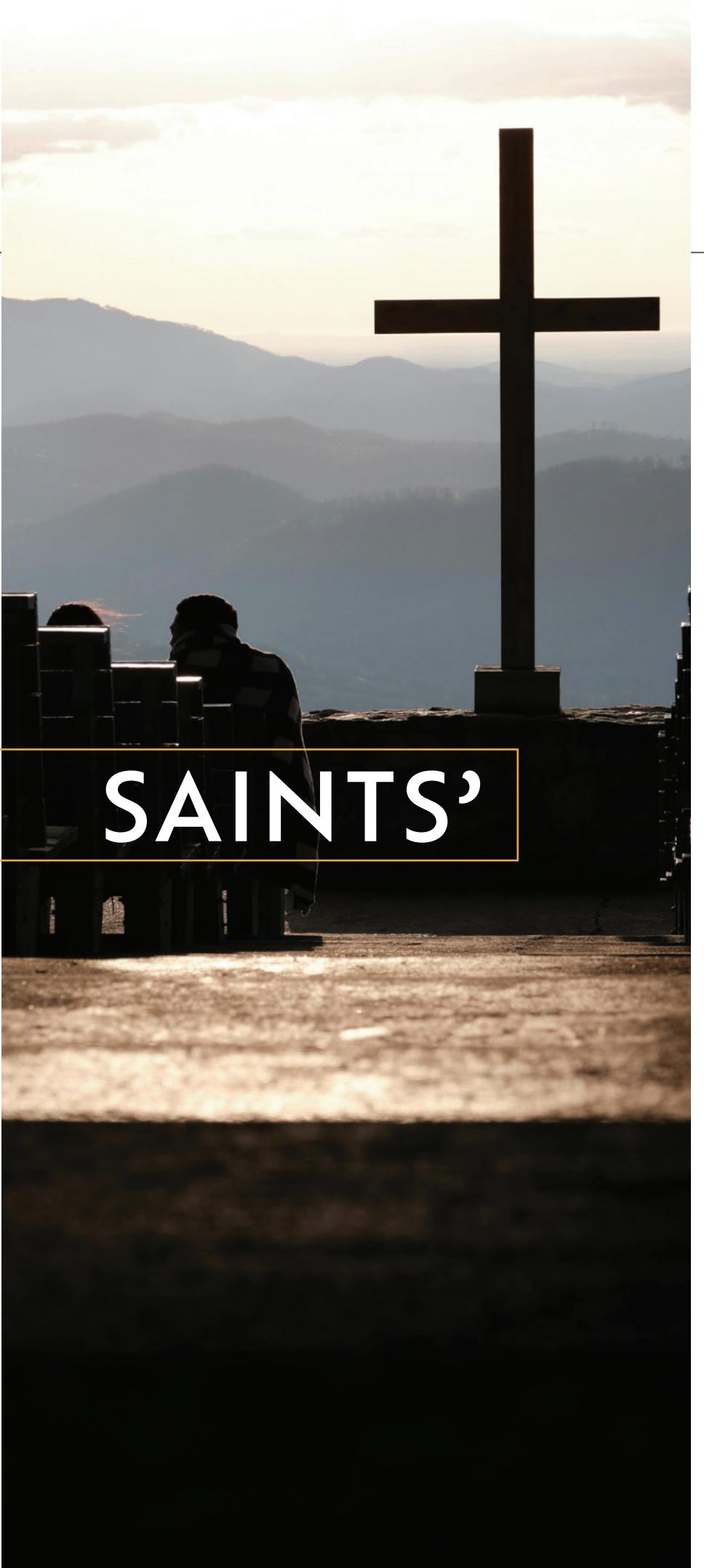
G R E E S

G R I E V E S S



“HE COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR AFFLICTION, SO THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO COMFORT THOSE WHO ARE IN ANY AFFLICTION, WITH THE COMFORT WITH WHICH WE OURSELVES ARE COMFORTED BY GOD.”

“WE ARE AFFLICTED IN EVERY WAY, BUT NOT CRUSHED; PERPLEXED, BUT NOT DRIVEN TO DESPAIR; PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN; STRUCK DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED.”



SAINTS’



Share in suffering? No, thank you. Yet, this is exactly the topic Paul uses to open his second letter to the Corinthians. And the message upends our finite understanding of suffering. The ever-abounding sufferings experienced by the Christian lead to the ever-abounding comfort of the Christian, and this is a restorative, redeeming, resurrectional reality to be shared within the body of Christ.

Sharing abundantly in Christ's sufferings proclaims the gospel truth of life out of death. The mortal body of the believer always carries the death of Christ. What does this look like? In his letter, the Apostle Paul declares a surprising reality to the believers in Corinth. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (II Corinthians 4:8–9). Suffering does not crush the believer because Christ "was crushed for our iniquities;" it does not leave us in our sorrows because of "the man of sorrows" who was "acquainted with grief"; suffering does not leave the believer "forsaken" because Christ was "forsaken by men" and his own Father; and the suffering soul is not left to destruction because the Son of God was "stricken for the transgression" of his people (Isaiah 53). Paul's comparison of paradoxes is a testimony of Christ restoring sinners to life by his wounds for their transgressions. The world expects the afflicted to be crushed and the perplexed to be driven to despair and the persecuted to be forsaken and the struck down to be destroyed. And for the unbeliever, this is reality. But for the child of God, sharing in Christ's sufferings proclaims restoration in the midst of brokenness.

Sharing abundantly in Christ's comfort provides the comfort of the gospel to fellow suffering souls. We must not miss this fact that "as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (II Corinthians 1:5). Christ himself provides for the analogy between suffering and comfort. This is a tender yet transforming truth to behold, that as our suffering abounds, so, too, does God's comfort to the wounded soul. No wonder Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by giving a blessing to "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (1:3). Paul knew personally that God comforts the Christian in every affliction, and he understood the redeeming result of God's comfort. "[God] comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (1:4). In Christ, our

affliction is redeemed for the "comfort and salvation" of precious souls, and our comfort is redeemed through the patient endurance of our brothers and sisters sharing in our same sufferings (1:6). God's comfort to me as I share in Christ's sufferings is redeemed in the resulting endurance of the saints. The church of God has an enduring hope in Christ. Praise be to the God of all comfort!

Sharing abundantly in Christ's sufferings and Christ's comfort reminds us of the resurrection hope of the gospel. In this world, the sufferings of the believer can lead to "despair of life itself" (1:8). Paul desires for the Corinthians to know the despair he has felt as he shares in Christ's suffering—"utterly burdened beyond our strength" (1:8). Have you ever felt this? As we share in Christ's sufferings, the weak and finite nature of our mortal flesh is exposed as inadequate to endure. And this is a gift from the God who raises the dead! Our sufferings remind us that our hope in Christ is a resurrection hope—an abounding deliverance from death. I wonder if Paul had trouble sitting still as he wrote these words: "He [Christ] delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again" (1:10).

So, I asked you, dear reader, if you have ever felt "utterly burdened beyond [your] strength," but I did not answer the question myself. I will. It was a seven-month period of despair, as it only took seven months for Dad's cancer to end his 68 years here on earth. Many of you know that watching someone suffer is probably the worst kind of suffering—the *utterly burdened beyond your strength* kind of suffering. I found myself standing under the graveside canopy wondering how we all got there. Gravesides had always been my least favorite part of funerals. I had always struggled with watching the casket being lowered because I struggled to lift my eyes from that hole. Yet our family had chosen to have the casket lowered before us, and so there I was. And there the God who raises the dead ministered to my weary mind and heart. As Dad's casket lowered, and all was silent, my heart was filled with hope—one day Dad's body would rise to meet his Savior. My eyes looked up and took in the graves all around me and the clear blue sky above, and my heart longed for the resurrection as it never had before. Fellow suffering saint, God has delivered, is delivering, and will again deliver you from this deadly peril. He is making all things new (Revelations 21:5).

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



Several Sundays a month, we join Christians around the world in reminding ourselves of what we believe through the words of the Apostles' Creed. In it, we proclaim to each other the truth of the gospel—how the Triune God has always been at work for our salvation.

As we advance into the second article, we somberly remember that this salvation came at a price, as our Savior King “was crucified, died, and was buried.” But then, we transition from this phrase to one that we don't always know what to do with: “He descended into hell.”

Sometimes, we see this line professed with a somber spirit, as if this descent was part of Christ's humiliation—with a quick and joyful follow-up that on “the third day he rose again from the dead.” Others seem to confess this part of the creed with confusion, wondering why Jesus would be descending into hell, and quickly move past it since they don't know what to make of it.

Faced with this dilemma, theologians have pointed to several verses over the years as they wrestle through this topic (Acts 2:27; Romans 10:6–7; Ephesians 4:8–9; I Peter 3:18–20, 4:6). However, there are still many who persist with divergent opinions about what this part of our confession truly means.

For instance, John Calvin, one of the leaders from the Reformation, believed that “Christ's descent into hell” referred to the fact that Christ not only died a bodily death but that “it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his last judgment” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*).

Others have understood this line as simply referring to Christ's descent to the grave, in that he descended to *hades* which is more akin to Sheol than *gehenna* or “hell.” Their confession states, “Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day; which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, He descended into hell” (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 50).

But what about for us as Lutherans? What have we historically held to and believed about Christ's descent into hell? We have looked at this phrase not as one of defeat but of victory!

While our Lutheran forefathers acknowledged that there was some dispute concerning this doctrine,¹ we find a synthesis with the position of a more mature Martin Luther and his sermon at Torgau in 1533. Luther states, “Before Christ arose and ascended into heaven, and while yet lying in the grave, He also descended into hell in order to deliver also us from it, who were to be held in it as prisoners” (*Luthers Werke*).

Following Luther's trajectory, the authors of the Formula of Concord proclaimed, “We know that Christ descended into hell and destroyed hell for all believers and that he redeemed them from the power of death, the devil, and eternal damnation of hellish retribution.”²

Here's what that means for us: our theological heritage would remind us that Christ's descent into hell is not to be professed with doom and sorrow, but with joy and gladness! It is not a confession of Christ's humiliation, but rather a confession of his exaltation. This perspective comes from verses like I John 3:8: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

He is victorious in heaven above and on earth below—and even to the farthest reaches of *hades* itself. He comes to proclaim victory from the grave and to put an end to the work of the evil one. This he does fully and completely, leaving no place without this proclamation of his deliverance.

Jesus is the ultimate victor over sin, death, and the devil, and this is seen through his life, death, *descent*, and resurrection.

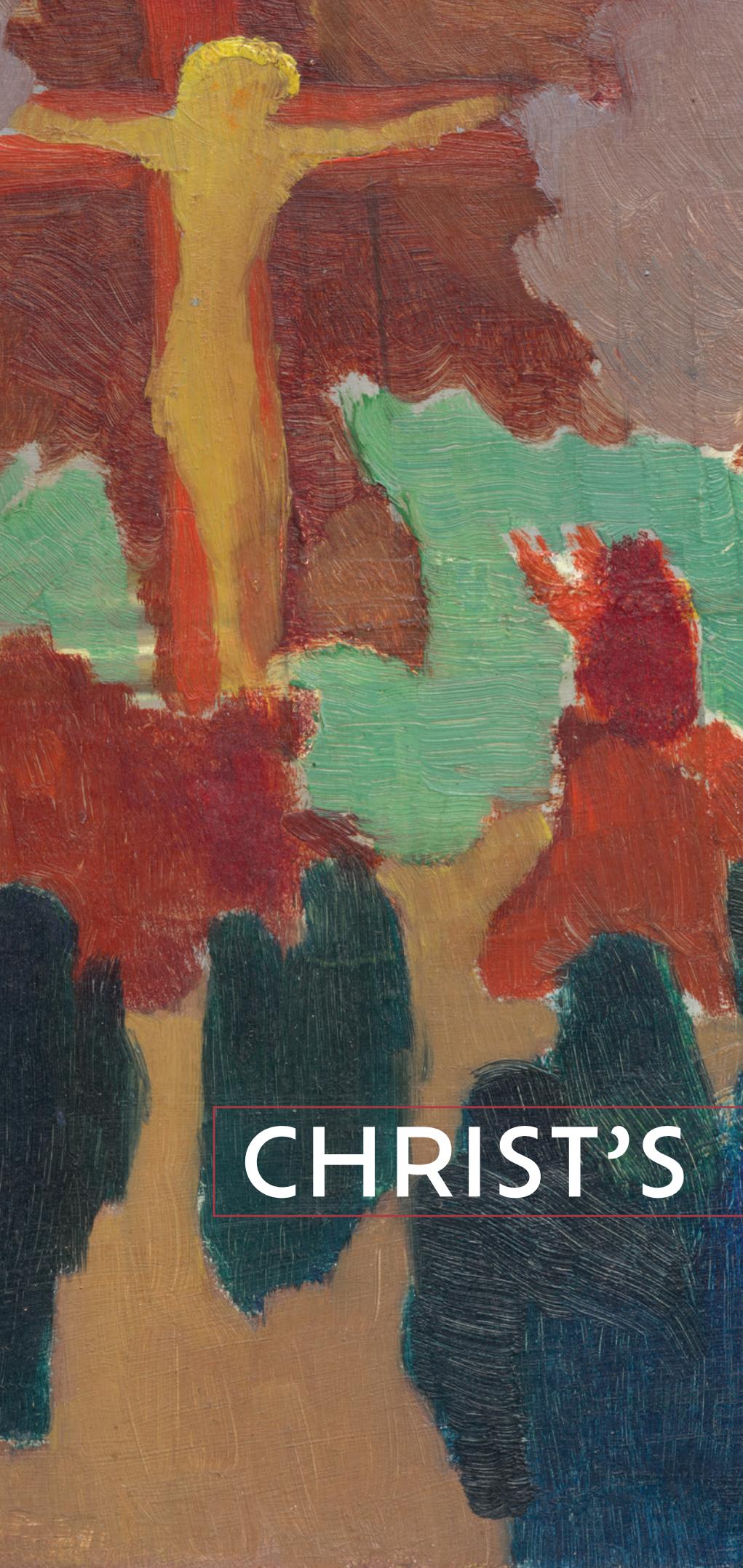
And so, the next time you join in with the church to confess your faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed, my prayer is that your trust would be in your Savior King, and that you would confess with a heart of joy and assurance in what Christ has done for you!

Olson serves Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., and is faculty at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary. Artwork: “The Orange Christ,” by Maurice Denis, 1889, Cleveland Museum of Art.

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles P. Arand, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 514–515.

² Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 514.





“FOR YOU WILL
NOT ABANDON MY
SOUL TO HADES,
OR LET YOUR
HOLY ONE SEE
CORRUPTION.”
ACTS 2:27

“FOR THIS IS WHY
THE GOSPEL WAS
PREACHED EVEN
TO THOSE WHO
ARE DEAD, THAT
THOUGH JUDGED
IN THE FLESH THE
WAY PEOPLE ARE,
THEY MIGHT LIVE
IN THE SPIRIT THE
WAY GOD DOES.”
1 PETER 4:6

CHRIST'S

FEATHED

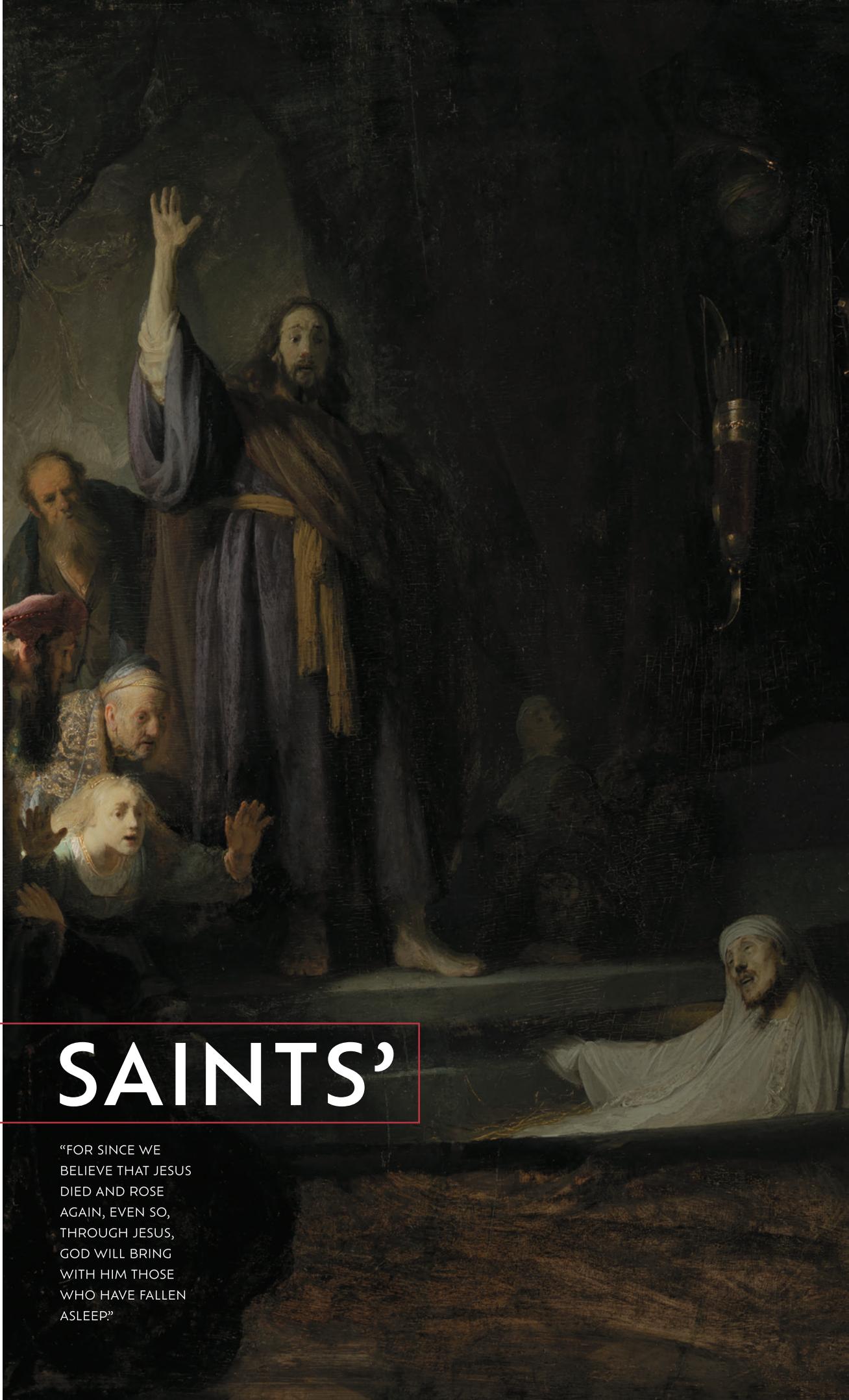


“HE WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES, AND DEATH SHALL BE NO MORE, NEITHER SHALL THERE BE MOURNING, NOR CRYING, NOR PAIN ANYMORE, FOR THE FORMER THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY?”

THE LIFE OF THE SAINTS'

SAINTS'

“FOR SINCE WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN, EVEN SO, THROUGH JESUS, GOD WILL BRING WITH HIM THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP?”





It was a sunny day—a little breezy for my liking, but still beautiful weather. Various family members of mine were gathered outside of their cars in the hospice parking lot, sitting in lawn chairs or pacing nervously. I was sitting under the shade of a nearby tree when my mother ran out of the building, frantically looking for me. She yelled across the parking lot, “Esther, hurry! He doesn’t have much time left.” I ran inside, took a left, and made my way down the wide hallway. As I got to his room, the nurse announced his time of death.

I was 15 when my father died. Though his death happened more than four years ago, there are still moments throughout my week when I am reminded of him and how he is no longer here, moments when I cry because I wish I could talk to my dad again.

Mary and Martha experienced something similar with a family member, except instead of a father, it was their dear brother Lazarus. At the beginning of John 11, he is ill; a few verses later, he dies. After four days pass, Jesus arrives to do the work of the Lord through this seemingly sorrowful circumstance. Upon arriving, the first person he interacts with is Martha. She says to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). Like anyone in her situation, Martha is grieving the loss of her brother, especially since she knows the power Jesus has and that he could have saved Lazarus. Even Jesus himself later grieves the loss of Lazarus (John 11:35), showing his empathy for mankind and his despair over the consequences of sin that he was sent to overcome.

However, Martha continues by saying, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you” (John 11:22). This is the kind of faith we are to show as Christians when faced with trials like the loss of a loved one; Martha still knows the God she serves and the goodness of Jesus. The most encouraging part of the account of Lazarus is what Jesus tells her a few verses later: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25–26). Christians do not need to have the same grief over death like

unbelievers because, in Jesus, we have life in death. Similarly, Paul, in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, says he desires that Christians “may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14). We have hope in Jesus and his second coming that we will see again all the believers who have “fallen asleep.” I will still grieve the loss of my father, but I can have confidence in our Lord that he is merely asleep, and I will see him again.

God uses our grief for his glory. How we remain steadfast through our grief is a living testament to those around us. We do not live a life in fear of death or a life full of deep sorrow because of the loss of a Christian; we live a life for Christ in all that we do, no matter the hardship. On this side of eternity, we will still mourn death, but we have hope. We long for that day when we will be with God and, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

We can only persevere through grief because of the faith and love that we have in Jesus. Though we grieve, we have hope in the faithful promises God has made, that we can live eternally by believing in his name, “knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (II Corinthians 4:14–16). All that we do and all that is done to us is for the glory of God. Throughout our lives, we do not lose heart because of the hope we have in our Savior, even in the midst of grief. Do you believe this?

Rabenberg, a student at the Free Lutheran Bible College, is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. Artwork: “The Raising of Lazarus,” by Rembrandt van Rijn, c. 1630, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

BY PASTOR TOM
SCHIERKOLK



“WE KNOW THAT CHRIST, BEING RAISED FROM THE DEAD, WILL NEVER DIE AGAIN; DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER HIM. FOR THE DEATH HE DIED HE DIED TO SIN, ONCE FOR ALL, BUT THE LIFE HE LIVES HE LIVES TO GOD.”



The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heartbeat of Christianity. It is a moment so staggering it redefines everything for those who put their faith in Jesus. In Romans 6:9–10, Paul captures the essence of this transformative event with a clarity that still echoes today: “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.” These verses give us a window into the power and purpose of Christ’s resurrected life.

First, let’s examine the utter finality of Christ’s victory over death. Paul says Christ “will never die again,” a phrase that lands like a thunderclap. Death, the universal equalizer, the one thing every human dreads, lost its grip on Jesus the moment he walked out of the tomb. This is not a temporary escape or a fleeting miracle; it’s a knockout blow. Before the resurrection, death was the undefeated champ, holding humanity in a chokehold of fear and inevitability. But Christ’s rising rewrote the rules. This is exactly what God promised us in Isaiah 25:8: “He will swallow up death

forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.” It is not that he dodged death. He faced it head-on, endured its worst, and then rendered it powerless. The thing that we covered in fear of, Christ has abolished.

What is even more striking is how Paul ties this victory to sin: “The death he died, he died to sin once for all.” This isn’t just about physical death; it is about what separates us from God. Sin is not just bad behavior—sin puts us at enmity with God. It is a chain that enslaves us to Satan and leads directly to our destruction. Jesus did not die because he had sinned; he died because you and I sinned. But his death snapped that chain in a single, decisive act. Peter tells us, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (I Peter 2:24). And those words “once for all” mean that sin has no claim on anyone. Sin’s claim on humanity was settled at the cross. For anyone who has ever felt stuck in guilt or shame, this is liberating: Christ’s death



CHRIST'S

RESURRECTION

did not just cover the tab; it tore up the bill. All of this was done in fulfillment of the promises of God. From Genesis 3:15 onward, the Father had been proclaiming his love, his mercy, and his desire to restore our relationship to him through faith in the work of the Messiah.

But the real wonder of the resurrected life shines in the second half: "... the life he lives, he lives to God." This is not a passive existence. Jesus is not kicking back in some cosmic retirement. His life now is still active, purposeful, and directed wholly toward the fulfillment of the Father's will. In his resurrected life, Jesus continues to stand up for us just as the author of Hebrews declares, "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). It is a life of continued service to you and me, but one in which "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). Think about that: a human life, once battered by betrayal, pain, and crucifixion, now radiates with eternal vitality as he wields "the keys of Death and

Hades" (Revelation 1:18). It is not just survival; it is thriving on a level we can barely grasp. For Paul, this is not abstract theology. It is the model for what is possible. If Christ lives to God, then those who follow him get invited into that same kind of life.

Romans 6:9–10 leaves us with a truth that is both humbling and exhilarating: Christ's resurrected life is not just a historical flex but the foundation that Christianity stands on. He died once, rose forever, and now lives in a way that pulls us upward. Death's mastery is done. Sin's reign is over. And the life he lives? It is ours to share when we acknowledge our sin, repent, and receive the wonderful gifts he offers us when we trust in him. That is not just good news—it's the best news there is!

Schierkolk serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Eben Junction, Mich. Artwork: "The Three Marys at the Tomb," by Jan van Eyck, c. 1425–1435, Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.



SAINTS'



RESURRECTION

Spring is a season of new life, and nowhere is this better seen than in nature. Tiny sprouts peek through snow. The changing seasons paint trees with slashes of green. Soon leaves begin to wake, curling open like newborn fingers.

Some of the brightest flowers and strongest trees are sown not in spring but just before winter. It seems strange to imagine such a life-giving season following the dark, death, and dimly lit days of winter. The perennial question arrives on our doorsteps every year with the first snowfall. How can life ever come from death?

My thumb remains woefully un-greened, yet even I can glimpse the strange truth of new life in nature. Kill the plant, bury it in a dirt grave far from light and air, and still, it will spring to life when March comes around. In the same way that winter is necessary for spring, so too is death necessary to bring new life.

The Apostle Paul blends this theme of new life from death in his first letter to the Corinthian church. Chapter 15 explores the “first seeds” of the Christian faith. The life,

death, and resurrection of Christ are all milestones in his encouragement to the Corinthians. Yet the core of Paul’s argument lies in the latter half of this chapter. It begins with a simple description of a seed.

The seed is the perfect picture of the Christian life. But the Corinthians here are worried. Like many of us, they see the sickness and darkness that cover not only the world but also their hearts, or “seed.” Paul describes the seed of the Christian’s body as being “sown” in evil and corruption. The seed is dishonorable. It is weak and natural. The seed is our body, and it is dead. The Corinthians are more than aware of this fact, and it discourages them greatly. How could they expect new life to come from this dead body?

Yet Paul’s argument hinges on this fact. “What you sow does not come to life,” he says, “unless it dies.” The body we see on this earth was never what the body was meant to be, no more than a flower was meant to stay a seedling. But Paul reveals that, in glorification, death will erupt to life, dishonor to honor, weakness to strength, and natural to spiritual. True to Paul’s final words in this chapter,



BY ZACH DAVIS



“SO IS IT WITH THE
RESURRECTION
OF THE DEAD.
WHAT IS SOWN
IS PERISHABLE;
WHAT IS RAISED
IS IMPERISHABLE.
IT IS SOWN IN
DISHONOR; IT IS
RAISED IN GLORY.
IT IS SOWN IN
WEAKNESS; IT IS
RAISED IN POWER.
IT IS SOWN A
NATURAL BODY;
IT IS RAISED A
SPIRITUAL BODY.
IF THERE IS A
NATURAL BODY,
THERE IS ALSO A
SPIRITUAL BODY.”

I CORINTHIANS 15:42-44

death must be put to death so that its sting may be forever banished from human experience. Through this, life is raised to life, and we will taste sweetness for all eternity. Christ really died so that we might really live.

But so often, we still stare at the earth where we buried the seed. We doubt the life that comes from death because we are deathly afraid of change, even if the change brings life. To the Christian, glorification is a wonderful thing. But to the Christian on earth, it can seem alien. If the natural must die to make way for the spiritual, all the better. But anyone who has felt the warmth of sun on natural skin or touched the cool of spring dew with natural fingers will no doubt be reluctant. This natural seed is so difficult to leave behind.

This is where we encounter the power of Paul's conclusion. Paul does not say that our bodies will be lost in this spiritual transition, but that they will be perfected. In fact, Paul uses language to describe things we are already familiar with. Our constant weakness will be turned into the strength we once felt in the prime of our lives because we have a Savior who will grant us his power. Our dishonor

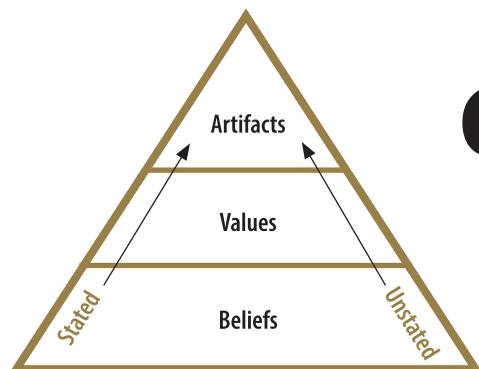
will fall away, and the honor we once felt from our greatest accomplishments will remain forever, won through Jesus' acts. The loneliness of life will be traded for the fellowship felt on those Sunday mornings so long ago, now fully realized in Jesus' presence. We already know what awaits us in glorification because we catch a glimpse of it in our happiest moments. Our God is a good father and a perfect gardener. The garden he has planned for his new creations is wonderful beyond what we can imagine, and it will be full of life, won from death.

Spring is a time of new life here on earth, but it's also a reminder of what awaits us. Paul's words in I Corinthians 15 give readers hope for the glorification in Christ that is coming soon. In every moment of pain, sadness, and darkness, we have the hope of new life. It is through all of this death that Christ wins life for his people.

Davis, a student at the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn., is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash.

Congregational culture.

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE



CULTURE PYRAMID

Artifacts.

The visible symbols of a culture, e.g., clothing styles, wall banners, or volume of speech. Even if not understood, they are deeply tied to underlying values and beliefs.

Values.

Standards of behavior that guide a group's actions, e.g., what is found on a church website. It is the area that has the greatest chance of being disconnected from reality.

Beliefs.

Foundational truths that people hold to be true, e.g., the subscribed doctrine of a church. Individuals bring their own beliefs that they have embraced into a congregation.

AFLC Home Missions held a regional conference on Feb. 15 in Sioux Falls, S.D. This conference was part of a larger six-pronged “renewal” strategy of Home Missions that seeks to come alongside leaders, equipping them to intentionally pursue health, clarity, and mission in their congregations.

This conference focused on congregational culture. Every congregation has its own culture. Culture is the beliefs, values, and artifacts of a community. It is what is seen, felt, and experienced. It is powerful, and it continually teaches and shapes those within it. The goals of this recent conference were for leaders to understand the nature of congregational culture and to receive a plan to lead culture alignment within their congregations. We want them to be rooted in being free, living, and Lutheran. We are excited to develop intentional and practical resources to help established congregations pursue renewal. Here are several conference reflections.

Pastor Kirk Thorson: Living Word Free Lutheran (Sioux Falls, S.D.)

They provided encouragement in what we are already doing as well as concrete ideas for putting these concepts into action. For example, how can we at Living Word show that the practice of prayer in our congregation is reflective of our church's values through the lens of our Free Lutheran identity? It was beneficial to discuss aligning the values of a congregation to the greater context of what we believe, teach, and confess within the AFLC.

Pastor Dean Feistner: Good Shepherd FL (Madison, S.D.) Center FL (Salem)

We have started to ask ourselves to consider what is the first impression that a visitor might key in on and what elements of our worship services might guests feel most receptive to. The conference also spent some time on who we are through our heritage as the AFLC. We have a great foundation of biblical doctrine to offer to a world of people who are searching, confused, or broken. All that we do as a congregation needs to be based on our core beliefs; we cannot turn our back on them for the sake of fitting into our culture.

Pastor Tim Johnson: Christ the King Free Lutheran (Pipestone, Minn.)

The conference helped us review why we do what we do and to consider if what we're doing matches our values and beliefs. We have since discovered that a lot of the things we do have a deeper value and belief behind them, which needs to be clearly communicated. For example, our altar has two candles representing the deity and humanity of Christ. One attendee said, “I will never see those candles in the same way again. We need to share that with everyone else.” We've also been considering how we can celebrate our beliefs, values, and the things that flow from them.

Pastor Seth Moan: Calvary Free Lutheran (Arlington, S.D.)

This conference was a valuable opportunity for my family and several leaders from my congregation to evaluate our church culture and examine how our identity as a free, living, Lutheran congregation influences our practices. I appreciated the encouragement to focus on one area of growth at a time (such as community or outreach) by intentionally planning and incorporating that particular emphasis throughout the various ministries of the congregation. I look forward to continuing these conversations with my fellow church leaders as we seek to more effectively carry out the gospel mission.



Coyle, Rapid City, S.D., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.



What we stand for.

BY KAREN PEDERSON

W is for women.

Join us for our annual Women's Day on June 11 at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis. Come join us for the day as we look at the theme, "The Light of the World is Jesus." Be a Mary for the day and sit under the teaching of our 2025 Bible study writer Vicki Johnson and FLBCS faculty member Dr. Nathan Olson as they teach from John's Gospel. Our day together will include singing with Julia Presteng; watching Linda Mohagen's chalk talk; hearing greetings from our world missionaries; participating in our business meeting; praying together; and fellowshiping with women across our AFLC. Register for WMF Day by visiting our website (aflc.org/women/wmf-day) or scanning the QR code at right.

M is for missions.

Missions is the ministry focus around which the WMF is organized. Come for WMF Day to meet and hear from Vardhini Dasari, representing AFLC-India. Also sharing will be our newest AFLC missionaries, Zach and Carey Ritland, who will be going to our mission field in Paraguay. AFLC missionary Becky Abel, from Campo Largo, Brazil, will also speak during our WMF Day program.

At the missions breakfast on Thursday, June 12, we will hear from AFLC missionary Jonni Sliver, who works at the Miriam Home in Campo Mourão, Brazil.

The Mission Festival service on Thursday evening combines the work of our Home Missions and World Missions departments. Pastor Paul Abel, from Campo Largo, Brazil, will be the featured speaker. The service will conclude with the commissioning of new missionaries Zach and Carey Ritland to Paraguay. A reception to greet and bless our new missionaries will follow the service.

F is for federation.

A federation is a group or union of people—in our case, women—with a common goal—in our case, supporting missions. We fellowship together, beginning at our home congregations through in our local WMF gatherings, continuing on to the district level through various spring rallies throughout April, and culminating in our yearly gathering of women across our AFLC at the annual WMF Day. Consider carpooling to these events with ladies from your local congregations or districts. I've heard stories of women getting up at 4 a.m. and watching the sunrise together on their way to a district rally in April. We want you to enjoy sitting under the teaching of the Word and praying and singing together. After hearing missionary letters of greeting, we want you to be challenged and informed about how to give to and support our WMF projects. By listening to the Word being taught, we are "encouraging each other all the more as [we] see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).



WMF Day



- **Date:** June 11
 - **Place:** Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.
 - **Theme:** The Light of the World is Jesus
 - **Cost:** \$25/advance, \$30/at event
- To register for WMF Day, scan QR code or visit our website:
- aflc.org/women/wmf-day

Pederson, a member of Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D., is the president of the Women's Missionary Federation.



Living with open hands.

BY SHELBY GREVEN

With every conversation you have, there is a possibility of a relationship, and with every relationship made, there is an opportunity to share the gospel. A common misconception about being a missionary equates ministry with poverty. You live with nothing, wash your clothes by hand, and are always on the streets sharing the gospel. While missionary life could be like that, my experience in Brazil and Paraguay has shown me something different.

In my time with Paul and Becky Abel (Curitiba, Brazil), I have learned that relationships are the backbone of ministry. Paul and Becky have intentionally built relationships with many individuals in their town of Bateias and the larger nearby city of Curitiba. As Paul was showing me the city, every other house had a story—whether it was a house they had built for a family or a man who stayed in their house for a year. Those are relationships that lead to the gospel message transforming lives.

Christians should live with hands wide open. We should invite our neighbors over for dinner to introduce them to Jesus. By starting a relationship with a neighbor, mechanic, or hairstylist, we can take the first step in sharing the gospel. When we go on mission trips, we put on our gospel hats and prepare so we are always ready to share the gospel.

But what are we doing back in our own homes? If you desire to be a missionary in another country, start sharing the gospel right now in your own country. Be intentional with your neighbor. Be intentional with your friend. Be intentional with the person you meet at the grocery store. That is what it means to live with hands open, ready to do whatever the Lord calls you to do.

My mom has taught me to “live on mission.” That means whatever you do, you do it for the glory of the Lord. We need to incorporate Jesus into everything we do. During every meal I had with AFLC missionaries Mafu and Ednay Abel (Villarrica, Paraguay), we always sang and prayed. Every time we went to drop off the kids at school, we sang and prayed. I learned to use every opportunity to talk about Jesus and his truth.

It is not going overseas that makes you a missionary; your mission field is where you are right now. Although God does call people out of their own comfort zones—even their nations—to share the gospel, most of the time God’s call is to bloom where you are planted. Have an open heart and invite people into your home. Live your life normally: go to the store, the nail salon, the mechanic, etc. But be intentional. When you are intentional with people, they feel loved and will be open to hearing the gospel. Mafu told me, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Start by intentionally caring for everyone you meet, building relationships, and then tell them you care because Jesus cares.



Missional perspective.

What is intentionality?

- The quality of being directed toward a subject, motivated by your belief.

Are you interested in serving with Journey Missions? Opportunities include serving as an assistant to an on-field missionary and traveling with a team on a short-term trip. Visit our website for more info:

- aflcworldmissions.org/journey-missions

Greven (above right), a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn., served as a short term assistant in Brazil and Paraguay this spring with Kelly Greven (middle).

A missional vision for Chile.

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

Our forefathers longed for congregations and a movement that was Lutheran in doctrine, with a concern for evangelism and spiritual life. Pastor Patricio Rivero Bravo of Santiago, Chile, has that same kind of longing. Pastor Patricio attended the AFLC Brazil Annual Conference in November 2024. He met with the leadership of AFLC Brazil, along with World Missions Executive Director Earl Korhonen and World Missions Board member Mark Riley. He was approved and added to the AFLC Brazil clergy roster. He was recently asked some introductory questions. His answers have been translated from Spanish.

How did you come to a Lutheran understanding of Scripture?

After doing theological studies for nine years, I came to understand through Luther's catechism, *Law and Gospel* by C.F.W. Walther, and *Christian Dogmatics* of Dr. J.T. Muller the need to change my vision regarding doctrine.

Why do you believe there is a need for a free and living Lutheran congregation in Chile?

I have seen how large corporations and synods did not allow their churches and leaders to grow and would not let the board of the congregations minister. I wondered how there would not be a free church and Lutheran doctrine. Will it be, my God, that I will always have to be like this, or will I have to raise a church according to what you have shown me? I was praying to God for two years until, through social networks, I found the AFLC mission work in Paraguay, which is led by our Pastor Mafu [Matthew Abel]. We began to know each other virtually. Two more years passed in which I began to know the AFLC. I felt God's call to continue persevering until being given the opportunity to belong to this fellowship and begin the work in Chile so that one day the free church can be planted in this long, narrow southern country.

What is the current spiritual condition in Chile?

Chile's spiritual condition is complicated by the mega churches that are appearing, with the doctrine of prosperity, the appearance of apostles and prophets who confuse many with their doctrine, who deliver a gospel deviated from the Holy Word, and only want the tithes and offerings of their parishioners.

Why is it necessary to have a Free Lutheran congregation in Chile?

It is necessary to have a Free Lutheran congregation because our Lord asks us to go and preach the good news to the ends of the earth, as our Lord says in Mark 16:15–18.

It is time to bring grace to others and be the bridge between Jesus and those who are lost and confused and help them come to the arms of our Heavenly Father.

What is your vision and passion?

My vision is to be able to show new believers a free congregation of sound doctrine in which they can fellowship with others to achieve things in common; a congregation that can further the education of the members and enhance local and world missions; and a congregation that can enhance the spiritual growth of the members so that they can live a pious life.



Pictured (from left) are Pastor John Lee (Brazil missionary), Pastor Earl Korhonen (WM director), Pastor Matthew Abel (Paraguay missionary), Pastor Patricio Rivero Bravo, Mark Riley (WM board member), and Pastor Jonathan Abel (Brazil missionary).

Johnson, who serves Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash., is the chairman of the AFLC World Missions Board of Directors..

Ritlands called to mission work in Paraguay

Zach and Carey Ritland, of Hubbard, Iowa, have accepted a call from the AFLC World Missions Board of Directors to be lay missionaries, assisting Pastor Matthew and Ednay Abel in the work of church planting in Paraguay. The Ritlands, who are members of Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, are in the process of raising support with the hope of leaving for Paraguay in August. If you would like to be part of their support team, contact the AFLC World Missions office. Following is a brief interview of the Ritlands about their call to missions work by Pastor Craig Johnson, chair of the WM Board of Directors.



Q. Where did you grow up?

Zach: I grew up on a farm in central Iowa.

Carey: My roots are in Iowa, but my parents and I moved to northeast Missouri [when I was] in third grade, and I was there through high school.

Q. When did you start a relationship with Jesus?

Zach: I was blessed to grow up being taught the Word. One night when I was around 4 years old, I came to the conclusion that although I was pretty sure I was saved, I should probably make sure by making it official. So I knelt down and prayed to God, telling him that I believed and trusted in Jesus as my Savior.

Carey: I don't remember a specific moment of accepting Jesus into my life. I grew up thinking he just was [God]. However, in college, I learned more about the effects of knowing God personally, and he had been priming me for this information, so my relationship with him grew dramatically.

Q. When did you sense a call to be involved in missions?

Zach: In college, the Holy Spirit really started working me over. I was quite successful in ignoring it in the beginning. But as time went on, the call got stronger and stronger until I had no peace. So I committed to serving the Lord wherever he called me. Proverbs 16:9 says, "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."

Carey: I seriously considered the call to be involved in missions when Zach brought it up within the first few weeks of dating, which was the spring of 2021.

Q. How did that call come about?

Zach: Carey and I had met and started dating the week after we graduated from college. I still remember telling her on one of our first dates that I was going to be an overseas missionary. I said that we might end up living in a mud hut somewhere if the Lord leads us, and that if that was a problem, we might as well call it quits right now. One and a half years later, we were married and still praying for the Lord to direct us where to serve.

Carey: After Zach brought it up, I asked God about me being a missionary. He reminded me of a desire to do mission work, which had been suppressed or forgotten, and helped me work through thoughts that I wasn't good enough, which had been holding me back.

Q. What kind of involvement have you had in missions?

Zach and Carey: We have been blessed to have visited missionaries in Israel, Tanzania, Thailand, Brazil, and of course, Paraguay! On our visits, we have always tried to encourage and help the missionaries and the locals whenever possible. However, the majority of the time, it was the missionaries who poured into and taught us.

Q. What are your expectations as to what you'll be doing?

Zach and Carey: In the beginning, a lot of language learning! We will help Matthew and Ednay Abel however we can and learn from them. As we learn Spanish and get to know the Paraguayan culture, we look forward to being more useful in the task of making disciples and pointing people toward Christ!

2025 Free Lutheran Seminary graduates

Troy Hanson

I was born on Dec. 23, 1976, in Jamestown, N.D., to Bruce and Sheryl Hanson. Raised in the Lutheran faith, I attended Atonement Lutheran in Jamestown and Eden Lutheran in Sheyenne, N.D. In high school, I aspired to become a research scientist. I pursued this dream at the University of North Dakota and Valley City State University, earning a degree in chemistry.



My wife, Nicole (Godel), and I have been married for 27 years and have two children: Seth, 26, and Naomi, 18. Early in our marriage, I focused on chemistry and biology, questioning faith and God's existence. Nikki, a steadfast Christian, prayed for me as I wrestled with doubts, surrounded

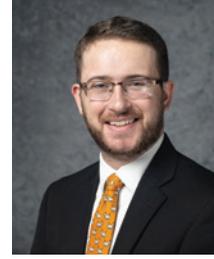
mostly by humanist and atheist friends.

In 2007, Nikki took a position as youth director at Faith Lutheran (ELCA) in Valley City, N.D. I attended worship sporadically, more out of duty than enjoyment, often eager to leave. In 2009, attending church conferences as a congregational representative exposed me to heated debates blending science and sociology, but lacking biblical grounding. This sparked curiosity, and with Nikki's prayers, I began exploring Scripture. By 2014, unresolved spiritual questions led us to Grace Free Lutheran in Valley City. There, Pastor Steve Mundfrom and knowledgeable laypeople showed me the Bible's authority and its witness to Jesus Christ. The Word proclaimed authoritatively, clearly, and without apology is powerful and changed my life. My desire to study God's Word grew, surpassing my previous career ambitions. Encouraged by the congregation, Nikki and I entered the Free Lutheran Seminary (FLS).

Seminary challenged me but enriched my faith. Immersion in Scripture, alongside relationships with students, faculty, and members of Good Shepherd Lutheran of Cokato, sustained me. Now, as I complete this chapter, I'm interning at Emmanuel Free Lutheran Church in Williston, N.D., eager to minister the Word that transformed me.

Marlen Meester

Marlen (Mikey) Meester was born to Tom and Sarah Meester on February 19, 1999, in Valley City, N.D. He was brought to faith in Christ in baptism at Our Savior's Lutheran Church (ELCA) of Valley City, N.D. In 2010, his family became members of Grace Free Lutheran Church (AFLC), also of Valley City, N.D.



He began to hear God's call to pastoral ministry in his senior year of high school as he had the opportunity to preach for his church's "Youth Sunday." Over the course of the next three years, he wrestled with this calling and his

own sinfulness until finally, through the help of a friend, he accepted the internal call and applied for seminary.

During that time, he attended Valley City State University, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in music with voice as his primary instrument.

In May of 2021, he married Madi (Trowbridge), and in July of 2022, their first son, Thomas, was born. In August of 2024, during his internship at Our Savior's Free Lutheran Church in Stanley, N.D., God blessed them with their second son, Leonardo.

While Marlen had accepted his internal call to ministry years earlier, throughout seminary and into his internship, he still struggled with his own sinfulness. It was not until he came across I Corinthians 15:9-10 that the struggle finally subsided, as he came to realize that if he was truly called to pastoral ministry, it would not be by anything he had done, but only by God's grace. It is now, by God's grace, that he looks forward to a call in the local congregation and prays for many years of being able to serve God's people.

Annual Conference registration and information

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 11-14 at the Association Retreat Center located near Osceola, Wis. Registration is now open (aflc.org/about-us/conferences). Prices are \$55/single or \$95/couple. To register for meals and lodging on site, visit the ARC website (arc-aflc.org/2025-annual-conference).

Online registration, which includes registration for nursery, vacation Bible school, and youth activities, will close on June 6. Walk-up registration will be available for the conference, nursery, vacation Bible school, and youth.

Nursery is available for children aged 3 and younger. A VBS program will be provided for children entering preschool

through those entering sixth grade. The youth track is offered to those entering seventh grade through high school (17 and younger). All activities will be on-site.

Conference committees will meet on June 11. The conference schedule and nominees will be included in the May issue.

Rekindle the Fire, June 10

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will host Rekindle the Fire, a revitalizing and equipping event, on June 10 at Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis. With the theme, "You Shall Be My Witnesses," the event is open to clergy and lay members. The event will include a meal and worship and prayer. The event is free. Registration can be found at aflc.org/evangelism/events/rekindle-fire.

WMF Day, June 11

WMF Day will be held on June 11 at the ARC with the theme, "The Light of the World Is Jesus" (John 8:12). The schedule begins with worship at 9 a.m. Workshops will be presented by Dr. Nathan Olson and Becky Abel (AFLC missionary to Brazil). After lunch, Linda Mohagen will present a session on chalk art. A memorial service and business meeting will close out the day. Pastor Paul Abel will speak at the Mission Festival service (June 12).

Registration can be found online (aflc.org/women/wmf-day). To include the WMF meal as part of the conference meal package, visit arc-aflc.org/2025-annual-conference.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa., has called Pastor Allen Giles (non-AFLC) as interim pastor. Giles was installed by members of the church council on Feb. 9.

Pastor David Jore has resigned from Maple Bay Free Lutheran, Mentor, Minn.

Pastor Dave Olson has resigned from Cornerstone Lutheran, Argyle, Wis.

Pastor Patrick VandenBos, Salinas, Calif., has rescinded his call to Abiding Faith Lutheran, Ortonville, Minn.

Raan installed at Tioga congregation



Pastor Brent Raan (center) was installed Jan. 26 as the associate pastor of Zion Free Lutheran, Tioga, N.D., with Pastor Chris Kumpula (at his right) officiating. Also pictured are members of the congregation's leadership.

Rekindle the Fire, June 10

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will host Rekindle the Fire, a revitalizing and equipping event, on June 10 at Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis. With the theme, "You Shall Be My Witnesses," the event is open to clergy and lay members. The event will include a meal and a time of worship and prayer for the Annual Conference. The event is free. Registration can be found at aflc.org/evangelism/events/rekindle-fire.

Support the AFLC's magazine

The Lutheran Ambassador is free for all subscribers. Our ministry is subsidized by your gifts. Thank you! Our mission continues to provide encouraging and informative content. For information on giving, please visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary subsidy reporting, at right, are now combined as of January 2025 receipts.

Station manager sought for KAKN

KAKN Radio in Naknek, Alaska, is seeking a full-time station manager. A background in radio, radio engineering, computer skills, and communication/verbal strengths is desirable but not absolutely essential. Housing is provided and can accommodate a married couple with children or a single individual.

More information is available upon request. KAKN Radio is a ministry of the Alaska Mission and Home Missions. For more info, contact the Alaska Mission coordinator, Loren Tungseth, by email (Loren.Tungseth@gmail.com) or by phone at 218-205-6987.

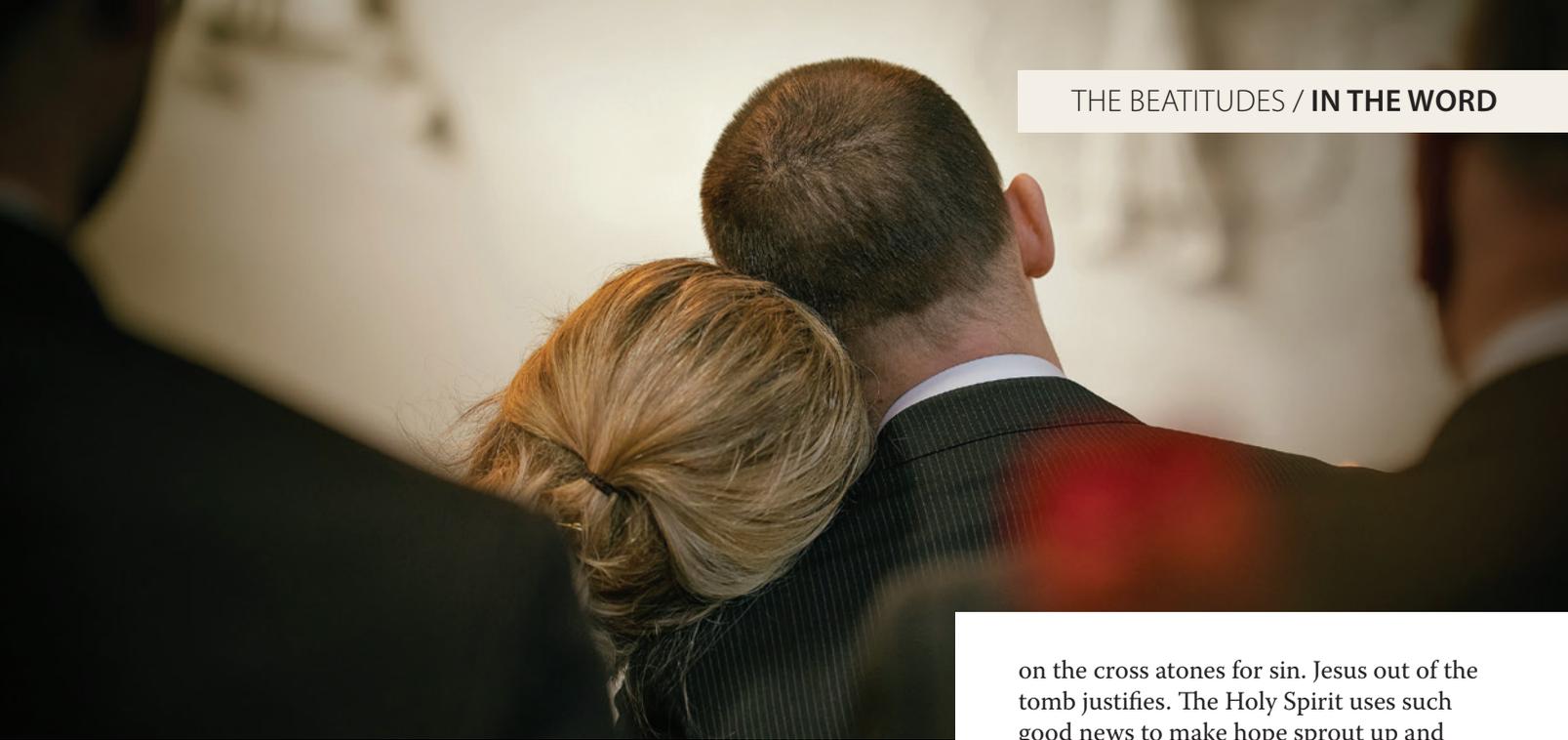
FEBRUARY MEMORIALS

- Evangelism** Sharon Monshaugen
- Arthur Arneson Olive Grimsrud
- Emma Waddle
- FLBCS** Evelyn Likness
- Arthur Arneson Gloria Paulson
- Viviann Christenson Harold Harder
- Ruth Claus Lorene Sateren
- Ken Johnson
- Lutheran Ambassador**
- Shirley Magnuson **World Missions**
- Beverly Robertson Jason Dahlen
- Arthur Arneson Melissa Selin
- Beverly Robertson
- WMF** Josiah Carlson
- Deb (Mortrud) Arthur Arneson
- Benson

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-February 28, 2025

FUND	REC'D IN FEBRUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$42,573	\$106,648	24	96,896
Evangelism	6,434	21,472	15	23,224
Youth Ministries	9,762	23,158	15	29,099
Parish Education	7,986	20,813	11	58,029
FLBCS	57,592	124,662	16	145,203
Home Missions	19,864	54,296	13	68,082
World Missions	24,691	67,665	14	84,259
Personal Support	50,964	105,794	14	154,157
TOTALS	\$219,866	\$524,507	15	\$594,850

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



Those who mourn.

BY PASTOR PAUL KINNEY

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Years ago, while traveling in Ethiopia with a pastor friend, I came to a village in which a young woman was mourning the loss of her husband. Even though we didn’t know her, we followed their custom to visit the grieving and share in their sorrow. As I walked across the village, I could hear her deep lament. I stooped and entered her hut, and there she was—one who mourns. Her hair was unkempt, and her tears mingled with dust and ashes on her face. She was mourning what sin and the curse for sin had done: her husband was dead.

I was glad that my pastor friend and I could join her in her sorrow and be used by the Lord to begin pointing her to the One who comforts those who mourn.

Matthew 5 reminds us that those who mourn are experiencing a deep emotional response to some loss, to some sin. This grief can be personal or experienced by the larger group. Think of Peter hearing the rooster crow and going out and weeping bitterly (Luke 22:62). In that moment, Peter’s sorrow for his denial was great. Think of the Slaughter of the Innocents (Matthew 2:16–18). Mothers refused to be

comforted because their little boys were no more. Their sorrow was great because of Herod’s sin, and it could not be hidden with a simple, “I’m fine.” Such a sorrow will find its expression.

You and I know something about such mourning. We know lament over personal sin or sorrow over some tragic event in our communities. We know grief at the loss of a loved one. What we need is a eucatastrophe.

J.R.R. Tolkien coined the term *eucatastrophe* in 1947. A eucatastrophe is a massive turn of events from seemingly utter ruin to unimagined victory. Think of the words in the Nicene Creed: “Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary ...” You already know how this is going to end: everything is going to be okay. Better than okay; it’s going to be glorious!

Those who mourn may be tempted to feel that God is distant. They may feel that they are alone in their misery. That’s not the case; the arrival of Jesus changes everything. His arrival is a result of the Lord’s favor, and his messianic mission is to bless, to comfort (Isaiah 61:2), and to do what those who are captive to sin cannot. Emmanuel—Jesus with the people—means the famine of God’s Word is over. Jesus’ preaching and teaching cause repentance and bring comfort. Jesus

on the cross atones for sin. Jesus out of the tomb justifies. The Holy Spirit uses such good news to make hope sprout up and grow, to bring comfort.

Comfort over death can sometimes come quickly. Consider the death of Eutychus (Acts 20:9–12). His parents were greatly comforted as they took their son home alive. But more likely, those who mourn will do so for quite a while. It can take years for comfort to find its way into our broken hearts. Jesus promises to those who mourn: comfort will come. Do not lose hope; Jesus has promised that comfort will come. Comfort will come through God’s Word itself. Comfort will come through God’s servants as they speak God’s Word to those who mourn.

As one who knows loss, I would encourage those who mourn to have a good cry. Go ahead and give it an Old Testament lament. Tell the Lord all about it. He is near to those who mourn (Psalm 34:18). Ask him for comfort. Actively look for it in the pages of your Bible. Listen for it in the words of the Body of Christ: your pastor and brethren. Those who have suffered and were comforted should now comfort others. If you are mourning, receive from others, and in time, when you meet another who mourns, give to them. Receive comfort. Give comfort.

Thanks to the Lord, we have a eucatastrophe. Jesus’ promise to return and bring all who trust in his redemptive work into his kingdom brings us comfort. In the world to come, he will wipe away all our tears. There, Jesus will give complete comfort to each believer.

This passage blesses me. I find comfort meditating on it, and I pray you do, too.

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SOMETHING TO SHARE

Love, loss, and the God who died.

BY RENAH THOMPSON

I was talking to my dad the other day on his 73rd birthday. We spoke of this and that, of everyday things, and then somehow, we got on the topic of death. He told me he won't be around forever. I told him, yes, I know. There was silence, and another small breaking of our hearts.

My best friend often tells me she's struggling with the milestones of her daughters' lives. First grade, second grade, and before you know it, they're graduating from high school. Everything beautiful is bittersweet, vanishing. I don't like thinking that way, but ... she's got a point.

What C.S. Lewis said about love is true—to love is to be vulnerable, to open ourselves to the inevitability of being hurt. I guess the Dread Pirate Roberts in *The Princess Bride* said it, too: "Love is pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something." We choose love (when we manage to do so) despite the pain we know is coming. It is rarely easy and never without risk.

Love is pain because of death, the small deaths of selfishness and anger just as much as Death itself. Love the world, and it will break your heart. Love people, and they will inevitably leave, or hurt you, or die. Or all of the above.

It occurred to me recently that the only one we love with no threat of separation is God—but consider how this comes about. Jesus suffered separation and death in the magnificently ugly penultimate act of the play. Now, during the final act, the

great reversal, the love of God is opened to us, and death no longer has the final word. Love is no longer always pain.

Jesus' suffering and death are paradoxically the very things that transform love back to a thing laden with possibility and joy. Now it is possible to love God without fear, to know that he is for us. Now it is possible to love and know that eternal life trumps temporal death. Now it is possible (firmly rooted in the love of God) to move from our cramped, fearful postures toward loving the world in all its crippled, broken, lovely forms.

What I'm really talking about (again) is the security found in the steadfast love of God. Think how profoundly your life is changed when you are deeply secure in the love of your spouse or your parents or a friend. Then think how profoundly grounded and safe you can be when you remember that the death-transcending love of God is utterly never-ending, when you remember again and again that this love does not hide a bitter promise at its core. Think of how transformative that complete safety can be.

God's love is the context, the foundation, the animating force of life for those who follow Jesus—precisely because it was proved by suffering and brought to life in resurrection. Now even death is less powerful than love.

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