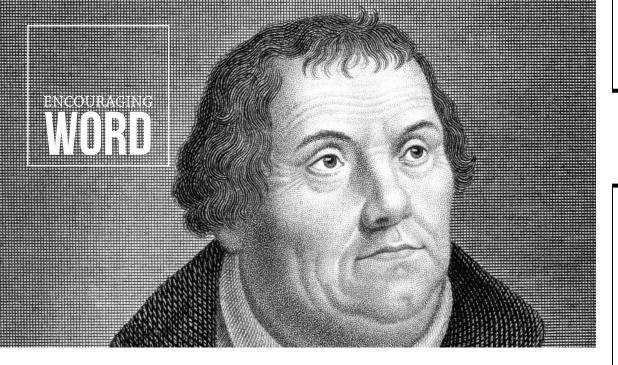
THE STANDARY 2017 LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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LUTHER: A PREACHER

BY PASTOR STEVE LOMBARDO

"As a preacher Luther stands in the first rank of those who by the ministry of God's Word have molded the characters and destinies of men. Among all his other offices and achievements—as scholar, theologian, author and leader—we must not forget that, first of all and chiefly, he was a preacher. At first he could hardly be persuaded to preach, but when he once got at it nothing could stop him."

(Edwin Dargan, A History of Preaching: Vol. 1)



e who are gifted with Reformation life give thanks to God for His ministry through Martin Luther. But as we reflect on Luther's ministry it is often his theology and valiant

stand for biblical truth that we recall. Surely, we do so to our spiritual profit. Yet, it is to our loss if we fail to remember Luther the preacher. For he was, indeed, a powerful proclaimer of God's Word. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, himself a renowned preacher of the twentieth century, described Luther as "pre-eminently a great preacher" (The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors). The heart of the Reformation beat with Bible-saturated, dynamic preaching. Luther ruled the pulpit with the Sword of Truth.

Joshua Bell played classical music on his costly Stradivarius violin for 45 minutes at a Washington, D.C., Metro station in 2007. During this time, more than 1,000 people rushed by, most of them oblivious to the majestic tones. This was all a part of a project arranged by the Washington *Post*—"... an experiment in context, perception, and priorities ... In a banal setting, at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?" Just three days earlier, Bell had performed a concert at Boston Symphony Hall, where ordinary seats sold for \$100. At the subway, he earned \$32 from

27 people who stopped long enough to listen (published April 10, 2007).

Like people seemingly unaware of the subway sounds, so were the masses whose lives for centuries hurried into eternity without hearing the melodies of the gospel. But then came preacher Martin! His white-hot preaching scorched the corrupt, complacent clergy and warmed ice cold souls frozen under false and futile preaching.

What prompted Luther's bold preaching? It was his view of the Scriptures. He said that, when the Bible speaks, we "assuredly believe that God Himself speaks unto us" (The Table Talk of Martin *Luther*). For him, the Bible did not simply contain the Word of God. Rather, he said, "... the entire Scriptures are assigned to the Holy Ghost," and, "The Scriptures have never erred" ("Luther and the Bible," *Inspiration and Interpretation*, by J. Theodore Mueller). Luther preached because the Bible is, indeed, the very Word of God. Captive to the truth, he delivered it to people who for too long had been captive to the devil's lies.

Lombardo, retired AFLC pastor living in Yorkville, Ill., spoke on "Luther As Preacher" during the fall Revival Conference at the AFLC Schools.



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sound bites

The focus of worship is not human experience, not a lecture, not entertainment, but Jesus Christ—His life, death, and resurrection.

-Robert E. Webber

To gather with God's people in united adoration of the Father is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer.

—Martin Luther

I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven.

—A.W. Tozer

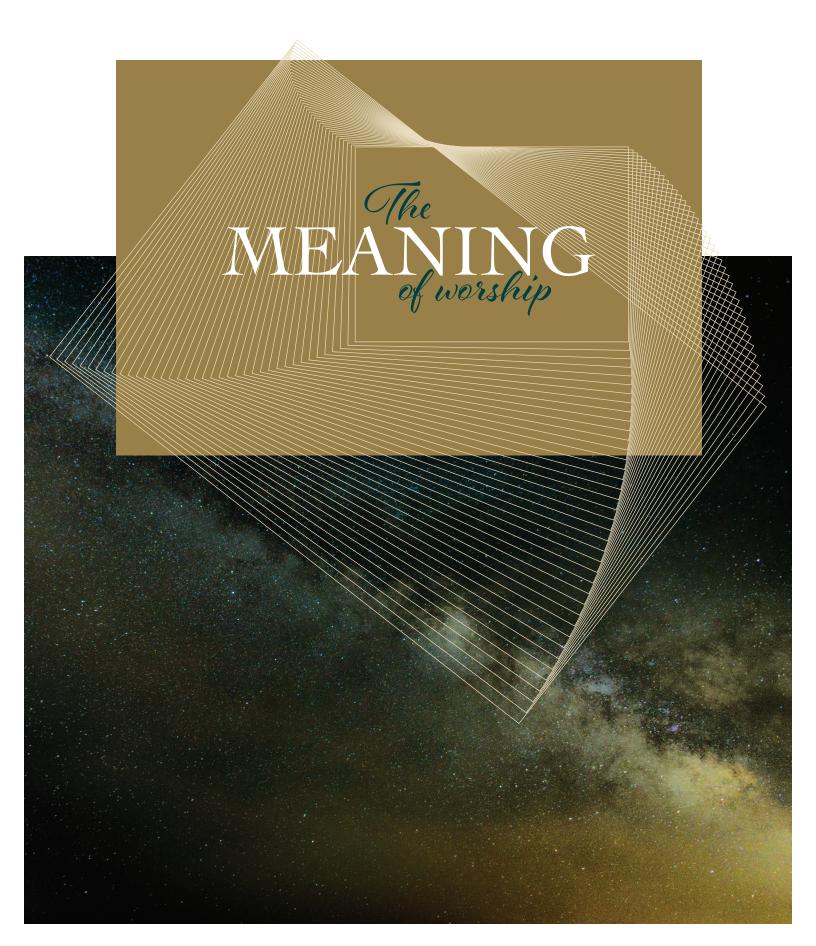
The worship of God is the most blessed of all earthly vocations. There is no higher or nobler task to which we can give our energies and devote our time. God is first. God is worthy. And we are privileged to enjoy fellowship with Him. —Bruce H. Leafblad

> A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell.

> > –C.S. Lewis

There is plenty of television. There are plenty of talk shows. There are plenty of comedians. But there is not plenty of worship of the true and living God.

—Charles R. Swindoll





hat is worship? This is a common question from and for Christians today. Yet, if you

were to ask 20 different people this question, you would likely get nearly 20 different answers.

Our English word "worship" comes from Anglo-Saxon origin, and has been shortened from worth-ship. In essence, when we worship someone or something, we are declaring that it is full of worth. Simply put, when we worship God, we declare that He is worthy.

Digging further into how the word worship is used in Scriptures, we see there are many Hebrew and Greek words that have been translated into our English word worship. The most common Hebrew word for worship is one that denotes genuine humility and the physical gesture of bowing down, prostrating oneself. Other words translated worship mean to revere, to fear, to serve (both in a religious service and in a daily moment-bymoment worship experience), to intensely seek and search out, to give thanks, to confess, and to praise.

Here are quite a broad range of words that have, at least at one point, been translated to worship. Overall, a majority of these words express a humility and reverence

by Andrew Hanson

toward God. And every single one of these words expresses an active response.

So, worship is declaring worth. It is actively expressing humility and reverence. But why worship? Tom Kraeuter, author of numerous books on worship and friend of many in the AFLC, wrote Worship is ... What?!, which tackles this question. Each chapter in the book offers a definition of worship based on different biblical examples. I'd like to share three of them.

First, worship is our reason for being. The first three of the Ten Commandments deal with our directive to worship God only and with the proper placement of God in our lives. The Israelites set up the tabernacle in the very center of the camp, and the arc of the covenant in the very center of the tabernacle, symbolizing that God should be the very center of importance to us. The first sentence of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father in heaven hallowed be Your name," is a statement of worship. Our main activity in heaven will be worship.

Second, worship is the response of man when he encounters either God or God's actions. Isaiah 6 is a well-used example when we consider worship. Here, Isaiah sees the Lord before him. His response: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!" Remember the encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel? Baal and his 450 prophets could not set their altar on fire. Then, after Elijah poured water on God's altar and then prayed that the Lord would show His people that He indeed was God, immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, stones, soil, and even the water. What was the response of the people? They fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—He is God! The Lord—He is God!" (I Kings 18:39). When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, it is recorded: "Then the disciples worshipped Him. 'Truly, you are the Son of God!' they exclaimed" (Matthew 14:33).

Kraeuter concludes this chapter, "For us today, even if we have not had an extraordinary encounter with God, we have all witnessed the reality of God and His works ... We have seen the wonder of God in His creation (Romans 1:20). We have experienced the acts of the Lord in His redemptive sacrifice. We have all 'seen' enough of God that worship should be our ongoing response."

Finally, worship is a way of life. The essence of worship is that God is preeminent all of the time, not just on Sunday morning. John 4:23 says that God is seeking worshipers. And I Corinthians 10:31 tells us to do everything for the glory of God. In Romans 12:1 we are instructed to offer our bodies as "a living sacrifice as our spiritual act of worship." In each of these cases, God is not looking for a one-hour-on-Sunday-morning commitment, but a way of life.

So, what is worship? Worship is a natural response in which we declare God worthy. We come before Him in humility and reverence for what He has done for us. We give Him praise for creating us, for redeeming us, and for working in us. As we seek Scripture to understand more of who God is, we offer ourselves unto the Lord in worship. Martin Luther summarized worship well: "Our dear Lord Himself may speak to us through His holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and praise."

Hanson, the music director at the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn., is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

hat, exactly, should the content of our worship be? This loaded question is often analyzed.

Many readers believe this content should not veer from the "Order of Morning Service II" liturgy from the Concordia Hymnal, using the historic liturgy's repetition as the primary means of faith formation each Sunday morning.

Other readers believe that in order to reach new people we should do all we can to become relevant.

Ironically, one of the purposes of the Concordia Hymnal's second worship service was to help simplify the historic liturgy to make it more relevant to those going through its trimmed-down order. Similarly, the confession of faith, confession of sin, absolution, and much of the poetry from historic hymnody are just as relevant, if not more so, for today as newer musical elements of worship.

Too often worship planners in the church are told that we need to make a choice. "New styles and music are going to reach the young people—you'd better have a modern service!" But wait, "Millennials are flocking to churches that have a traditional, liturgical style you'd better have that!"

Author Bryan Chapell urges us to think beyond issues of either/or and focus on the function of whatever we choose to include. He writes, "The problem with choosing between any of these values in Christ-

by Ryan Egan

centered worship is that there is biblical warrant for each. If our goal is to present the gospel, then there has to be some structure to the truths we want to communicate. At the same time, the varieties of people and circumstances we address will necessitate judgment about how best to present those truths. The witness of the gospel requires some structure, but it requires some freedom too" (Christ-Centered Worship, 137).

I've been a long-time proponent of what's called convergent worship. Instead of dividing your church into two separate services or doing essentially the same thing by providing a blended service (which often looks like two mini-churches in one service), this approach helps ancient and new converge. It takes a lot of work, humility, and graciousness from everyone in the church, however, to function.

This convergent process declares that hymns from 1620 are still worth singing, recognizing their staying power, and songs from 2016 should not be discounted, acknowledging the creativity of new generations. It forces organists and drummers, classical pianists and bass players, guitarists and brass players to "play nicely together" in more than one sense of the term. Personal preference is replaced by the commitment to "outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10).

When this attitude is cultivated, the congregation is presented with a wonderful solution for the content of the worship service. Elements that retell and remember the gospel can always be present. Chapell lists them as: adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition and intercession, instruction, communion/fellowship, and charge and blessing.

While these elements could be labeled the same in each Sunday's order, they don't have to look the same. Adoration could include "Praise to the Lord, The Almighty," or, "I Stand In Awe." Confession could include the traditional confession of sin or singing Schumaker and Ward's "Not In Me." The charge could include Matt Redman's version of the Aaronic blessing or the Keith and Kristyn Getty's beautiful modern "Benediction" hymn.

Including many people and preferences within the worship service promotes variety and unity while keeping the service in a style and format that, while historically grounded, is still relevant. Martin Luther himself, in his radical shift in how the reformed Mass looked, desired this same thing: "Luther wanted the worship service to be a participatory experience, in keeping with his understanding of church being a community of faithful people praising God for his salvation ... but Luther also expected the worship service to be in their vernacular ... Commitment to the 'priesthood of believers' led not only to the Bible [being translated] into German but also to significant transitions in liturgical practice," writes Chapell.

Today's vernacular looks dramatically different than it did in the mid-1600s. The idea that the content of our services might be completely foreign to many who enter our doors must be considered.

The temptation to enter into conflicts over style still exists. The conflict is much broader than worship preferences. Every day our Old Adam wages war on us to convince us to worship something other than our Redeemer. When we allow the idol of preference to win over the fruit of brotherly love, everyone loses.

Zac Hicks includes these thoughts in the footnotes of his fantastic new book: "Here is one painful and lamentable irony in the now historic 'worship wars' over musical style and personal preference. In these 'wars,' we have actually declared a truce in the war on the flesh by allowing the flesh to retain its selfish desires for 'my way.' Worse yet, such wars have often allowed the flesh to pseudo-sanctify its desires in seemingly biblical and godly argumentation. How far the flesh will go in aiding and abetting our heart's self-deception! Lord, have mercy" (The Worship Pastor).

Forcing ourselves to make a choice between new and old, rooted and relevant is unnecessary. If we truly believe that "there are no non-gifted, dispensable people in the church we must show this in practice," writes Bob Kauflin in True Worshippers.



In regards to worship, one of the Scripture passages that is perhaps taken out of context more than any other is I Corinthians 13. Paul's original intent was to challenge the local congregation to love each other. Between truths such as, "God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as He chose" (12:18), and, "let all things be done for building up" (14:26),

Paul urges the Corinthians in chapter 13 to love sacrificially.

What will it take for us to look at the older saints who love their beloved hymns in the same way we look at the teenager who loves the newest Phil Wickham tune? When we can look at Paul's instructions to the church and truly "love one another with brotherly affection" (Romans

12:10), the way we approach what content should be in our services will be dramatically changed.

Egan is the worship director at Living Word Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



orship in and of itself is a response. It is a response to a holy and perfect God. It is a

response to a perfect sacrifice. It is a response to perfect love.

When I think of our response in worship, my mind goes to Isaiah 6:1-8. Isaiah was given a vision of God on His throne as all the living creatures cried out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" Isaiah saw the glory of God and was changed. He saw the perfection of God and immediately responded with, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

As Isaiah looked upon a perfect God, he instantly recognized that he was far from perfect and did not deserve to be in God's presence. He recognized his standing before God as a fallen human being and feared the punishment that was required. He began pleading for mercy. Isaiah's response to the glory of God was humility.

In the very next verse, a seraphim flew to Isaiah and touch his lips with a burning coal and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned by Katy Wahl

for." God's response to Isaiah's humble plea was forgiveness and mercy.

Isaiah had tasted the goodness of the Lord and had experienced the forgiveness of sin. Then, Isaiah's response to such incredible grace is, "Here am I! Send me!"

Isaiah's encounter with God begged a response. He saw God's glory, he tasted His forgiveness, and he responded by giving God his life. This is worship.

As Isaiah encountered the living God, we too, encounter Him every day. We see the glory of God all around us on a daily basis—God has revealed Himself through His creation so that no one is without excuse (Romans 1:20), He has revealed Himself through the Scripture, and He has revealed Himself through His Son. "We have seen His glory ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). His glory is all around us, and just like it did for Isaiah, an encounter with God's glory will evoke a response of either humility or pride.

We also encounter God's grace each day, just as Isaiah did, whether we realize it or not. We are clearly living after the time of Jesus' life, death and resurrection; therefore, God's forgiveness and grace extend to all people, Jews and Gentiles, every day. God never stops lavishing His love upon us, therefore how we live is a response to this love, whether we are aware of it or not. Isaiah responded to God's forgiveness with gratitude and willing submission.

Worship is always birthed from humility and gratitude and lived out through the power of the Holy Spirit. The only other option would be to respond with pride and selfishness, which would result in self-striving. God is glorified when we

are satisfied in who He is and what He has done, which means resting in His grace. Our act of worship—living in humility and gratitude through the power of the Holy Spirit—is a response to a holy God and His love for His people. It is a response to who God is and what He has done. This is possible as we remind ourselves each day that God is on His throne and that His love runs so deep that He gave His only Son to have a relationship with you and with me. As this truth comes alive in us daily, it will change the way we think, interact, and react to the people around us as we humbly allow the Holy Spirit to transform us.

A verse that constantly keeps this in perspective for me is Romans 11:36, which says, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen." Salvation comes from God, it is lived out through His Spirit in us, and it is all for the purpose of His glory. It is all by Him, through Him, and for Him!

Worship is a response of faith motivated by love for what Christ has done for us. Worship is responding in the power of God's grace revealed in Christ Jesus. Worship is a response to His perfect love. May our lives reflect humility and gratitude as an act of worship to a God who is worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise!

Dahl, a 2012 graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, is the worship leader at Living Hope, Rogers, Minn.







hy do we observe the church calendar and celebrate the various

holidays contained within it? The simplest answer is that the church calendar is designed to take us through the life of Christ each year. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost/Trinity each provide us with opportunities to consider the life of Christ.

The benefits of examining the life of Christ during the church year in our congregations are manifold. As does so much of our Lutheran tradition, these benefits can best be summarized through a proper understanding of the law and the gospel.

The Law

The church year gives us opportunity to apply God's law to our lives. First and foremost, there are the penitential seasons. These are seasons that are especially designed to be times of introspection and repentance.

The primary penitential season is Lent. Lent is designed for us to focus on our own sinfulness as we consider Christ's suffering and the brutal cost of our atonement. Lent is inaugurated each year with Ash Wednesday, which is a special time for us to consider not just our sinfulness, but our mortality, which is a direct

by Paster Jason Gudim

result of our sinfulness.

The other penitential season is Advent. Unlike Lent, Advent is rarely observed as a penitential season. Advent is a time that anticipates the birth of Christ, but also anticipates His second coming. As such, we ought to consider the urgency of our repentance and the need to proclaim the gospel to a lost and condemned world.

Another way that God's law is highlighted is during the season of Pentecost/Trinity. This is the longest season of the church year, and it is a time spent focusing on the teachings of Christ and His miracles. We see the law at work here as it guides Christians into God's will and instructs us on how we ought to live our lives.

Though the law both guides and instructs us, it always accuses—it always kills. For this reason we always need a healthy dose of the gospel to raise us to life by delivering the grace of God and forgiveness for our sins.

The Gospel

We highlighted above that the primary purpose of the church year is to take us through the life of Christ. In doing this, the church year delivers the gospel to us in much the same way the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed does.

In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther explains it this way: "Now, if you are asked, 'What do you believe in the Second Article about Jesus Christ?" answer briefly, 'I believe that Jesus Christ, God's true Son, has become my Lord.' 'But what does it mean to become Lord?' 'It is this. He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. For before I did not have a Lord or King, but was captive under the devil's power, condemned to death, stuck in sin and blindness."

Luther goes on to say:

"Let this, then, be the sum of this article:

the little word *Lord* means simply the same as redeemer. It means the One who has brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same. But all the points that follow in this article serve no other purpose than to explain and express this redemption. They explain how and by whom it was accomplished. They explain how much it cost Him and what He spent and risked so that He might win us and bring us under His dominion."1

In short, the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ are all for you. They are for your redemption, your salvation, and your adoption. They explain not only that your sins are forgiven, but also how your sins are forgiven. This is the essence of the gospel.

Each season and holiday of the church year, then, becomes a unique way to express and apply the gospel to your life. Think about how your pastor preaches to you each week. Imagine if, at the end of his sermon, he simply stated, "Oh, and by the way, Jesus died on the cross for your sins." That would not only be tragic, but criminal. The gospel deserves to be proclaimed with all the artfulness and beauty with which it is presented to us in Scripture. The gospel should never be declared in a way that makes it rote.

In the same way, the church year highlights the depth, variety, and beauty of the gospel by causing us to focus on the various times of Christ's life. Each one of these periods highlights something that God has done for you that you might be His.

Gudim serves Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

^{1.} Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Paul Timothy McCain, ed., (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 401-402.

walked the midway at a fair and heard the call to "Test your strength"? At many fairs, there is a game called High Striker. The game seems simple enough. Take an oversized mallet and, using all of one's might, strike a lever to send a dead weight soaring to ring a bell. You watch as person after person sends the weight skyward passing the 10, 20 ... 60, 70 feet mark, only to see it pass those same numbers on its way down without reaching its intended goal.

ave you ever

It strikes me that this is an apt metaphor for our relationship with God. Inflicted with the disease of sin, we try as hard as we can to reach heaven through our own strength, only to find ourselves back where we started.

In the liturgy of the Divine Service, we witness a metaphor for the Strong Man and Lever doing that which we cannot. In the service, the Father is the Strong Man who took out His wrath on Jesus, the Lever, and as a result we as the dead weight soar to heaven. The Lutheran service is chiastic, which means that it uses a symmetrical narrative motif throughout its liturgy. In the service, we see a progression from A to B, to C, then D, up to the central point "X" and then a return to D', and C', and B', and ending with A'. The service chiasm is as follows:

- A. Invocation: We remember that God baptized us into the death and resurrection of Christ, claiming us to be His children.
 - B. Confession and Absolution: We confess

by Paster Lee Kuhns

that we do not deserve God's love and hear that by Christ's action we are made deserving

- C. Scripture readings: We hear the Lord speak to us in His written Word.
- D. Creed: We confess our God-given faith to one another.
 - X. Sermon: God's Word is preached to our circumstance.
- D' Offering: We live out our God-given faith by giving to others from the abundance that He has given us.
- C' Prayer: We speak to God according to His Word.
- B' Lord's Supper: We receive God's family meal of acceptance, sustenance, and assurance of His love as He provides the finest bread and wine, His own body and blood.
- A' Benediction: We go forth into the world as children of God.

The sermon, as the pinnacle of the service based on the Scripture text chosen, has its own chiastic pattern:

- A. It introduces the problem, our complicity to the problem, and the lack of peace the problem produces.
- B. It shows us our incapability to resolve the problem.
 - X. It shows us the Solution, the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ.
- B' It shows us how He was fully capable to resolve the problem.
- A' It assures us that the problem has no power over us and that we can go forth in the peace God produces.

The sermon should mirror Scripture. In it, we see the Word of God and how it is not only pertinent but necessary for our lives now and forever. How many of us, through good preaching, have seen ourselves as David—the sexual sinner; Moses—the murderer; Peter—the boastful; and Saul—the persecutor? How many of us, through good preaching, have seen ourselves redeemed by God as David, Moses, Peter, and Paul were? Yes, in good preaching the law is given in all of its severity, and the gospel is given in all of its beauty.

Throughout the sermon, as well as the

service, we are constantly reminded of God's benevolent gifts. He bestows upon us Christ's righteousness. Thus, to preach Christ crucified and risen is central to all sermons. Without the centrality of Christ, the sermon is powerless. Sadly, many sermons get lost in the cult of preacher. The examples and stories are focused on the acts of the one speaking and not the Actor of our faith. Sadly, many sermons end with a call to act and not a refrain of "Amen" for what God has done, continues to do, and will do. In these times, the gospel is lost and the hearers are left with the bitter taste of emptiness instead of the sweet sense of fullness that was promised in the Scripture text. Our words are ineffective, but God's Word is the power of salvation. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ," says Romans 10:17. Faith comes and is retained solely by the Word of God, so we simply preach Christ and Him crucified.

God's gift in the gospel is for all people. Thus, the sermon is to be preached to the congregation. The congregation needs to hear the Word of God in their vernacular. The sermon speaks to old and young, rich and poor, married and single, saved and unsaved. Not one person within the congregation, from pulpit to greeter, should leave the service without hearing the Word of God spoken to them.

Finally, all sermons are to be preached by and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Andreas Helland wrote that Georg Sverdrup's preaching "was not only Christ-centered and congregation-centered; it was also Spirit-centered" (Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message). Those who preach acknowledge that without the power of the Holy Spirit, the sermon would be a complete mess and best left unpreached. In Luther's sacristy prayer, the preacher prays this truth, "Use me as Your instrument—but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

May God continue to use His broken instruments to convey His perfect gift, so the congregation may soar to heaven on the strength of what God has done.

Kuhns serves Faith Lutheran, El Campo, Texas.







of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. With its destruction a new era was born, when no longer did the Lord dwell in a temple to be worshiped by His people (Acts 17:24); instead, because of the sacrifice of His Son, His resurrection, and the coming of His Spirit, we are the new temple where He dwells (I Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19; II Corinthians 6:16-18; and Ephesians 2:21-22). The Apostle Paul describes this new era even further when he says that we are "to present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1). Peter reiterates this thought, saying we are "like living stones, being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5). This leaves us in a very serious position; we must view ourselves rightly, for if we are the Lord's new temple, in this new era, it means we are the house of worship where the Spirit now dwells.

It matters what we do with

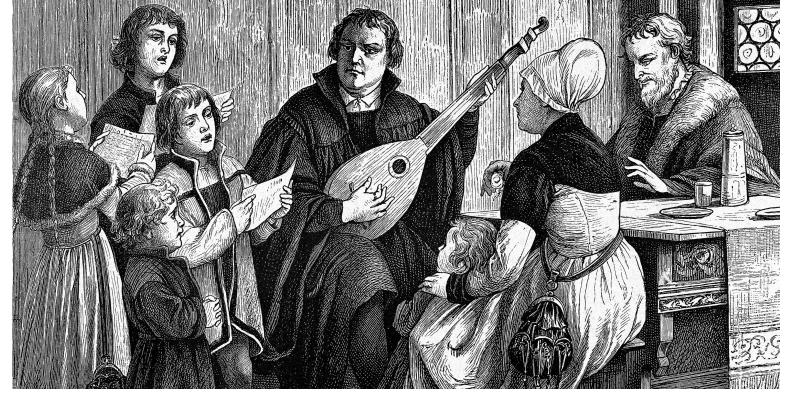
by Rachel Wilhelm

our bodies. It matters how we think with our minds. We are living, breathing, talking, walking temples in this world in which we are aliens and sojourners. We are temples that should be seasoned with salt, lit up on a hill so all can see, and ambassadors from the Holy City, spreading the light of the gospel. This means all we do is an act of worship: eating, drinking, cleaning, caring for our children, going to work, shopping, walking the dog, sleeping, mowing the lawn, shoveling the snow, praying, reading the Word, singing, giving, etc. Think of all the things you do in a day. Think of where God has put you on this earth. Think of all the things He has given you with which to work. In Christ, the mundane is no longer meaningless. As the Preacher says in Ecclesiastes, we are to enjoy our work and glorify God in it. So all of our work and all of our rest is worship to the Lord, a living sacrifice.

When we gather on Sunday to worship God in our sanctuaries, imagine all of His living, breathing temples congregating together to knit themselves as one: The Body of Christ. Our practice is to pray, sing, hear the Word, and have fellowship as one body. But most importantly, we are gifted with the body and blood of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to sustain us for the coming week as we are given opportunities to live as His living temples. We remember Him because He lives in us as we live, and we remember Him and receive Him as we worship Him together. Our reliance on God should be evident because we need Him to do His work. We come thirsty and hungry. And we come with open hands, ready to do what He calls us to do.

So how do we prepare for worship if we are the temples of His worship? We live worship, because all the worship we do on this earth is preparation for the day when we will worship the Lord perfectly in spirit and in truth. We may not even feel like we are worshiping, or, for that matter, feel like worshiping at all. But worship is mostly about obedience, not feeling. Just like love is not an emotion, but an action, worship is putting ourselves forward as a living sacrifice no matter how we feel inside. Our faithful God gives us the feelings in due time by the power of His Spirit. If it were up to us (being sinful human beings) or our feelings, the whole thing would be nonsense. Our minds need to be in a constant state of awareness, seeing the Lord's work in everything, trusting that He is working all of them out for our good as He promises. And we, His temples, need to always be in a constant state of readiness to do the will of our Lord. He is the backdrop, the ground under our feet, the source of our nourishment, and source of our power to do the work. Where is this power? It is within you since you believe that Christ did the work for you on the cross. Knock. Ask. Christ lives inside you, the temple of the Living God. Go out into the world in peace, and enter His courts with praise.

Wilhelm is worship director at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, and is co-founder of Roots Worship Collective, Minneapolis Chapter. Look for her upcoming album, Songs of Lament, in 2017.



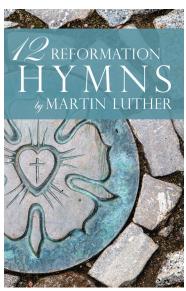
TWELVE OF LUTHER'S HYMNS

t's 2017—an important year in church history. On Oct. 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95
Theses to the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany, challenging papal authority and the practice of selling indulgences.

Luther is known for his emphasis on the authority of the Scriptures and his teaching of justification by faith in Christ alone. But Luther also made significant contributions to hymnody, being credited with 37 hymns and the restoration of congregational singing in the worship service. The chief function of music for Luther was the proclamation of the Word of God, especially the clear gospel message. Through his hymns, written in the language of the people rather than Latin, and through his translation of the Bible

into German, the gospel became accessible to the common people, and the Word and the Spirit brought about spiritual reformation.

Throughout 2017, events around the world will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Myriad new publications are being released, including 12 Reformation Hymns by Martin Luther published by Ambassador Publications. This booklet encourages families and congregations to teach and sing Luther's hymns throughout 2017. These hymns, with brief historic introductions written by Pastor Gordon Waterman, can be presented in a special service of hymns or as a hymn-of-the-month project, focusing on one each month. Consider putting these beautiful booklets next to your hymnals in every pew and providing a copy for each family in your church.



\$2/each
From Ambassador Publications
Visit: ambassadorpublications.org

THE FIRST HYMN

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,
With exultation springing,
And, with united heart and voice
And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,
How His right arm the victory won;
Right dearly it hath cost Him.

The first congregational hymn or chorale of the Lutheran Reformation was, "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice." Martin Luther claims that he heard the melody from a traveling minstrel and adapted it to the words of the chorale.

Luther's hymns and other hymns of this period are correctly referred to as "chorales," and represent the best of the Reformation theology of the Lutheran church. For 500 years musicians have been creating special musical compositions based on the melodies of the Lutheran chorales. These musical compositions are called "chorale

preludes." J. S. Bach, Johann Pachelbel, Dietrich Buxtehude, Max Reger, Sigfrid Karg-Elert, and Helmut Walcha are just a few names of famous composers of chorale preludes on Lutheran chorale tunes.

The first chorale in this booklet is a fitting response to rejoice over the re-discovery of the gospel—that we are saved by faith alone in Jesus, the Savior of the world. It should be sung in a joyous manner with a lot of spirit.

~Pastor Gordon Waterman

Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Tomball, Texas



BY KYLE & MARLI ARNESON

ne Sunday morning this past summer in Naknek, Pastor Jeff Swanson asked if

I, Kyle, would go out to Silver Bay Seafoods to pick up some cannery workers who wanted to come to church. I followed him out there, driving the big 1987 Dodge Ram. When I turned into the cannery's lot I witnessed more than 20 people standing around, waiting to be picked up to come to church. Even with both of our vehicles packed to capacity, we were going to have to make two trips.

I turned some worship music on the radio and as we drove down Bristol Bay's only paved road and tried to strike up a conversation with the cannery workers, none of whom spoke English as their primary language.

Pastor Jeff and I returned

back to Silver Bay to pick up the remaining cannery workers. The number of those waiting had grown: another full load. I passed Pastor Jeff on the way back to Hilltop Christian Fellowship as he pulled over to the side of the road and picked up two guys with their thumbs up. I wasn't surprised when I saw them walk in the door at Hilltop a couple of minutes later.

That Sunday morning, with extra chairs being set up back into the entryway, we had a bilingual service. Pastor Jeff spoke a few sentences and then one of the cannery workers would translate his words into Spanish. That morning at church we had cannery workers who hailed from Costa Rica all the way to Ukraine, local and foreign fisherman with their boots on, missionaries from all over the United States, and many more people from all over the world, including the local congregation members who so desperately realized the importance that everyone needs to hear the Word of God and have the opportunity to worship Him.

The church in Naknek isn't always full, though. Sometimes we probably could have fit all of us into two or three pews. While it was exciting to have the church packed full, the families and individuals who come to church every Sunday—

to both the morning and evening service—were still on fire for the Lord and ready to worship with their whole spirit. Attendance at Sunday school was even sparser, but whoever was there was engaged and excited to learn what the Lord would teach them that day.

The evening service is generally a gathering of all of the churches in the community, and it was so exciting to see who would come each week. There were regulars like Jesse Sherman and his family, owners of the local coffee shop. We can honestly say we don't think we have ever met a more joyful person than Jesse, no matter what his circumstances were. There were cannery workers like Nathan. This was his third summer working in Naknek, and he would show up to church hours before it would start because he loved it so much. Then there were always people you would only see only once, but it was evident that God was working in everyone's hearts during a worship service at Hilltop.

The Arnesons spent the summer of 2016 leading VBS in remote Alaska villages. They are members of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka Minn.



A weekend of Christmas concerts



The AFLC Schools hosted a weekend of Christmas music Dec. 2-4 for the family and friends of the seminary and Bible school. The AFLBS gospel teams presented a program on Friday evening, and the Concert Choir, Proclaim Choir, Wind Ensemble, Handbell Choir and Seminary Chorus presented two candlelight concerts on Saturday and Sunday.





CHRISTIANS IN ACTION

BY JOAN CULLER



s I prayed and studied after being asked to write a Bible study for the WMF, I found

myself drawn to the Book of Acts. It's a book I haven't studied much, maybe because it sits between the Gospels and the epistles, yet doesn't fit neatly into either category.

Acts has been described as a pivotal book—it connects what Jesus did and taught during His life to the things He continued to do through the first believers. It's also very important historically—without it we would know very little about the early Church.

What comes to your mind when you think about the Book of Acts? Pentecost? The missionary journeys of Paul? The spread of the gospel from

the Jews in Jerusalem to both Jews and Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire? An account of the practices of the first Christians?

Acts was written by Luke, a Gentile doctor and close companion of Paul. Scholars regard it as the second of a two-part volume (Luke-Acts). It's an accurate historical record which sets the beginnings of the Church into detailed political, geographic, and cultural information about the time. Luke was a careful chronicler and the historic facts listed in Acts have proved to be indisputable, many verified by secular sources.

However, Acts is so much more than a historic account. It falls into a literary genre common to its time: a record of the great deeds of certain individuals or cities. More than anything else, Acts is a book about people: more than 100 are named in Acts. Some of them are well known—like Peter and Paul—but many others are fairly obscure, ordinary folks like me and you. Yet these people did great things for God. They were chosen to be part of His story.

It's the history of those ordinary, early believers—their daily lives, and the way that God used them to build His Church—that moves me

most when I read through this book. Acts is a window into the mind and actions of these first Christians. What did they do and why did they do it? How did they respond to and resolve the conflicts and problems they encountered? What were the qualities that enabled them to "turn the world upside down?" (Acts 17:6, ESV)

Instead of a chronological approach to Acts, I chose to focus this study on the actions that distinguished Christians from the pagan world around them. In Acts you will find the basic principles of Christian life and ministry that are still relevant to us and our congregations today.

There is no formal conclusion to the Book of Acts because its story hasn't ended. The work of the Church continues in us and through those who will follow us until Jesus comes again. It is my prayer that those who choose to study the Book of Acts will be as blessed as I was in its writing, and inspired and encouraged to follow in the footsteps of these women and men of God.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md.

ARC Board, faced with shortfall, issues changes

Members of the Association Retreat Center's Board of Directors have made some difficult decisions this fall as it has become increasingly challenging to pay off the camps' accruing debt while meeting overhead costs.

In a letter issued to the ARC Corporation Members in November, board members described key financial issues while outlining a restructuring plan in an effort to become financially solvent. Ongoing debt accrued from building projects and structural upgrades—while at the same time gaining only modest increases in camp and retreat contracts—continues to stress finances.

To meet the immediate financial needs through the end of 2016, board members voted to close the ARC for December and January, laying off all non-essential staff. The camp will reopen in February as the retreat and camp schedule starts anew. The layoffs are not permanent, according to Pastor Richard Carr, board member. "The goal is to get the ARC to a point that seems viable," said Carr. "And also to thrive."

Key changes proposed in the letter include redefining the roles of camp leadership positions. The position of executive director, held by Pat Flanders, will transition from its current focus of operational management to a visionary, promotional, and communications-focused role. Board members will add the position of operations manager, a role that will be in charge of the day-to-day operations of the camp. Carr stated that Flanders has been offered the newly redefined position of executive director, which he has declined. He is currently considering the position of operations manager. The board has now opened a search for a new executive director.

The second change to be implemented by the board will redefine salaried or hourly employees, identifying them as missionaries. "As missionaries they will be responsible for a large segment of their salary to be funded by individuals (much the same way the AFLC World Missions department does)," states the letter. According to Carr, this aspect of the strategic plan will be rolled out in phases in the coming months, though the board has yet to determine the specifics of that plan. "This model of ministry has had success in other campus outside of the AFLC," stated the board in a recent press release.

The ARC Board has committed to expanding the current retreat schedule, as well as creating a vision for the future direction of the camp. "As the ARC navigates these unchartered waters of change, we need the direction that only God can give," stated the board. "We need fervent prayer coverage as we implement these changes."



Thanks to several generous donations, an new sign was installed at the AFLC campus entrance in early December.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Herb Hoff announced his upcoming retirement from full-time pastoral ministry at St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif., on July 1, 2017. He has served in the ministry for 37 years, more than 20 of those years with St. Ansgar's. Hoff and his wife, Gail, plan to move to the Olympia, Wash., area to be near family.

Pastor George Winston was installed Dec. 11 at St. John's Lutheran, Newark, Ohio, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Gary Haug has resigned as assistant pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., due to health concerns.

Pastor Nick Dyrud was installed Dec. 4 at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., as senior pastor, with Pastor Lyndon Korhnen, AFLC president, officiating. Dyrud had been serving as assistant pastor, a position the congregation is now seeking to fill.

Roger Pahl, of Zumbrota, Minn., was accepted onto the AFLC's lay pastor clergy roster. He serves as a lay pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, with Pastor Eric Westlake.

Pastor Scott Guhl, Oswego, Ill., was accepted back onto the AFLC's Fellowship Roster pending a call to an AFLC congregation. Guhl is a 2005 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary.



New members were received Nov. 20 at Abiding Word Lutheran, Deshler, Neb. Pictured are (from left) Jay, Aaron, Kathy and Austin Buckles, Pastor Jon Langness, and Dakotah, Robin, Brendan, Jenna and Chad Lemke.



OUR COMMON BOND

BY PASTOR TODD SCHIERKOLK

his past October was a very special time in the life of our sister church, Gethsemane

Lutheran, in Celaya, Mexico. The ordination of a new pastor took place on October 30 and former AFLC president Pastor Elden Nelson and his wife, Faith, were able to be there and share in the event with us. Pastor Jovani completed his training this year with Pastor Milton Flores. For the time being, he will be serving in Celaya alongside Pastor Flores and assisting with several other small groups in various locations in central Mexico.

Along with the ordination, the weekend provided an opportunity for the pastors' wives to get together for a time of great fellowship and encouragement. Barb Schierkolk led a study about common questions that pastors' wives have as they serve the Lord alongside their husbands and the answers that the Lord provides in the Scriptures. Questions were asked about marriage, family, expectations, inadequacy, disappointments, trials, and blessings.

The four women were able to share from their different experiences and encourage one another from God's Word. Faith Nelson provided a voice of wise experience from her years in ministry and her unique perspective as the wife of the former president of the AFLC. Chelo Flores shared based on her years serving the Lord there in the host congregation. Chelo's husband, Pastor Milton Flores, is the new president of the Central Mexican Lutheran Church (ILMC). He attended seminary in Minneapolis at AFLTS and two of the Flores' three sons have graduated recently from AFLBS. Elizabeth Martinez, the wife of Jovani, was able to share from the years her husband had spent in training, as well.

Barb observed how really wonderful it was

Pictured (from left) are Faith Nelson, Chelo Flores, Elizabeth Martinez, and Barb Schierkolk.

to see how the common bond of serving the Lord in the ministry crosses cultural and geographic boundaries. It was a special blessing to see how the wives were such an encouragement to one another. Faith and Barb and Chelo and Elizabeth—true sisters in the Lord. And it's always good to be with family.

Schierkolk and his wife, Barb, serve as AFLC missionaries in Jerez. Mexico.



In Memoriam

Janice (Hall) Schmitke, 80, of Thief River Falls, Minn., died Dec. 9, 2016.

Born May 31, 1936, in Thief River Falls, she was the daughter of Olaf and Mayme (Evenson) Hall. She married Irvin Schmitke (an AFLC pastor) on Dec. 25, 1955 at Rindal Lutheran, rural Newfolden, Minn.

She graduated from Newfolden High School in 1954 and worked at Parkins Corner Drug from 1954 to 1976. She also worked for North Central/ Republic Airlines from 1972 until 1983. After Irvin's honorable release from service in 1957, the couple lived in several locations where Irving was called to serve in congregations in the Iron Range of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Chicago, Thief River Falls, and Fargo. Janice worked with the Fargo School system and at St. Paul's Lutheran. She was very active in Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, serving the WMF, youth, parish education and Sunday school.

Surviving are her husband of nearly 61 years, Irvin Schmitke, Thief River Falls; two sons, Gregory (Renate) Schmitke, Moorhead, Minn., and Mark (Kim) Schmitke, Thief River Fall; one daughter, Kristi Schmitke, Tacoma, Wash.; seven grandchildren; three great grand-daughters; two sisters, Lenore Wold and Carol (Harlen) Halvorson, Thief River Falls; and one brother, David (Dee) Hall, Pine Island, Minn.

The service was held Dec. 16, 2016, at Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, with Pastor Wesley Langaas officiating. Burial was in Rindal Cemetery near Viking, Minn.

Pastor Wayne Juntunen, 83, of Esko Minnesota, died December 5, 2016, in his home.

Born Aug. 5, 1933, in Cloquet, Minn., he was the son of Joseph and Lempi Juntunen. He married Patricia Ylatalo on June 14, 1958, in Fredrick, S.D.

He grew up in Esko and graduated from Esko High School in 1951. Wayne attended Suomi College and Seminary, Augsburg College and Seminary, and received his Doctorate of Ministry from Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary. Wayne served in the Army from 1953 until 1955. Wayne served as pastor of the Apostolic Lutheran Church in Esko, dean of the Inter-Lutheran Theological Seminary in Plymouth, Minn., pastor of Bethel Free Lutheran Church in Grafton, N.D., Zion Lutheran in Hancock, Mich., and visitation minister at St. Paul's Lutheran in Cloquet.

Surviving are his wife of 58 years, Patricia; three sons, Timothy (Lynn) of Darwin, Minn., Kerry (Diane) of Hermantown; and Nathan (Laura) of Esko; two daughters, Holly (Gordon) Rintala of Chassell, Mich., and Amy (David) Jacobson of Eagan, Minn.; brother, one brother, Glenn Juntunen of Esko; one sister, Luella Bergstedt of Cloquet; 15 grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

The service was Dec. 10, 2016, at Apostolic Lutheran Church in Esko. Military Honors were provided by the Cloquet Combined Honor Guard. Burial was in Apostolic Lutheran Cemetery.

Pastor James Winter, 82, died Nov. 24 in Moose Jaw, SK. He was born Feb. 4. 1934, on the Winter farm in Coronach, Saskatchewan, where he grew up. In 1966, he married

Lorene Bergen.

A second-career student, Jim studied at AFLTS from 1988 to 1990, while his wife took Bible school classes. He was a pastor with the AFLC-Canada, serving the congregation in Calgary, Alberta. He was present for the AFLC organizational conference in October 1962 at Thief River Falls, Minn., and served briefly in the U.S. as interim pastor at McVille and Binford, N.D. Jim and Lorene served as volunteers for a year with our missionaries in Brazil, and then he served as pastor at Lake Alma, SK, before retirement.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, David (Lisa) Winter; and Eldon (Tammy) Winter; two daughters, Anne Marie Winter and Sonja (Robert) Cumming; and 18 grandchildren.

A grave side service was held Nov. 26, 2016, at Mount Pleasant Cemetery near Coronach. Blessed be his memory.

OCTOBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Eugene Nesland (2) Myron Haugen

AFLTS

Eugene Nesland Donna Knudsvig Merle & Golde Gray Arnold & Alice Rokke

All Ministries Jennie Schmiess

Home Missions Darlene Davidson

General Fund Pastor Victor Young Kenneth Rolf

World Missions

Donna Knudsvig Mike Walter Arnold Hjermstad Kristin Lau

... in honor of

AFLBS

Vernon Russum Pastor Wade Mobley Pastor Richard Gunderson

World Missions Vernon Russum

General Fund \$53,044 \$422,873 \$306,000 Evangelism 7,761 110,272 121,783 Youth Ministries 8.490 95,002 97.158 Parish Education 9,386 138,434 130,260 Seminary 35,885 232,606 240,245 Bible School 48,784 463,046 468,416 **Home Missions** 43,191 452,256 416,369 **World Missions** 56,048 476,894 405,927 Personal Support 48,821 533,833 520,210 \$2,925,216 TOTALS \$311,411 \$2,706,368

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-November 30, 2016

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

A DYING CONGREGATION AT WORSHIP

famous artist, so the story goes, was commissioned to paint pictures of what he envisioned to be a dying church. Much to the surprise of those who viewed the paintings, he presented them with pictures of a spacious and beautiful church building, with landscaped surroundings and crowds of people entering the doors. He also depicted a worshipful interior with impressive stained glass windows and a powerful pipe organ, with a chancel graced by a hand-carved altar and a towering pulpit.



Pastor Robert Lee

Other paintings were presented by the artist, too, including ones of a fellowship hall, a youth room and a nursery, and there was even one of a bulletin board with announcements of a full range of meetings,

dinners, and other activities.

"What does this mean?" the artist was asked by those who had commissioned the paintings. They expected to see depictions more like an old run-down unpainted church building almost ready to collapse, with broken windows and an empty, longneglected interior and grounds taken over by weeds. The paintings didn't look at all how they envisioned a dying church to appear.

The artist replied that he had used the biblical account of the Church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-5) as his model, the only account in Holy Scripture of a dead church, but it was one that had a name for being alive. Thus, he concluded that a dying or dead church may not look like it is dead at all. Though declining attendance and dull services are often signs of decline, this is not necessarily so. A congregation with packed pews and inspiring services may be dying, too, for the death of a church is a matter of the heart.

There's a required Bible school class entitled Principles of Congregational Life, and nearly 70 first-year students were enrolled in it during the fall semester.

The instructor and students explored the Scriptures to understand the meaning of "church"—how it was born, how it grew and expanded. Spiritual gifts, leadership, church discipline, and worship were considered, and toward the end of the semester the class looked at what it might mean for a church to drift.

Dr. Arnold Cook's book, Historical Drift, highlights the real danger of a congregation or ministry drifting away from the foundational teachings and vision with which it began. Decay does not happen overnight, but is usually a gradual process that may go unnoticed.

Here are a couple signs that might indicate a dying congregation:

Drifting away from foundational teachings

Dr. Cook maintains that churches don't drift, their leaders do. It's a tragic fact that a denial of foundational teachings has been heard from too many pulpits, even in churches with a strong heritage of biblical preaching. A few of our readers may recall that one of our AFLC congregations began when an older layman stood up and walked out of his former congregation, leading the way for others to follow after the pastor proclaimed false teachings during a morning service. A congregation that has lost its discernment and no longer stands on God's Word where its forefathers stood is dying, whither its worship services are full or not.

Drifting away from evangelism

A generation or so ago it was common for congregations to sponsor special meetings or evangelistic services with guest speakers, at times in cooperation with other churches in the area, because of a conviction that there were people who were lost and needed to be converted, perhaps even within the membership of the congregations. Many remember the ministry of the Hauge Federation and the

Lutheran Evangelistic Movement; others recall the Preaching-Teaching-Reaching missions. At their best, these services were preceded by an emphasis on prayer preparation, with an effort to invite the

A congregation with packed pews and inspiring services may be dying, too, for the death of a church is a matter of the heart.

> unchurched to attend. These outreach efforts are rare today, and some suggest that they lost their effectiveness. But what is happening in their place? One is reminded of the old evangelist of the 19th century who was criticized for his methods. He received the criticisms graciously, but then responded that he thought his way of doing evangelism was better than his critic's way of not doing it. A congregation without a heart for evangelism is drifting and dying.

"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carrying away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:17-18).



With Thanks

We acknowledge with gratitude the excellent contributions of our columnists during 2016: Pastor Steve Snipstead and Pastor Tom Parrish (Encouraging Word), Peggy Berglund (Something to Share) and Pastor Jeremy Vance (Building the Base).

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

WHEN WE CALL UPON GOD

BY PASTOR KARL ANDERSON



ometimes we are tempted to think God is sleeping, that He is unaware of the trials and tribulations that come our way. Yet in those times

we most need to call out to God. As the prophet Isaiah warned his people Israel of a coming judgment and called upon them to repent and have faith in God, he also called on God to act.

Consider Isaiah 51:9, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago" (ESV).

Awake, O God of history! Looking back to the days of old, Isaiah recounted some of the great things God did for His people to redeem them from the bondage of slavery in a foreign land. When we are troubled, it is good for us to recall the great things God has done. Scripture records His great redeeming power to save in so many circumstances: from Israel's bondage in Egypt to the many times He delivered His people from their enemies. Ultimately His

great love and power was demonstrated by the incarnation of Jesus, leading to His sacrificial death and resurrection to redeem us from our sins. All these mighty deeds remind us of the great power God has to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

Now consider Isaiah 51:11, "Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion" (KJV).

Awake, O God of promises! Looking forward to the return of God's people to Zion with joy and gladness reminds us of God's promise that those who believe in Jesus will one day enter the New Jerusalem to spend eternity in the presence of our Lord and King. During our time on earth, we cannot grasp the height, depth, width, or length of His love. But we are reminded of His great and precious promises—that He desires that none should perish but that all should come to know the truth. In the midst of our earthly struggles we can know that the battle ultimately has been won.

Last, consider Isaiah 51:12, "I, I am he who comforts you" (ESV).

Awake, O God of comfort! Looking down upon the fears that overwhelm us day by day in the here and now, we need to be reminded that God is greater than all our fears. He is greater than the greatest enemy on earth. Jesus demonstrated His power over sickness, suffering, and even nature through the many signs recorded in the Gospel accounts. He defeated sin, death, and the devil. Isaiah calls us to take comfort in God's great love and power when earthly fears overwhelm us, tempting us to forget our Creator.

The Association Retreat Center provides a place where Christians from near and far can get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life to be reminded of the greatness of our God—a God of history, a God of promises, and a God of comfort—so that they, too, may call out to Him.

Anderson, who serves Mt. Carmel and Trinity Lutheran, McIntosh, Minn., is a member of the ARC Corporation.