

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

May 17, 1994



*O Holy Spirit
Fill Our Lives With
Unsurpassed Peace,
Unquenchable Fire.*

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

May 17, 1994 • Vol. 32, No. 10

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

is published biweekly (except for the first issue of July and the first issue of August) by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

CONTENTS

The Divine Nature of the Holy Spirit	p. 3
Shaken Up and Calmed Down	p. 4
Walk In the Spirit	p. 5
My Life Changed	p. 6

Subscriptions: \$15.00 year, U. S.
\$18.00 year, International

Write to:

The Lutheran Ambassador
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Send all communications concerning this magazine to: Solveig Hjermstad, Assistant to the Editor, Box 423, Faith, South Dakota 57626. Phone (605) 967-2381. Fax (605) 967-2382.

USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413

Second-class postage paid at Minneapolis, Minnesota, and additional mailing office.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Ambassador*, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

Rev. Craig Johnson, Editor
Mrs. Wayne Hjermstad, Assistant to the Editor

Editorial Board:

Rev. John Mundfrom
Dr. Craig Jennings
Mrs. Oryen Benrud

Light on the Way

The True Messiah

A frustrated pastor comments: "Since my church isn't growing, I must be out of the will of God." An anxious mother cries: "If only I had more faith, my child would get well." A television preacher emotionally pleads: "Send your generous contributions to my ministry and unleash Jesus Christ's full blessings upon you!"

The words of all three of the above people betray a false view of the Messiah. Rather than believing in the Messiah of the Bible, they are following a false savior who they believe will lead them to a life of success, health, and wealth — if only they follow him closely enough or have enough faith or send enough money!

But what happens to the pastor whose church doesn't grow no matter how hard he tries to follow Jesus? What will the mother do when the sick child dies in spite of her desperate attempts to muster up enough faith? How will the widow survive after she sends her entire Social Security check to the TV preacher and then cannot pay her rent? These people are in trouble, for their "messiah" has proven himself to be a major failure!

If their messiah is false, what is the true Messiah like? The title "Messiah" means "anointed one." When the biblical writers used the term, they were generally referring to God's Messiah, the one anointed by the Father to bring salvation to all people. He is Jesus Christ and His very name underscores His "Messiahship!"

What sort of person is Jesus, God's Messiah? Isaiah prophetically quoted him, saying "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has

anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor ..." (Isaiah 61:1-2a). When Jesus came 700 years later, He quoted these very words in the Nazareth synagogue and then said: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Jesus was — and is — God's long-promised Messiah! He brings good news, healing, freedom, and light! Truly He is a glorious liberator, but not necessarily from political oppression or every physical illness or financial difficulty we may face. The key to rightly understanding the true Messiah's liberation is to remember that it applies primarily to the bondage of sin. Furthermore, it only begins to be fulfilled in this world: it culminates in the world to come where it will last forever!

The true Messiah prophesied by Isaiah came, but because those to whom He came wanted a mere this-world liberator, Jesus was rejected and crucified. A Savior who didn't bring complete liberation in the here and now was and still is a stumbling block; regarded as foolishness by the world **and even by many in the church.** May the Holy Spirit gift us with the faith to accept the true Messiah, the crucified and risen Christ, the only One able to save us.



— Rev. Jerry
Holmaas

In the Old Testament, Pentecost, also known as the "feast of weeks," was one of two festivals of Israel signifying the completion of the barley and wheat harvest (Leviticus 23:15-16, Deuteronomy 16:9-10). This old Jewish festival obtained a new significance for the early New Testament church by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-13). The details of that memorable day in the history of Christianity are told vividly in Acts. On the first Pentecost, the Spirit of God came upon people as "a power from high." On that day they were empowered for the monumental task that lay before them to preach the gospel to all nations.

For years I heard and read of this account of Pentecost and I understood that the Holy Spirit was with me to strengthen and guide me. I understood that Christ had ascended to heaven to be with His Father just prior to the Holy Spirit being outpoured. I also thought, incorrectly however, that this was the first time God revealed His Holy Spirit to believers.

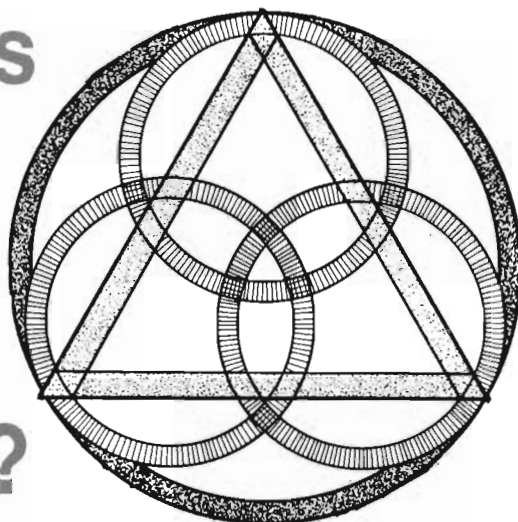
It was not until I heard a speaker on the topic of creation that I came to understand from Genesis 2:26 that when God said: "Let us make man in Our image ..." this was referring to the Trinity — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Then I understood that the Holy Spirit was there since the beginning of time; not just since Pentecost.

Consider how the Bible clarifies the divine nature or deity of the Holy Spirit before and after Pentecost.

In dealing with Ananias (Acts 5), Peter revealed the deity of the Holy Spirit when he said: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to me but to God." In Ephesians 4:30-32, Paul writes that the sin of grieving "... the Holy Spirit of God" is committed if the believer resists giving Him control of his life. The Holy Spirit is God and He is co-equal, co-eternal and co-existent with the Father and the Son.

His deity is also evident in that He possesses divine attributes. First He is everywhere present (omnipresent) in the universe (Psalm 139:7-10). Luke 1:35 declares that Mary would give birth to the Son of God and the power of the Holy Spirit would overshadow her (omnipotent). Another attribute is described in I Corinthians 2:10-11, where Paul says the Spirit has all knowledge (omniscience).

Who is the Holy Spirit?



Hebrew 9:14 brings to mind that the deity of the Holy Spirit is eternal. Here the writer states: "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Christ died and rose again so that we might have life. So too, the Holy Spirit lives eternally.

His name reveals His deity in that it is coupled in equality with the name of the Father and the Son. Two examples come to mind. The first is in the call to baptize found in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. The other is found in II Corinthians 13:14 where Paul blesses the church at Corinth.

Finally, His deity is seen in relation to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for service (Acts 10:38). He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). Our Savior was crucified in the power of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:14) and was raised from the dead by the Spirit's power (Romans 8:11). And then Jesus gave commandments to the apostles and the church through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2). This was often done during those last days before His ascension.

Now I realize that God's Holy Spirit is with me always to strengthen and guide me in the Christian walk. He is there to empower me. He has existed in all eternity. Think for a moment how Jesus depend-



— by Rev. Alan Arneson
Badger Creek and
Oiland Lutheran
Badger, Minnesota

Shaken Up and Calmed Down

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the Word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).

The Spirit's work in the congregation

A few months ago many Californians were shaken from their early morning sleep by a strong, tragic earthquake. The quake resulted in a devastating loss of property and human life. Ironically, while the quake literally shook things up, it was caused by the attempted continual settling of the earth's crust.

The Holy Spirit's work also is to shake us up, awaken us to the spiritual reality regarding ourselves and our world. We are prone to spiritual drowsiness, complacency and apathy. We need to be shaken from such a spiritual state and awakened to our need. Only when convicted and awakened will we turn to Jesus to find the calm comfort of His presence, love and promises. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, through the clear, firm preaching of the Word of God (John 16:7-11). The Holy Spirit can then lead us to faith in Christ and to the blessed assurances of all His promises in His Word. The Holy Spirit also calls us through the Word to see those around us and to go in Jesus' Name to minister His love.

Have you experienced the Holy Spirit's work in your life, in your congregation? He would come and shake us out of our spiritual sleep, convict us of sin and then reveal to us where forgiveness is. In Christ we find calm, peace and rest for our souls as well as purpose for living.

The early church experienced the Spirit's work (Acts 4:31). God literally shook the place where they were gathered. He settled them into His will and used them in a mighty way. How did the Holy Spirit work with those first Christians?

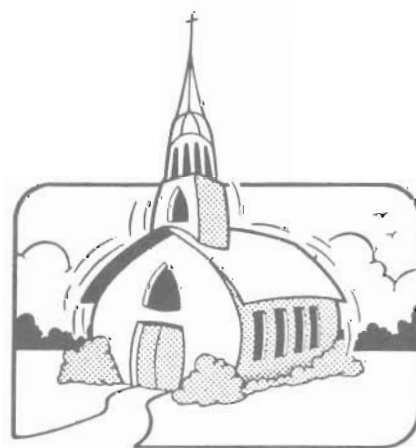
"They" had been with Jesus (4:13). Though uneducated and untrained, they were a marvel to the people simply because they had been with Jesus and He had made a difference in their lives. They were a spiritually hungry group (vs. 29, 30). They longed to see Jesus work the power of God evidenced in changed lives. Business as usual was not satisfying. The

Holy Spirit seeks to awaken in each of us a hunger for righteousness (Matthew 5:6), for holiness (I Peter 1:16), for the Word (I Peter 2:2), for God (Psalm 63:1) and a desire to see souls saved (I Timothy 2:4).

"They had prayed." The book of Acts is often called the Acts of the Apostles. Some say it should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. It could also be referred to as a testimony of a praying church. The early church knew, as should we, that nothing could be done without the power of God's Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). Apart from Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5). The Holy Spirit calls the church to dependent prayer.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Certainly one thing that the Holy Spirit wants to do in the lives of true believers in every congregation is to fill them with Himself. All believers have the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) but does He have all of us? The plague of the church today is distractions and busy lives where the influence of the Word and thus the Spirit is

"God literally shook the place where they were gathered. He settled them into His will and used them in a mighty way."



— by Rev. Jeff Swanson
Helmer Lutheran
Newark, Illinois

The Bible says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit," (Galatians 5:25). Dr. Neil T. Anderson in his book *The Bondage Breaker* makes the following observations: "No more than 15% of the evangelical Christian community is completely free of Satan's bondage." That leaves 85% of the Christian community under various levels of bondage, restricted in their service to the Lord and not realizing the full joy of their salvation.

Many Christians lead defeated lives. They bear very little fruit for the kingdom of God. They struggle with feelings of anxiety, unworthiness, rejection, abandonment, low self-worth, etc. They experience difficulty in forgiving people who have offended them. They carry bitterness and buried resentments that fester and harm their relationship with God and man.

The Bible is unmistakably clear that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). We are involved in spiritual warfare and the only way we can win is to "put on the full armor of God that we may

Walk by the Spirit

be able to resist against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 8:10-18). "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (Corinthians 10:3, 4). These fortresses are Satan's lies and deceptions.

Jesus said: "... if you abide in My word ... you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32). The gospel truth sets us free not only from eternal punishment but from all sorts of spiritual bondage in our lives. We can be free from self-hate, low self-esteem, guilt, feelings of unworthiness, feelings of rejection and abandonment, feelings of bitterness and resentment, feelings of failure, ◇

Living free
from
spiritual
bondage!

often pushed aside. We need to ask ourselves the probing question: can the Holy Spirit fill me or am I so filled with my own thoughts, plans and activities that there is no room left for Him? The place where they were meeting was shaken and they went out and shook things up because of the Holy Spirit in them. Are we available and longing for the same visitation and power?

"And (they began to speak the Word of God with boldness)." The Holy Spirit's work in our lives and in our congregations is directly tied to the use of the Word of God. He calls us and moves us to read, meditate on, study and proclaim the Word in teaching and preaching in all seasons. This Word brings faith, gives life, convicts of sin and points to Jesus. Let us hear and trust in this Word and proclaim it boldly.

The early church was filled with people who had been with Jesus and were saved by Him. They hungered and prayed for Holy Spirit boldness and power and

were graciously filled to speak boldly of Him. That is the kind of church the Holy Spirit desires.

The task confronts the church today. The needs of the world are too great. Even the needs we face as local congregations are overwhelming. But rejoice! Jesus said: "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away for if I do not go away the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go away I will send Him to you" (John 16:7). The Holy Spirit has come! He convicts, comforts, teaches and He gives individuals to carry out the work of the church.

The Holy Spirit is here today. We have the Word. We have congregations. May we be shaken from any complacency among us and be encouraged and comforted by the promises associated with the Spirit and the Word. Let each of us pray and yield ourselves so that the Holy Spirit might work in and through us to the glory of God and to the eternal good of many souls.

My Life Changed

Four words come to mind when I think of the Holy Spirit's ministry in my life; life, light, love and liberty.

In 1938 I gave my heart to the Lord. The Living Bible says this in John 3:6: "Men can only reproduce human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven." My Savior called me to share this life-giving message on the mission field.

In 1949 I arrived in Bolivia, eager to begin mission work. Two years later Odell Kittleson arrived on the field where we met, and the following year we were married.

Our fourth child was born while on fur-

lough in 1960. When we returned to Bolivia at the end of that year, Odell had been elected director of the field and coordinator between the National Church and the Mission. Half of his time was now spent on the road. My days were filled with activities in and outside of the home. However, I grew increasingly discontented with my spiritual state.

In 1963 Bill Gothard came through La Paz. He gave a chalk talk in our Lutheran church that evening, after which I invited him to our home for coffee along with other missionary parents. At that time, Mr. Gothard was working with Chicago teenagers and I felt he could share helpful insights with us parents.

As Phil, our ten-year-old, walked through the living room on his way to bed, Mr. Gothard began a conversation with him. It was easy to tell that Phil was not excited about school. Then Gothard said:

WALK

and the list goes on and on. "But pastor," you say, "I have been a Christian for many years and I still struggle with many of the things you have mentioned. I feel so powerless to deal with these things. Is there any hope for Me?" Let me assure you that by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit the victory has already been won for you by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5) and we "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). In Ephesians 6:17 we are told that the "sword of the Spirit ... is the word of God." Now, let us connect some of these verses of Scripture together so we can get a better understanding of how the Holy Spirit can bring us freedom to love and serve the Lord with joy and gladness.

When we "abide in the word," we will feel the effects of the "love of God" in concert with the "sword of the Spirit" which is able to "judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Through the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit "you shall know the truth" concerning these thoughts and intentions."

Many Christians don't realize that there is a battle for the control of their

minds. If the devil can deceive you he can control you. He is capable of putting deceptive thoughts into our minds and convince us that they are ours. Take David, for example: "Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel" (I Chronicles 1:21). Do you think that David would have numbered Israel if he had known that it was Satan who had put this thought in his mind? I think not. Every thought and intention must be judged good or evil. However, we are incapable of doing this apart from the Holy Spirit. We tend to make excuses, rationalize, or justify in some way our thoughts and evil intentions. Only the Holy Spirit, using His sword, the Word, can separate the lying thoughts and evil intentions from what is true and good. Once they are judged evil we must "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:3). In other words, replace evil thoughts with good thoughts and the lie with the truth.

For purposes of illustration consider the devil's lie, "God has forsaken you." this lie is taken captive with the truth, "And the Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you, He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

As a pastor and counselor I have experi-

"Phil, it took me nine years to get through the first eight grades. I didn't like school until a friend suggested a worthwhile Christian activity. What do you think it was?" Phil didn't try to guess and then Mr. Gothard began to explain that it was meditation. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:6-7: "You must think constantly about these commandments ... You must teach them to your children and talk about them when you sit at home (at mealtimes), when you walk along the road (to and from school), when you lie down and when you get up." After meditating on a brief portion of Scripture seven times a day, one would perhaps have it memorized.

I determined to begin meditating on God's Word. The next morning I asked the Holy Spirit to shed light on the Word as I opened my Bible to Mark 4, the parable of the four soils. He was faithful and I saw

enced and witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit overcome the forces of evil and set people free from various forms of bondage. Some of the things from which they have been set free are: painful memories of an abusive childhood, anxiety attacks, various kinds of fears, feelings of unworthiness, feelings of rejection, feelings of abandonment, feelings of bitterness towards those who have offended them, feelings of guilt and shame, and freedom to know the joy of their salvation. One who had been set free said to me: "For the first time in my life, I am experiencing the joy of my salvation." Another said: "The Scriptures have come to life for me." Another said: "I have a much greater focus when I pray and study the Scriptures." The power of the Holy Spirit is awesome and every Christian has the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no need to lead a defeated life.

Walk in the Spirit and you will discern the devil's schemes and deceptive thoughts. Your life will be filled with joy and you will truly bear the fruit of the Spirit.



— Rev. Harris Van Someren
Our Savior's
and Drummond
Free Lutheran
Mason, Wisconsin

clearly that the cares of this life were "thorns" choking the Word and making it unfruitful in my life. Jesus hadn't been real to me.

Back in the states on furlough in 1964, I was given Stanley Voke's book, *Reality*. He states that brokenness is basic in the life of a Christian. God used that book and Basilea Schink's *Realities and Repentance — The Joy-Filled Life*. Attending special meetings and seeing friends and relatives letting the Holy Spirit have His way in their lives increased my hunger and thirst for the Word. It became the "joy and rejoicing of my heart." Life was truly revolutionized for me.

The Holy Spirit had given me life and light and now He filled my heart with genuine love for Jesus and others. I could not think of anyone I didn't love.

Romans 8:2 became my favorite Bible verse: "For the law of the Spirit of life has made me free from the law of sin and death." I now had true liberty. I could relax!

Each of our four children had been at death's door and I had always developed panic headaches. Now I was free as I allowed the Holy Spirit to take over. One day back in Bolivia I would be tested. Our son broke his wrist and a few hours later our 12-year-old daughter fell as she was attempting to jump from the top of our patio wall to the new church construction and struck the cement banister along the outside stairway. I was in the house when the gatekeeper carried her in, dripping with blood. I drove Beth to the hospital and watched the doctor sew her leg that had been split horizontally. I could not have done that before! For me to experience perfect peace and tranquillity in the midst of this was a tremendous blessing.

Now it was a joy to share the Word in many places, including hospitals which I had previously maintained was not my forte. We spent time in my ladies' Bible classes each week memorizing Scripture because many of these dear women were illiterate. How their eyes lit up when they grasped precious truths bringing freedom to their hearts as well!

I can't thank God enough for His Spirit's continual presence in my life today. Many years have passed since I experienced that real "joy and rejoicing of my heart." He continues to teach, comfort and guide me through all of life's experiences.

**"Now I was
free as I
allowed the
Holy Spirit
to take
over."**

— by Mrs.
Margaret Küttelson
Helmer Lutheran
Newark, Illinois

It was in February of 1993, that I first met Bishop Harald Kalnins, the 83-year-old head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States (ELKRO). Little did I realize as I visited with him in his office that winter day in Latvia that the Lord would allow us to return to eastern Europe to assist in the ministry of this widely-scattered church group. What a privilege it has been this past year to become better acquainted with this man of God!

Born in 1911 in St. Petersburg, then the capital of Russia, Harald Kalnins was only six years old when the Bolshevik Revolution shook that city, the Russian nation and, ultimately, the world. His family moved to Latvia after the revolution where he grew to manhood. After studying theology in Switzerland and serving as a vicar in France for two years, he returned to Latvia.

In the 1940s, he along with many of his countrymen, were forced into the German army. There he served as a chaplain. When the Russians took over Latvia in 1944, he was sent to a prison camp along with many other soldiers. He tells of God's faithfulness to him during that difficult time, sometimes in miraculous ways.

Bishop Kalnins later served as pastor of the Jesus Lutheran Church in central Riga for many years. More than one person has told me how his Bible-based and Christ-centered preaching filled the church with eager, note-taking listeners. A few of those "note-takers," however, were KGB monitors who were particularly incensed at the presence of young people in the services. In the providence of God, the preaching of Bishop Kalnins was somehow tolerated by the KGB and continued unabated for some time.

During the long years under communism, Bishop Kalnins was very concerned about the spiritual welfare of Lutherans in Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. German Lutherans have a long history in Russia, having been invited by Czar Peter the Great in the early 18th Century to come and help the Russian people farm more effectively. Peter gave land for the churches and helped them build their first buildings. By the time of the Revolution in 1917, there was a large Lutheran church in Russia.

It was under Joseph Stalin that the Lutheran church suffered the most. Stalin uprooted Germans from their prosperous farmlands in the Volga region and elsewhere and sent them to Siberia and other remote places. During World War II, Germans were persona non grata in Russia and many were killed and the church as an organization was destroyed. As far as the records were concerned, there was no more Lutheran church. However, God preserved His church amidst the carnage and wherever the believers went or were sent, they worshiped and prayed together in secret. By the 1960s all but one or two of their pastors had been killed or had died in a prison camp. Concerned for the spiritual welfare of these Lutheran people, Bishop Kalnins began traveling from place to place to encourage them with the ministry of the Word of God. This was a very dangerous undertaking. There were many "eyes and ears" for the KGB that reported anything unusual. However, word spread among the believers and he was invited to more and more places. He often ministered from morning until night, serving with a true "pastor's heart." Bibles were sent to Bishop Kalnins from Germany and he freely gave them out to the people.

CAMPUS DATES

May 20, 8 p.m.
AFLC Schools Spring Concert

May 21, 1 p.m.
Graduation for the Seminary and Bible School

May 31 - June 4
Summer Teams training week

July 7-13
3rd International Lutheran Bible Institute-School Conference

July 18-22
Youth Leadership School

Summer Institute of Theology
July 25-29
August 1-5

Fall Quarter-AFLBS, Sept. 12

In the latter part of the 1980s, the church finally began to experience some freedom. When it came time to organize the Lutheran church of Russia once again, Bishop Kalnins was installed since he was widely known and loved. The most pressing need after he became bishop in the fall of 1988 was to send out Bibles. For a long time, 80-100 Bibles a day were mailed from his office to all parts of the former Soviet Union. Though they have virtually no church buildings and no pastors who have received seminary training, the Lutheran church in Russia and other former Soviet states has experienced a wonderful resurgence. There are now 650 ELKRO congregations, most of them "house" churches served by a host of humble, godly lay pastors.

— Dr. Francis Monseth
AFLTS Dean on a teaching sabbatical in Latvia.

Our Chaplain Writes

Quite often, I get asked: "How can we help to support our military chaplains?" Here are some suggestions:

First, remember to minister to those from your own congregation who enter the military. Recognize that you will be their "home church," even if they are gone for 20 years. Rarely will military personnel put down roots and officially join a congregation. Too many moves and disturbances cause strong community ties and church membership to be quite rare. If the person has been raised in an AFLC congregation, it is not likely they will find one nearby and they may tend to church hop. Bear in mind that someday they will get out, and many will be returning to their home communities. How well you maintain ties with them may well determine their choice of a home church when they return; or it may even influence the choice of where to live.

Ways to keep the bond of Christian fellowship

1. Publicly note enlistments in the military; a small gift would be very appropriate such as a Bible or devotional book.

2. Remember them in prayer regularly.

3. Put military personnel on your mailing list: weekly bulletins, monthly newsletters, occasional personal letters, tapes or transcripts of sermons and even a gift subscription to *The Lutheran Ambassador*. (Do not judge your "success" by return mail, that may not be too regular.)

4. Remember birthdays and anniversaries.

5. If an AFLC congregation is nearby, send a letter of introduction to the pastor and to the service member with information about the congregation. Do this a couple of times as persistence equals concern.

What Can We Do?

6. When the service member is going to be home for leave, a low-key welcome and a pastoral/elder visit is definitely in order.

7. The key is to communicate your continued concern!

If you have a military installation nearby, a couple of additional suggestions: (Your congregation's continued care and concern for



other service members will be noted by those who have enlisted from your church!)

1. Exercise a cooperative approach. The chaplains who serve on that installation are responsible for pastoral care to their soldiers/airmen/sailors even though they may have community church connections. There is still regulatory requirement for such care! In terms of military-service member relation, the chaplain will be able to address many issues that a civilian clergyman cannot. An approach that is perceived as "proselytizing," however, will not be supported.

If you coordinate with the head chaplain of the base with a "how can we help" attitude, you will find doors of ministry opened. An excellent means of building cooperation is to invite chaplains to speak to your congregation for such things

as Memorial Day, Veterans Day and Armed Forces Day or some other special event. They do not have to be AFLC (or even Lutheran) to be a great blessing! As they see your legitimate concern for the souls and welfare of the service members, the evangelical-minded chaplains will be much more cooperative in future endeavors. Often they will refer people to you for stable congregational care. You may even find a chaplain who adopts you as "home away from home" when he does not have a preaching commitment.

2. Recognize that ministry to the military is primarily a mission project. I do not believe it is possible, based on my experiences at Wichita Falls and Sheppard Air Force Base, to build a congregation solely or even in large part on the basis of service members. They, like college students, are generally there only for the short term. They are an outreach ministry!

This is not to say that some will not join the congregation and perhaps even stay if they retire in the area, but this cannot be the emphasis. Rather, seek to minister Christ to them in the short time you have them. Get them involved but recognize that your relationship may well be short-term. Only a congregation that is growing and developing independently of the military community will be able to effectively reach out to them on a continuing basis.

The bottom line is that you must approach this ministry with the attitude of giving without thought of receiving. But then, should this not be our attitude in all of ministry?

Hopefully, you will find these suggestions helpful. Ultimately, ministering to the military personnel from your congregation or around your area boils down to this: Prayerfully, consistently seeking God's will as you reach out in love!

— Chaplain (CPT)
Michael Crowell
Fort Hood, Texas

What is 'The greatest tragedy'?

Just the other day a tract came to me through the mail. It was entitled "The Greatest Tragedy" and it told the story of how the thousands of people of Noah's day (Genesis 7) had watched Noah building the ark, but as Jesus said according to Matthew 24:39: "They knew not until the flood came and took them all away." Again the writer made reference to Genesis 19:14 where we read of Lot speaking to his sons-in-law, urging them to flee from the condemned cities of the plain, "But he seemed to them as one that mocked," and, of course, they perished in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. These, the writer of the tract stated, were the greatest tragedies.

As I read that tract I wondered, "Isn't there also another tragedy of almost equal magnitude taking place right in our churches today: Yes, right in the Lutheran churches in America?" (I cannot speak for other denominations.)

I live near the city of Phoenix, Arizona, a city which, with its satellite cities, counts almost two million permanent residents, with another one million coming each year to spend the winter months. In this area there are between 75 and 100 "Lutheran" congregations. Those congregations promote many social activities on a regular basis but it has become increasingly difficult in recent years to find even one congregation with a regularly scheduled Bible study program. For some unexplained reason we Lutherans have succumbed to the idea that all a person needs in order to live a victorious Christian life is a bit of Sunday School and a brief period of confirmation instruction.

This is far from the truth. Experience as well as God's inspired Word tells us we need much more than these.

In His Great Commission, recorded for us in the 28th chapter of Matthew's gospel account, Jesus clearly gave us the formula for making Christian disciples: "Baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and *teaching them to observe all things which I have commanded you.*"

I firmly believe in the validity of Christian baptism as it is taught in our Lutheran doctrine. I believe that the Holy Spirit enters a child's life at Holy Christian Baptism and begins His work in that young life. But if that child is not properly instructed in "all things" which Jesus has commanded, do we not hinder the sacred work which the Spirit of Christ would accomplish in that life? Should not the teachings written in the New Testament Epistles by the inspired servants of our Lord Jesus be taught and re-taught, meditated upon and discussed throughout our adult lives? These Epistles give us the clearest instructions in how to live holy and fruitful lives to the glory of our God and Savior.

Let us then in the congregations of our Association make every effort to be a Bible-teaching church. Then we will be carrying out our Savior's Great Commission to the fullest.

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen" (II Peter 3:18).

— by Rev. Robert D. Giles
Laveen, Arizona

"Let us ... be a Bible-teaching church."

It's the

The organ's last refrain still echoes. The lights dim. The congregation grows quiet. The pastor begins the sermon.

Sunday after Sunday, Christians everywhere experience this pattern. The same church, the same faces, the same intonations and accents. Yet how different are the hearts, minds, and needs of the listeners.

What am I looking for at sermon time? What should a sermon do for me? How can a sermon help to answer my deepest questions and fulfill my greatest needs?

Above all, what I want in a sermon is God's Word in all its power and purity. But I want it expressed in words, images, and ideas that are familiar and meaningful in my life. I look for a sense of togetherness, a reawakening, a new slant, a laugh, a tear, a slap on the back combined with a slap on the hand, an inward renewal, and encouragement to do better — not because I ought to, but because with God's help I want to.

But church going can become simply a habit, and so can sermon giving. Church services must follow a pattern, but our reactions to them must not. So too with sermons: a pattern, yes; a conditioned reflex, no! A ritualistic greeting, a hurried reading of the text, a 20-minute explanation of words that are themselves beautifully self-explanatory, then a flowery finish — that's not a sermon, it's waste of time!

I see a worship service as a step — neither the first nor the last — on a Christian's journey toward heaven. It's an oasis, a refresher, a refuge, a renewal. The sermon is an opportunity for giving us the feeling that we've moved ahead since last Sunday and now stand in a different

Sermon

place. Each sermon should be a new campsite with a new view, new sounds, new feelings, new experiences — not just another stop at a chain restaurant that's exactly like the last five we visited, with the same architecture, the same menu, the same indigestion.

For me, worship on Sunday morning, and especially the sermon, must be a regrouping, not a withdrawal; a renewal of faith, not a restatement of belief.

Yes, I've often heard the kind of sermon that gives me these things. It's hard to say exactly what makes them so. No pastor or lay person can be inspiring or inspired every Sunday morning. But I know that certain things help me find what I'm seeking — for example, a surprise beginning to open sleepy eyes, or a text that's woven into the message, not pompously read and then plodded around for endless minutes.

Pastor, don't read; talk to me. Enjoy yourself. Talk about tools, the obstacles, the accents of daily life to which all of us must apply God's Word. Help me to know how.

Inspire me with the thrill of angel voices, forgiveness, faith, and eternal life — but don't cloud them with oratory and dull them with academic jargon. Open a door for me but don't try to push me through it. Tell me where to look, not where not to look.

Do these things for me in your sermon, Pastor, and I will be eternally grateful.

— by Dr. Thomas H. Peterson
Wausau, Wisconsin

(This article was submitted by an AFLC pastor. The article first appeared in *The Lutheran Standard* a number of years ago and is reprinted with the permission of the author.)

Our President Writes

The AFLC - An Experiment

"The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations is ... an experiment in extreme ecclesiastical democracy and decentralization. It is a searching test of faith in the power of the Spirit of God." These words were written a generation ago in reference to the former Lutheran Free Church, and revised for an AFLC pamphlet included in informational packets that are distributed to interested friends.

One of the main concerns that customarily arises whenever I conduct an informational meeting or answer inquiries involves this same issue. People are pleased to hear that we recognize no authority above the local congregation, and this concept seems to be a refreshing change from the tangled church politics that many have experienced in their current affiliations. Yet what about when a congregation has a problem, for example, with the pastor? Shouldn't the church body through its elected officials have the power to intervene for the good of the work? Aren't there circumstances when some authority over the local congregation is good and proper?

The main problem with placing authority outside of the local congregation is that it is not biblical. God's Word identifies "church" with the local congregation or with the Holy Christian Church, and one would be hard-pressed to present a biblical case for synods or associations to have power over them.

Other problems will obviously flow from the first. Who is the most likely to know that is best for a local congregation, the members or the district and national officials? If you answer by choosing the latter, then your problem may be a deficient grasp of the biblical and Reformation principles known as the priesthood of all believers.

This problem may also point to the need for a church history refresher course. Even a superficial survey should indicate how often the leadership of denominations have erred, as faithful lay people persevered by God's grace, in spite of their leaders' failures. Our forefathers were convinced that it is better to trust the Spirit of God than to place our faith in human safeguards, and this is still the commitment of the AFLC today.

"An experiment" ... yes, it is true. Perhaps some definitions of this word would not apply, but there is one that surely does: a test designed to illustrate a known law or principle. The Word of God is spirit and life, powerful and effective; the Holy Spirit dwells personally in all believers, equipping them for service. We are well acquainted with these principles, yet may fail to find them practical in matters of church polity.

The same pamphlet in which the AFLC is called an experiment affirms in another paragraph that we were conceived to be an "ecclesiastical and spiritual haven" in American Lutheranism. Putting the best construction on this statement, it is a declaration of our unique mission as a church body, not only to proclaim the gospel to the lost, but to present an illustration to our denominational family that a fellowship of free and living Lutheran congregations is possible by God's grace, subject only to His Word and Spirit.

May God grant us discernment as our mission is defined, a clarity of commitment as it is challenged, and perseverance to press on in His power.

— Rev. Robert L. Lee

To the Editor:

What about an evangelist in the AFLC? As I have observed most of the special meetings I have attended recently, I have been sadly aware that there are three generations that are absent. It is the 50 and under crowd. Thankfully there are exceptions where attendance at special meetings includes teenagers, 20 something through 50 something, and the faithful 60 plus age group.

Who comes to special meetings? Do the unsaved flock to the door when they see the poster or the news release in the paper?

And then we say the preaching is for the edification of the saints. I, for one, love special meetings. At the last series in our church, our "evangelist" said, "There's no place I'd rather be on this earth." I agree, and I think that most in attendance would have agreed.

To the Editor:

The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations has a great heritage in its roots in the Lutheran churches in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

I am more familiar with the former Augustana Synod. I attended Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, which was a thoroughly Lutheran seminary with a strong pietistic and evangelistic spirit. Pastor Maynard Force told me how the seminary president Dr. Sibelius took him along one summer doing evangelistic work. Dr. Sibelius took Evald Conrad with him another summer doing the same type of ministry.

In 1931 a new president came to Augustana Seminary with a more intellectual emphasis. Three new professors joined the faculty that same year. I sat in their classes and realized there was a tremendous difference from the days of Dr. Sibelius, when a personal relationship with Christ and a commitment to Him was stressed.

In the following years the fruit of this emphasis during the time

This, however, is not evangelism.

If this is not evangelism, when are we doing evangelism? The sad reality is that we think having special meetings, which aren't very evangelistic, absolves us for the year of our command to evangelize.

Thankfully we believe in the preaching of the Word which is in itself evangelistic. But, we are all called to witness — year around.

When we did have an evangelist, according to my knowledge, the problem was not the AFLC, or pastors, or annual conference, but the offering plate. In some churches the offerings did not even cover the mileage.

From my perspective as a young pastor, I have noticed an amazing complacency regarding the salvation of our confirmands. Too many of us shake our heads in dismay about the many, many confirmands who "graduate" from church but do little about it.

Let me make my point. How many of us got saved as teenagers and younger? How many of us got saved at Bible camp and youth events? I dare say that it would be as high as 80%. Statistics bear this out. We need to be about the business of evangelism. Evangelism seems to be incredibly effective on people under 20. We are told that up to half the world's population is in their youth. In my mind we need to do all that we can to see that our kids are evangelized in the home, at church, in active youth groups, in confirmation, at camps and in Bible school. We would be on the cutting edge of ministry to channel our financial resources to youth ministry. Let's get a full-time youth evangelist resource person, and let's do it this year! We've got to put a stop to kids "graduating" from our churches.

Rev. Tom Tuura
DeKalb, Illinois

letters to the editor

of Dr. Sibelius was so evident in the former Augustana Synod. The first meeting to discuss the formation of the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI) was composed of Augustana pastors. They immediately recognized they needed to invite representatives of other Lutheran groups to attend succeeding meetings and LBI became an inter-Lutheran effort. Evald Conrad of Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis invited some of his seminary classmates to meet together during the third week of January. Out of this meeting the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement (LEM) was born. The World Mission Prayer League came out of the vision and leadership of LBI, Paul Lindell and C.O. Grandlund. It too was inter-Lutheran from the early days. I see a clear connection between pastors of the Augustana Semi-

nary under Dr. Sibelius and the vision and impetus for the beginning of these "Free Movements" that have been such a blessing to the Lutheran church in our country through the years.

From the beginning of my seminary training, I have seen less of this emphasis and the resulting loss of spiritual, vibrant life in many congregations that once preached and taught it openly and unashamedly. Will this happen in the AFLC? I hope not.

It was this commitment to the emphasis of a living, personal faith in Jesus Christ that led me to take part in the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement and, finally, to be its director for nine years. It was sheer wonder and blessing to see people, young and old, some who had been members in the Lutheran church for many years, come to assurance of salvation

To the Editor:

While visiting recently with a new member of our AFLC, this individual asked if we (AFLC) had an evangelist. Upon further fellowship we agreed about the need. We were in harmony that an evangelical pastor is not necessarily an evangelist. Yes, an evangelist is a gift and calling of God!

It is interesting to note that according to God's Word the calling of God to be an evangelist is as necessary as the calling to be a pastor, teacher, missionary, etc. (Ephesians 4:11, Acts 21:8). Tragically, I believe we, in our AFLC, have overlooked this specific calling and ministry. We have prayerfully and consciously chosen and called pastors, teachers, etc. but not an evangelist(s) for a goodly number of years.

Other than a heaven-sent revival throughout our AFLC, I believe one of our greatest needs is to call at least one or more men of God to be our evangelist(s). This is not putting down or minimizing the efforts of pastors and laity who are gifted in the same and available on a limited basis.

It has been a blessing and encouragement to me to read in our church periodical recently expressed concerns for calling an evangelist. Most certainly we who

and renewed commitment to their Savior.

The response of a person, long lost in sin, being set free by the power of the Holy Spirit through a clear call to commitment and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, is something one can never forget. Homes are restored and relationships renewed with all the praise to the Lord. May we never stray from this emphasis of the personal relationship and the call to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Without this continuing emphasis, church bodies die spiritually, slowly but surely.

Rev. Laurel M. Udden
Minneapolis, Minnesota

know and love Jesus as our personal Saviour need to do the work of an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5); that is God's plan. However, this is distinctively different than the gift and calling of God to be an evangelist.

I believe, as we let God lead in this calling, we will hear of more souls being saved and God's people being renewed and revived and blessings and provisions will

follow for months and years to come, by His grace. Let us earnestly seek the face of the Lord and His guidance and earnestly pray about the same!

Praise God from whom all blessings flow as we seek to do His work here on earth as it is a great work because it is God's work!

Pastor Rodney Stueland
Kenyon, Minnesota

Partners In Prayer



"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Praise God for the safe return of the AFLBS choirs from their tours to Texas and the West Coast. May the testimony in word and music left in the congregations continue to bear fruit.

Pray for the church planting efforts going on in the Quad-City area sponsored by the Iowa-Illinois District Church Planting Committee. An ad is currently running in the local newspaper asking for a response from those who would be interested in an AFLC congregation in that area.

Praise God for the near completion of reprinting the *Believer Free From the Law* by C.O. Rosenius. Also being reprinted are Tanner's confirmation books. The Parish Education Department is thankful for recent progress on the development of the new Sunday School kindergarten material.

Pray for the Brazilian congregations that they might experience unity in spirit as they go forth with the gospel to their communities. **Pray** for the young Christians in Bateias that they might grow in Christ and develop leadership in the congregation.

Praise God for the young people committed to serve the Lord this summer on the Ambassador, Barnabas, Majesty, Cornerstone and FLY teams. **Pray** for the Lord's protection, wisdom and strength for each team member.

Pray for Home Missions Director Elden Nelson as he is in Texas this month working with people interested in Home Mission ministry. **Pray** for the Committee as they seek God's will in giving leadership and the channeling of funds to the many needs throughout the nation.

Pray for safety and good health of our AFLC missionaries. **Pray** also that each might be encouraged with a renewed love and vision for the lost.

Pray for God's supply of pressing Parish Education needs of practical office equipment such as computer, secretary's desk and chair, and file cabinets. Financial needs continue as the budgeted monthly goal of approximately \$5,500 is being only 30% met.

Pray for AFLC President Robert Lee and each of the faculty and staff at the headquarters and schools in Minneapolis.

Praise God for the blessed year of teaching and encouraging the Lutheran church in Eastern Europe with the ministry of Dr. Francis Monseth and family. **Pray** for their safe return June 7.

Pray for the 32nd Annual Conference of the AFLC in Valley City, North Dakota, that God's will might be done in all things and that each delegate will leave refreshed and encouraged to "stand firm in the faith."

PEOPLE and PLACES

Bruce, South Dakota — Grace Lutheran held a reception for 21 new members on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1994.

Amarillo, Texas — The first Thursday each month, Rev. Joseph Schultz, Tulia, drives 45 miles to lead a Bible study at a home in Amarillo. The fellowship

group is excited to see the size grow from two families to five since it began in January 1994.

Ferndale, Washington — Triumph Lutheran Church will be observing the 25th year of their church building on Sunday, June 5, 1994, at 3 p.m. Golgotha and First Lutheran merged in 1967 and began building a new church. The first service was June 1, 1969. Triumph recently installed new pews and new carpet and they will also be dedicated.

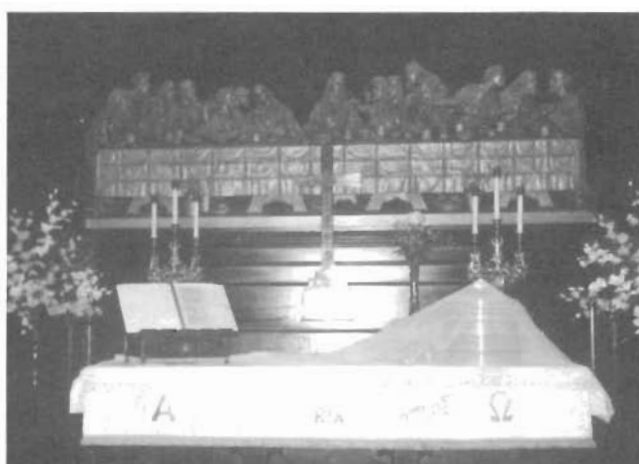
Greenbush, Minnesota — The Church Council of United Free Lutheran Church recently presented its first "Nehemiah Award." The 1993 award went to Mrs. Donald (Sharon) Christianson for being a Kingdom builder. Sharon is a willing worker with the Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and the Community Blood Bank sponsored by United Congregation. The idea of the Nehemiah Award came from Abiding Word Ministries.



Deshler, Nebraska — Pictured are the men from the Nebraska-Kansas District of the AFLC who gathered in Milford, Nebraska for a Midwinter Men's Retreat at the end of February 1994. Intern Randy Nelson led the retreat which featured teaching videos from the 1993 national Promise Keepers Men's Conference in Boulder, Colorado. There was a great response from many of the men to the message of being a "promise keeper" to God, our families and to our local church. Several are making plans to attend the National Conference this year at Boulder.

Fargo, North Dakota — St. Paul's Free Lutheran sponsored an AFLC informational meeting on April 17, 1994, in the South Fargo area. AFLC President Robert Lee spoke at the evening meeting. St. Paul's is exploring the possibility of mothering a new congregation in that area. For more information contact Rev. James Fugleberg (701) 237-5555.

Beverly Eikenberry, 63, passed away on April 8, 1994. She was a founding member of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Kirkland, Washington.



Indianapolis, Indiana — Pictured is the recently restored oak carving of the Last Supper located above the altar at St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Carved by Alois Lang, a German craftsman, the solid oak masterpiece was originally hung in 1922, at a cost of \$1,000. Contributions for the refurbishing came from nearly every family at St. Mark's in keeping with the spirit of the original memorial to Rev. William Sigmund, D.D.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences - January 1 - March 31, 1994

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN MARCH	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$256,591.00	\$19,866.40	\$48,759.76	19
Seminary	148,000.00	5,200.72	22,249.85	15
Bible School	232,562.00	11,840.09	34,824.80	15
Home Missions	319,086.00	18,680.87	47,588.65	15
World Missions	342,788.00	26,683.87	79,457.97	23
Capital Investment	37,395.00	1,932.33	4,317.50	12
Parish Education	67,868.00	2,433.16	7,231.27	11
ARC	8,600.00	324.58	990.46	12
Church Extension	10,000.00	320.58	1,054.12	11
TOTALS	\$1,422,890.00	\$86,226.00	\$246,474.28	17
1993 Goal 9%	\$1,235,434.74	\$117,742.25	\$117,742.25	9
1994 Goal 17%				

Listening to the Counselor

Our community has some wonderful Christian counselors. We also have a lot of hurting people living messed up lives. It doesn't seem to make sense. Why aren't the counselors getting everybody straightened out?

Counselors have a problem. Their advice does little good for the person who does not listen to them. Many counselors have great wisdom to share, but they encounter a number of closed ears.

The greatest Counselor of all also meets with a lot of closed ears. The night before He went to the cross Jesus said he would send another Counselor who would be with us forever — the Spirit of truth who would guide us into all truth (John 14:16; 16:13). On Pentecost we celebrate the day, recorded in the book of Acts, when the early believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. We also remember that the Holy Spirit is active and present in the world today. The Spirit is still desiring to teach and guide God's children. Like other counselors, though, the Spirit is seeking people who will listen.

Listening to the Spirit of God may sound like a rather mystical subject. For some of us, the type of Christian work we want to be involved in is the seemingly more practical, hands-on type of service. Ask us to put up some tables and chairs, vacuum a carpet, paint a wall or bring something to a potluck and we are ready to go. But listening to the Spirit of God ... many of us know it is something the Bible calls on us to do but the honest truth is we are a little scared and confused about the whole subject. We want to keep on fixing the building or working in the kitchen or making a visit or doing some other good thing so that we can avoid doing that which is so foreign to our nature.

God wants to speak to us. He invites us to open up the Bible and let His Spirit speak through that Word to our hearts. This involves using the Bible not simply as a club which can smash our opponent's arguments. It is not to be a supermarket we rush through looking for some appealing quotes for witnessing, preaching or teaching. It is not a mere toy or book of catchy phrases that we can look to for some warm fuzzies when we are feeling bad. It is the living Word of God, through which the Spirit of God speaks to the deepest part of our being. We approach it as a subject coming to the King to hear the royal decree. We come as an eager student sitting at the feet of the world's greatest Teacher. We open it as an excited beloved who has received a letter from her lover and longs to hear what he has to say.

Each day, throughout the day, God has something to say to us. What an incredible truth that is: the Almighty God actually wants to be intimate and personal with us, listening to us, talking with us, walking with us through life. He shows the desire of His heart by sending His Spirit to be in us and with us. He is the perfect Counselor. How silly it is to have no interest in listening to His eternal wisdom. But do we listen?

I was in a discussion group recently when someone mentioned "listening to God." I was struck by the phrase and asked myself, "How much time in an average day do I really spend listening to God?" It is easy to go through the prayer list, prepare the Bible study and message, do what we feel we are suppose to do, and in the whole process find ourselves spending little time that can truly be called listening to God.

Listening time involves following the call of God to "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). In this noisy, fast-paced world, we need to spend much time doing what may seem like an odd thing of being still, of being quiet, of not trying to produce something or get something done, but listening to the Spirit of God speak through the Bible. God has something to say to us. What an exciting thought! What an encouragement to listen!

Laugh a Little

A recent study said that, on average, a child laughs 400 times a day. The average adult, on the other hand, laughs only 15 times a day.

I do not think Paul was referring to laughter when he spoke about putting childish ways behind him (I Corinthians 13:11). Verses that may have more application to the subject are in Luke 18:15-17 where Jesus calls on us to become like little children.

Yes, the world gives us much reason for sadness. But God gives us great reason to rejoice and laugh and be glad. God loves us. Our standing with Him is secure, when we are trusting in Jesus and His death and resurrection. God is still on the throne. Jesus is coming again.

When we know Christ as Lord and Savior, we have a cause for rejoicing that overshadows the darkness. We can be like little children who make clear to the world that we enjoy belonging to our heavenly Father.

How Can Miracles be Possible

Can we really trust what the Bible says about miracles? There are many in the world and some in the church who do not believe in the miracles of the Bible.

There are three different ways people can look at and respond to miracles. The first way to look at miracles is to **wrestle** with God. A person who wrestles with God would roll their eyeballs and shake their head at one who believes in miracles. Today many people balk at the notion of miracles. Some claim that the miracles we read about in the Bible are nothing but fictitious folklore. Other people, however, simply **walk** away from God. They don't wrestle with God so much as they just walk away and show no interest, not really concerned whether Christ turned water into wine or not. The third way a person can respond to miracles, however, is to **worship** God! This person has become convinced that the miracles recorded in the Bible can be found to be trustworthy.

The miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is one miracle that stands above all the rest. When Jesus Christ predicted His own death and resurrection and then three days afterward actually "pulled it off" without a hitch, every other mention of miracles became not only possible but expected in comparison. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the "glue" that holds Christianity together. Without faith in the resurrection there is no Christianity. Let's examine a few important pieces of evidence that point to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First, let's address the existence of the Christian Church around the world. The history of the Christian Church can be traced back to Palestine to the year 32 A.D. How did that come

about? By accident? Or was there a reason? History documents that a group of people from Antioch called Christians turned "the world upside down." They kept talking about the resurrection. The resurrection became the basis for their teaching, their living and their dying.

Let's not forget that the very first Christians were Jewish and they worshiped God on Saturday. But something happened which prompted them to change the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. That's a monumental change! People don't change those kinds of traditions easily.

Ask yourself: How easy would it be for the United States to move Independence Day from July Fourth to September 3? Very difficult, right? You just don't change something so important without good cause. Why would new Christians who traditionally worshiped on Saturday shift to Sunday? History records that a most phenomenal event took place in their lives to shift their holiest day of the week, and that event was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There were many eyewitnesses to the factual event of the resurrection. The eyewitness testimony was strong and very credible; it changed the lives of many people. Just days and hours prior to Christ's death, you might describe the most earnest followers of Christ as being a group of fright-

ened, cowardly men. But a few weeks after the crucifixion, these frightened men did a radical about-face: they became men of conviction and unspeakable courage. What brought about such a sharp change? Remember Peter the night before the crucifixion? He was afraid, disillusioned, and denied ever knowing Jesus Christ. yet 50 days later, we find Peter preaching his heart out on the resurrection of Jesus Christ — in Jerusalem, the very town where city officials were after his life! Peter and the other disciples were a radically changed group of men. Many of them died terrible deaths because of their insistence that they were witnesses of the resurrection. They were not crazy: they were changed by a miraculous fact of history.

Has the resurrection of Jesus Christ radically changed your life? Christ does not invite you to place your hope in a philosophy or a creed or even in a charismatic leader, dead or alive. Jesus Christ invites you to experience a relationship with God. That, too, is a great miracle performed by an Almighty and loving God: to know and love Jesus Christ as the Risen God!



— by Rev.
Jim Ritter