

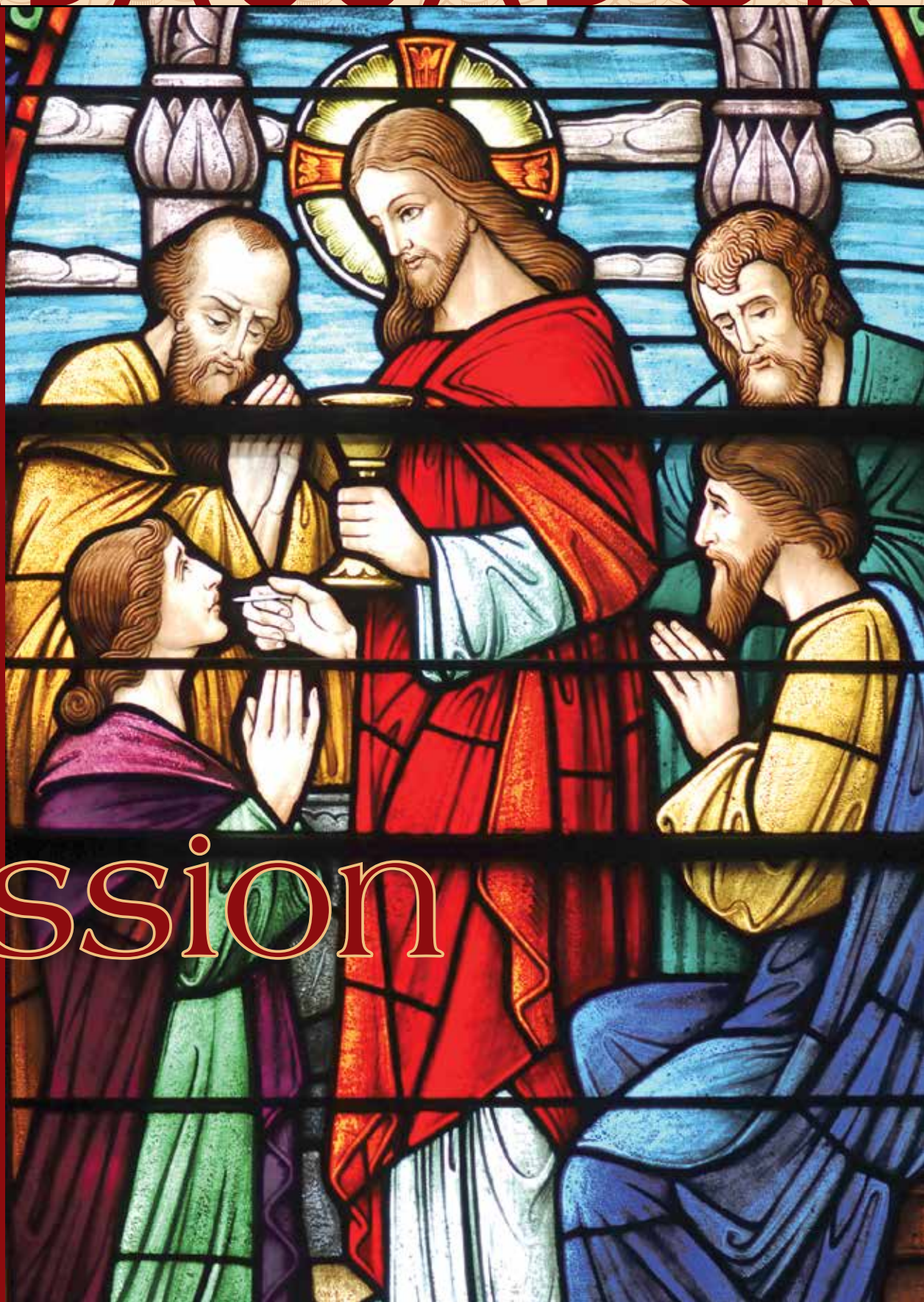
THE LUTHERAN 

MARCH 2008

AMBASSADOR

Peter, Mary,
Thomas, the
thief, Malchus
... they found
themselves
embroiled
in history's
central story.
What lessons
can we learn
from them?

People of The Passion



Discipline

BY JOAN CULLER



Are you a disciplined person? Do you go to the gym or walk regularly to exercise your body? Do you take all the training offered in your workplace so that you can advance in your career? Do you read child development books and *Parents Magazine* in the hopes of becoming the best mom or dad you can be?

All of these activities require discipline, and most of us are willing to practice discipline when the end result is important to us.

Lent is a season of *spiritual* discipline. At the time of the Reformation, when some wanted to eliminate Lent, Martin Luther argued for keeping it, saying, "Lent, Palm Sunday and Easter week should be retained, not to force anyone to fast, but to preserve the Passion history and the gospels appointed for that season" (Luther's Works 53:90).

Adopting a Lenten practice has real spiritual value. It can help us develop self-control by detaching our desires from worldly things. We may identify more strongly with Christ's suffering and meditate on the true meaning of discipleship. It is a concrete way to express sorrow and repentance for our sins.

Most often I hear people say they are observing Lent by giving something up. (In the case of Lutherans this is usually coffee or desserts, which seem to be our particular vices!) There is nothing wrong with fasting for Lent, especially if we are avoiding something which is a particular area of sin or a distraction for us. I am an avid reader and I

sometimes "fast" from all secular reading during Lent. This opens up more time for reading the Bible and devotional literature.

You might "fast" from watching TV for the same reason; or give up recreational shopping or eating out and contribute the money you save to a worthy cause.

Adding something to your schedule is another way to practice spiritual discipline. If your church has a weekly Lenten service, go — this is a discipline that will help you grow in your faith! One year our congregation shared our favorite Bible verses and committed ourselves to memorizing one new verse each day during Lent. It was marvelous to see the great variety in God's Word and an incentive to strengthen our spiritual muscles. You might try setting aside extra time for prayer, offering your service to a local ministry such as the soup kitchen, or writing notes of encouragement to people who need God's love.

We are each unique, so be creative in finding the Lenten exercise that stretches and increases your faith. If you think of Lent as a journey, you may very well end up in a new place when it is over. It can be a time of exciting discovery instead of that dreary season to get through on the way to Easter. Have a blessed Lent as you seek His face.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Leitersburg, Md.

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God does not accept me conditionally, on the basis of my performance, but bestows his love and forgiveness freely, despite my innumerable failures.

— Philip Yancey

I would argue that the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead is not at all improbable. In fact, based on the evidence, it's the best explanation for what happened.

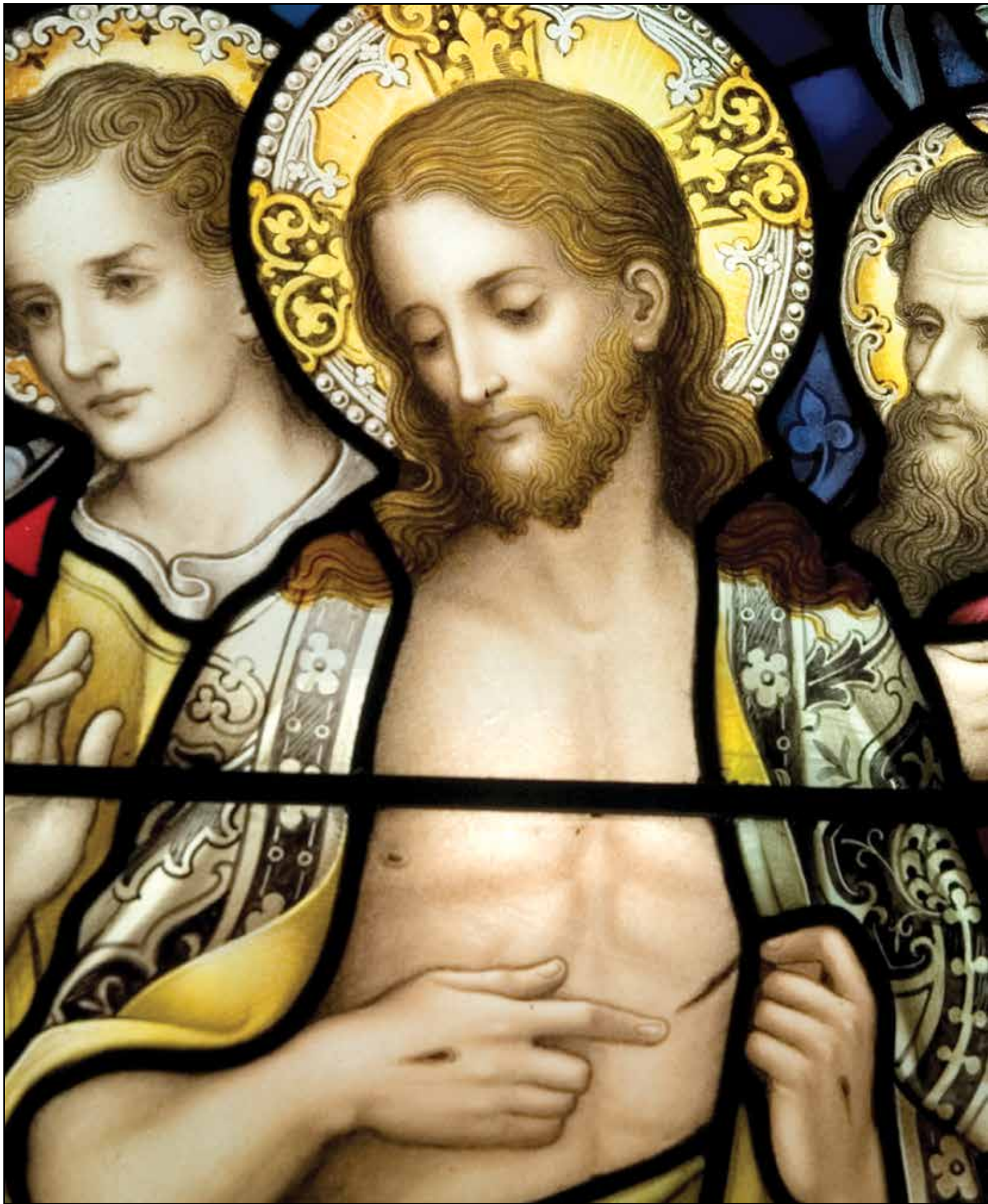
— William Lane Craig

Worship often degenerates into celebrating the believers' dedication to God. After a while you wake up and say, "Hey, what are we celebrating here? Not my dedication. We're celebrating the work of Christ."

— Henry Jauhiainen

If we would live aright it must be by the contemplation of Christ's death.

— Charles Spurgeon



THOMAS

From doubt to belief



By Pastor Kirk Thorson

In rereading the accounts of the passion of our Lord, I am amazed at the love our Savior had for you and me as He willingly went to the cross. I am reminded of my own weaknesses as I look at the disciples who couldn't stay awake while praying with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. I can identify with Judas' betrayal when sin in my own life leads me away from Christ. But I am truly astounded when I think of the disciple Thomas doubting Jesus.

How could one of the twelve, who spent so much time with Jesus and saw His miracles firsthand, doubt that Christ would perform the ultimate miracle — resurrection from the dead? In John 20 we read that Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time shortly after his resurrection, but for some unknown reason, Thomas was not present. When the disciples told Thomas the good news, he refused to believe, saying, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25).

Thomas' absence brings to mind an important lesson that we can take from this portion of Scripture. Jesus' second appearing to the disciples, including Thomas, reminds us that as believers we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. Doubting Thomas rediscovered his faith as he touched Jesus' nail-scarred hands and side. Jesus responded to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed" (John 20:29). While we cannot physically feel Jesus' wounds, you and I are called "blessed" when the Holy Spirit works the gift of faith in our hearts, allowing us to believe what we cannot see.

We may be surprised when we see that even a disciple, one who followed Jesus daily, struggled with doubt. Skepticism and uncertainty can easily creep into the life of a believer. Perhaps this is difficult to understand, but if we look into our own lives and are honest with ourselves and with God, we have to admit that just like Thomas we are afflicted by these same feelings.

I have found doubt to be a nagging concern in my walk with the Lord as I have questioned God many times. I

wondered why I graduated from seminary this spring and waited until the end of August to begin ministering in a congregation. "God, aren't you going to give me a place to serve?" I asked. I questioned God's wisdom in placing someone who grew up in a suburban area of Chicago into a small farming town in eastern North Dakota. "God, what are You doing here?" I asked. I want to immediately see God's plans and know how He is going to accomplish His purpose, finding it easier at that point to believe in Him.

Doubt finds its way into your thoughts from time to time. It makes you feel helpless, discouraged, and maybe even depressed. You may find yourself echoing the words of a passionate father, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Is it possible that Satan pounces on those feelings "like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), making us feel ashamed of ourselves, maybe even making us think that we aren't a follower of Christ after all? Only in Jesus do we find the remedy for these burdens and conflicting feelings.

A weary and anxious believer can find tremendous comfort in Jesus' response to Thomas. By all accounts, Jesus could have been upset with Thomas. He would have been well within His rights to question Thomas' devotion and faith. Instead, note how tenderly Jesus dealt with Thomas. Jesus lovingly called him to touch His nail-scarred hands and side. "Stop doubting and believe," Jesus said to his beloved disciple.

It is the same firm but gentle message He gives to you and me today. At times in our lives, our faith is rocked by the winds and waves, just as the disciples' boat was tossed in a strong storm. We can be confident that God's love and faithfulness is stronger still.

I am thankful we have a Savior who is powerful enough to be resurrected from the dead, yet full of grace, forgiving us when we question His ways. This Lenten season is a wonderful opportunity to think through the reality of Christ's love and compassion for you and for me. When we feel helpless and weak in our faith, Christ gently comes alongside us, saying, "Stop doubting and believe."

Thorson serves Living Faith Free Lutheran, Larimore, N.D.



MALCHUS

Servant of the high priest

By Pastor Brent Olson

Arresting Jesus is a dangerous endeavor. I mean, it *will* endanger your life. A pastor of a church I once attended thought he could do it, no problem. Before he was a pastor, his wife came home one day and said she had met Christ and was now a believer. It made him laugh at first; then it started getting annoying; then it started getting dangerous in the way I mentioned. He didn't like the way it was affecting his life.

At the time, he was a big shot legal reporter for the most influential newspaper in the Midwest. He was smart, well-educated, savvy, and he knew it. So he went out one day to nip this in the bud — to arrest Jesus, you could say. Like a reporter, he would go out and interview the best minds, the smartest people, the experts. He'd bring the story back to his wife and show her Jesus of Nazareth with handcuffs on — just another man with delusions of grandeur. He'd arrest these primitive ideas that had the potential to control his life. I'm happy to say, this reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* lost his life in the process. If you've ever read his book, *The Case for Christ*, you'll know what Lee Strobel gained in return — real and abundant life, eternal life.

History is full of such cautionary tales. You may have read about a lawyer who went out one day to arrest Jesus, so to speak. He was riding down this road in the middle of the day. And, all of the sudden, he got knocked off his high horse. By a bright light, no less. And then he heard this voice, "Saul, why are you persecuting me? It's hard, isn't it, to kick against the goads?" Two thousand years ago that was a way of saying, "Don't you realize that, if you keep at it, the only person you're really going to hurt is yourself?" In other words, "Trying to arrest Jesus, Saul, is a dangerous endeavor. It may well cost you your life."

I like the way this lawyer came to understand what happened to him when he went out to arrest Jesus. He was completely overwhelmed that this same Jesus whom he

was persecuting would not only spare one of His greatest enemies, but also make him His greatest human ambassador. In short, it was all grace. He wrote about it in a letter to another pastor: "The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (I Timothy 1:14-16).

Again, here's the pattern as concerns God's healing of men: It's all grace in Jesus Christ. It's true, Saul lost his life in the process. But it was a joyful exchange. He described it this way to the members of a church: "I have been crucified with Christ, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Paul was perhaps the greatest example of what happens when you go out to arrest Jesus Christ. But he wasn't the first. Being a leader among the Pharisees, it's probable that Paul was acquainted with the first example, though. Whenever he wanted to see Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel, Paul would have had to go through Caiaphas' chief servant, a man named Malchus. And Malchus had a story for the ages. It was a story embarrassing enough to the high priest — and the whole Council — to make silence the prudent course — but a difficult course, you can imagine.

Malchus had gone out to arrest Jesus late one night. He'd brought other servants with him. He'd even managed to persuade the Romans to send some soldiers along to deal with this troublemaker. They found the Nazarene in a garden where He and His followers liked to sleep at night. Remarkably, Jesus didn't even try to escape or resist arrest when they approached. In fact, He stepped right out, and



said, "I am He." "I'm the one you're looking for. Why don't you let the rest of them go." But one of His more obnoxious followers — a Galilean fisherman — was less cooperative. Along with the rest of the Galilean rabble, he shouted, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" But this one didn't wait for an answer. He took a swipe at Malchus. The blade swathed through the air and sliced Malchus' right ear clean off. Malchus' band, brandishing swords and clubs themselves, likely moved to retaliate. But then something happened that Malchus maybe spent the rest of his life trying to forget: The Enemy of the state stretched out His arm and with His hand touched Malchus' bloody wound. "Permit even this," He said. Some say it was His answer to His followers. But it could have just as easily been His request of Malchus and his band. "Permit even this, men." "Permit me to heal your brother." Malchus was healed.

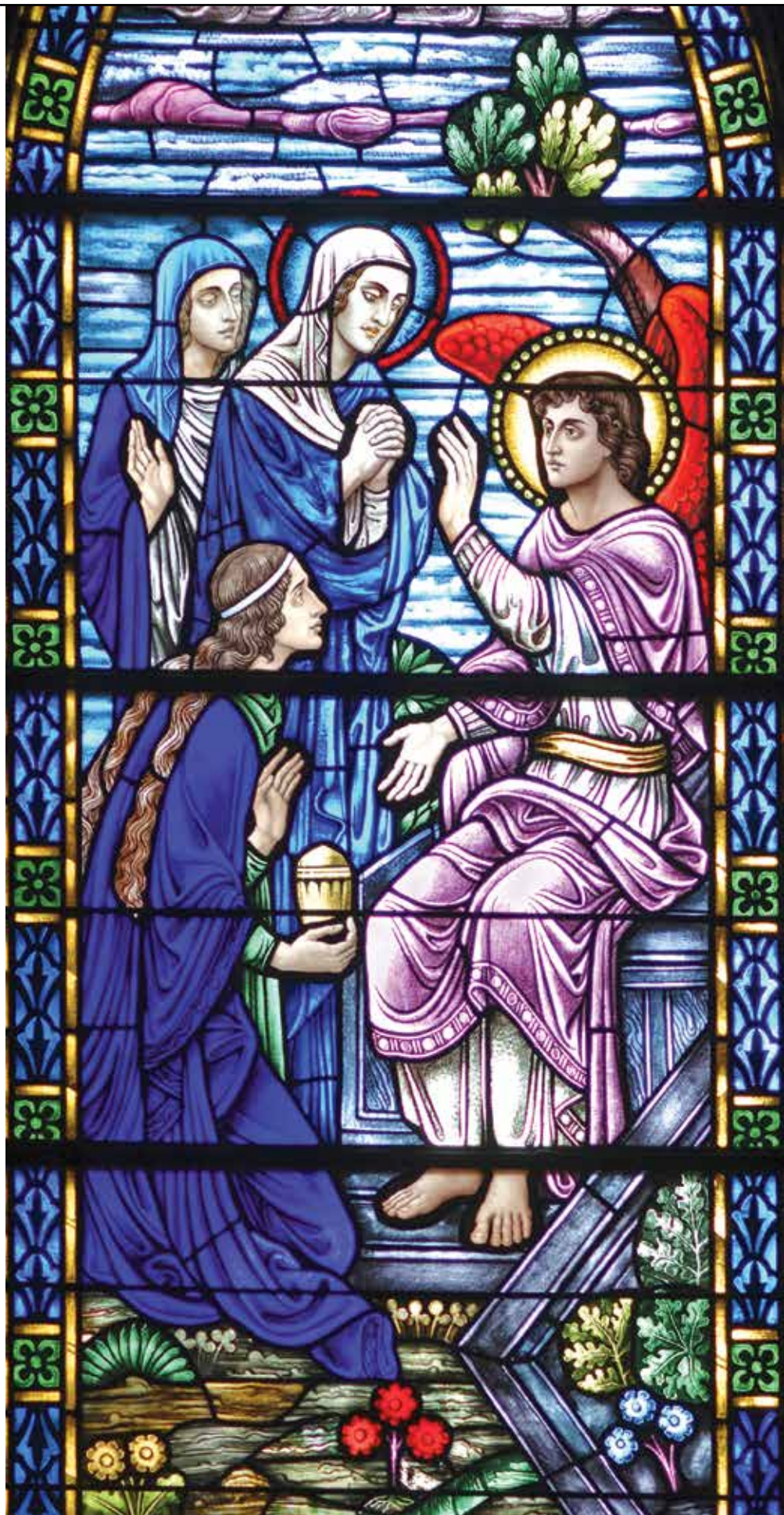
The next afternoon, we don't know where Malchus was. Was he standing beneath the cross? Was he participating in the mockery there? "Physician, you healed others.

Heal thyself." Or was he standing quietly, looking at the outstretched arms and bloody hands, which had touched him only hours before? Maybe he could hear those words in his head, those gentle words in the garden, "Permit even this." And just maybe he could understand the request of the outstretched arms before him now: "Malchus, permit me to give you My grace, that by these stripes you may be healed." Indeed, it had proven a dangerous endeavor to arrest Jesus Christ. But hopefully, by God's grace, Malchus, like the Apostle Paul and Pastor Lee Strobel after him, died to self and now lives in the everlasting Spirit of Jesus Christ. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:8,10).

Olson serves Ruthfred Evangelical Free Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa.

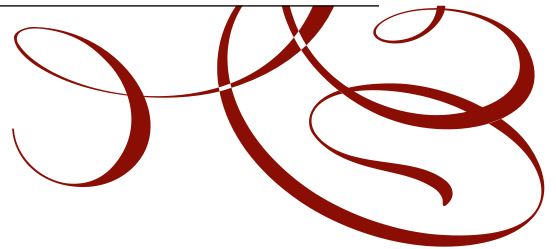
“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him. ... But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping.’”

» John 20:1-2, 11a



MARY MAGDALENE

Missing the Lord



By Patricia Ballmann

Do you ever feel at times like you're surrounded by darkness? That no matter where you turn, frustration, hopelessness, despair, and sorrow are the only things you see waiting on the horizon? I'm sure this is how Mary Magdalene felt early on Easter morning when she went to the tomb of Jesus with spices she had prepared for His body. Not only had her Lord and Savior died, but now also His body was gone.

She had probably been hoping to do this one last thing for Him, this final act of devotion as a way to say goodbye, but when she arrived and found Him missing, she just broke down in despair and sorrow. There are at least two important truths for us to grasp from this story.

The first lesson is this: even while Mary wept in grief, God had already performed His marvelous work. What she saw as a terrible circumstance turned out to be the single most important event for mankind's hope of salvation — Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead. By focusing inward, she failed to see the glory of God's power being revealed to her through the person of the risen Savior.

Does your situation seem hopeless? Take comfort in knowing that God is right there with you, and He is working in ways you cannot yet see. He is bigger than any problem you may be facing. He can turn the most despairing situations into tremendous blessings that bring glory to Him. Look to Him in faith and trust. What you see as an impossible circumstance may very well turn out to be the vehicle God uses to accomplish His purpose and bring restoration, healing, and hope into your life.

The second lesson from this story is a warning: Do not get so caught up in your own pain and problems that you miss seeing God's presence. The visitation of the two angels didn't seem to move Mary in the slightest. "... and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do

not know where they have laid Him'" (vs. 11b-13).

The usual response to angel visitations recorded in the Bible is astonishment, fear, humility, and special honor. In this passage, we don't see any emotional reaction from Mary regarding the heavenly messengers. She seems numb with sorrow.

If that wasn't enough, Mary didn't recognize her Lord and Savior, either. She mistook Him for a gardener and begged to know where Jesus' body had been taken. "Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, 'Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away'" (vs. 14-15).

Mary was so caught up in mourning and longing for Jesus that she almost missed His coming! It took Him calling her name for her to finally recognize Him (v. 16).

It is so easy to be swallowed up in ourselves, our grief, and our problems. It is certainly not wrong to mourn the loss of someone we love or to be grieved over a difficult situation, but if we allow our focus to remain there, we could potentially ignore the blessing and joy of seeing God and His work in our lives and in the lives of others. Mary's story highlights this important point: if we are focused on the wrong thing, we could miss not only the work God is doing, but also the big and miraculous event of His very presence, which should always be a wonder to us and proof of His unfailing love.

Let us continually remember to keep our hearts fixed on the Lord, even in the hour of our deepest pain. He awaits just outside that dark tomb for us to lift up our eyes from our circumstances and acknowledge that He is there. It is His presence with us that, no matter what we face, will bring us joy, hope, and light.

Ballmann is a member of Word of Truth Lutheran, Glen Rose, Texas.



PETER



Restored to ministry

By Pastor Michael Burke

I love Peter! I love all the apostles, but I love Peter best. I love Paul, but Peter is more like me. I can relate to Paul's zeal as a persecutor and his struggles in coming to salvation. But Peter is the impetuous one who jumps out of the boat and then realizes he could drown. Peter is the one who is ready to fight to the death for Jesus against the strongest military force then known.

Peter, after walking with Jesus for three years, is the one who denies Him, not once, but three times. I can relate to that.

Peter had been one of the "insiders." He was privy to Jesus' day-to-day plans. He had walked where Jesus walked. He knew the joy of seeing Jesus' miracles. But he also knew the crushing disappointment of the crucifixion. All the doubts about Jesus rose to the surface when Peter saw His trial and death. Were all the things that Jesus taught really true? Was He really the God-man the Father had promised?

So Peter denies Him. Denies knowing Him. Denies being with Him. Denies being His follower. Denies the Son of God. Denies Him three times.

Sometimes, when I am discouraged, I deny Him. When things go in a direction that I find uncomfortable or in a way I don't like, I deny Him. When He asks things of me that I don't want to do, or think I can't do, I deny Him. I curse myself when I do that, but I do it. My old nature comes to the fore.

Then I want to get out of the boat and walk on water to show Jesus that, actually, I do love Him and want to do His will. I want to earn my way back into His good graces. I know better than that, but that is the response of my old nature. I want to show Jesus I am worthy of His grace. My sin nature tells me that I can earn it. I don't want to acknowledge that I did something wrong.

Peter wept bitterly when he realized he had done exactly what he had said he would not do. But there was no time for him to earn his way back with Jesus. Jesus was dead. Peter's world was falling down around him. Then the women came with the news that Jesus wasn't in the grave, that maybe He wasn't dead. Peter's elation showed as he

ran to the tomb with John. But where was He?

Then Jesus appears among them. He speaks to Peter and asks him three questions. Three times, Jesus tells Peter to feed His sheep. Peter had denied Him three times. Jesus had restored him three times. The complete fall of Peter had been completely restored. Not only forgiven, but restored to the ministry he had when Jesus was alive. The Lutheran scholar R.C.H. Lenski in his commentary on John points out that, in the passage in John 21:15-17, Jesus refers to Peter as Simon, perhaps to remind him of where he had come from.

Simon came from the same place we all do. He was a sinner. He did what his natural tendencies led him to do. He denied God. We do what our natural tendencies lead us to, as well. We sin. Even though we have experienced salvation, we sin. And we have the same problem we had before we were saved; we are unable to correct the sin.

We need someone to do it for us. We need a savior. We need someone who can make the sacrifice that we cannot. We need someone to say to us, "Do you love me?" Someone who does not require us to change, rather, someone who changes us. Someone who says, "I know you because I walked where you walk. I know you and died for you." One who restores us to peace with God.

Only One can do this. Only One is willing to do this. Only One has done this. The One who is Lord of the universe hung on a shameful cross, shed His precious blood, and endured humiliation so that we might find reconciliation with the Father, so that we might find true peace, and so that we might receive forgiveness for all our sins. He has shown us the love of the Father through His sacrifice. He has opened the way into the Holy of Holies so that we can approach the mercy seat.

As we celebrate this resurrection Sunday, receive, perhaps anew, the gift He has purchased for you.

Scripture references: Matthew 26:34-35; John 21:15-17

Burke serves Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.



MARY

Compassion at the cross



By Faylin Myhre

When you think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, does your mind go directly to the stable as mine does? Do you see a young woman about to give birth? Do you see a new mother tenderly wrapping her tiny infant in strips of cloth and singing a lullaby as sweet as the angels sang?

Perhaps your mind goes back a little further, about nine months earlier, when a young Hebrew girl had a visit from an angel. A young Hebrew girl who found favor with God and humbly accepted His will for her. Perhaps you remember the account of her visit with Elizabeth and the praise she gave to God. In spite of the difficulties that she encountered as a virgin with child, we look at the events in Mary's life that led to the stable, the shepherds, the star and the wise-men — and we see joy!

Mark Lowry wrote the lyrics to a song called "Mary Did You Know." In it he asks the question, "Mary did you have any idea what the future would hold?" I believe Mary knew that the years ahead would be filled with wonder as she and Joseph cared for God's own Son. She had, after all, been visited by an angel, conceived miraculously and then watched as God faithfully protected and provided for them.

I think she was aware, also, that there would be difficulties. God's Son would be perfect, a spotless lamb, and she and Joseph were human with frailties and faults, fears and frustrations. In spite of all that, God had chosen her to bear His Son. He chose Mary and Joseph to be His earthly parents.

I wonder, did she know that one day she would see her son wrongfully accused, unjustly tried, spit upon, mocked and beaten? She knew that her Jesus was God's Messiah, but could anyone even imagine the cruelty He would encounter on that Friday? They would sentence Him to death. How could they sentence God to death? They would beat Him bloody and then force Him to drag that horrible cross up the hill until He had no more strength. They would pierce His precious flesh with huge spikes, and His blood would flow. Mary would have to watch helplessly as this son she loved was in pain and agony.

How many miracles had Mary seen God do in her life?

How many had she witnessed at the hand of Jesus? Yet now there are no miracles. Did she wait for God to step in and rescue His Son, or did she deep down understand that what began in the stable was finished on the cross?

It was nearly over. Jesus had been hanging there for hours. Mary was there, at the foot of the cross. So was John. Waiting, for what they're not sure. A miracle, maybe? Or just for His suffering and pain to end.

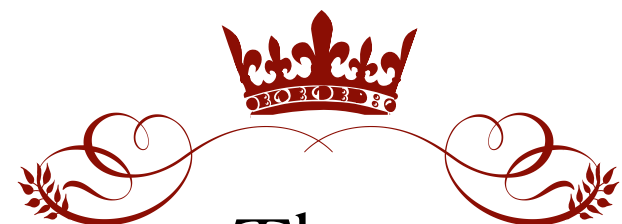
Then, from the cross, Jesus saw them. He saw Mary, His mother. He saw John, His beloved disciple. He saw their pain, their grief, their confusion. He saw their needs. He saw Mary's need for a son, someone to care for her, her need to know that all would be well. He saw John's need to serve, to be needed and used, and to know that all would be well.

John 19:26-27 says: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." Jesus was in the midst of His great mission; our redemption. Yet he took the time to meet the needs of His mother and dear disciple.

One day I hope to sit down with Mary as one mother with another. I want to hear her tell firsthand of the infant Christ, the toddler Jesus, the 12-year-old who was in the temple, and the teen who learned carpentry from Joseph. I want to hear her tell of the love of a mother for her son and a son for his mother.

Until then, just as Jesus saw Mary and John that day, I know He *sees* me. He sees my needs and frailty, my hunger for Him and His love. He is *never* too busy to meet my needs. He sees you, too. Your pain. Your confusion. Your need for Him. He looked down from the cross across the centuries and saw our need for a savior. He died to meet that need and then arose three days later, conquering death on our behalf! Have you accepted His gift? Will you allow Him to pour out His love over you and meet your every need?

Myhre, the Women's Outreach Coordinator for the WMF, is a member of Bethany Free Lutheran, Abercrombie, N.D.



The THIEF

Today
in paradise

Luke 23:39-43

By Pastor Arlin Olson

It is remarkable what we can learn from one man who spent all but the last minutes of his life as a criminal. Yet there he is, a criminal on a cross next to Jesus, coming to faith and finding help during the last hours of his life. What can we learn from this criminal?

A lesson of faith

He came to believe in Jesus. We know he came to faith because of his words as he hung there dying. He rebuked the other criminal who was railing against Jesus saying, "Don't you fear God?" Somehow he recognized that to rail against Jesus was to remain under the wrath of God. Then he said, "But this man has done nothing wrong." He knew Jesus was without sin. Finally we hear him speak these words: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He came to believe that Jesus was more than an ordinary man, that Jesus had a kingdom that was not over just because He was now dying on a cross. Clearly, the criminal came to believe enough about Jesus that he was willing to trust himself to Him. Jesus said, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life!"

True confession of sin

The criminal said, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve." He did not defend himself; he simply stated what was true. Confession of sin is not a good work for which God gives brownie points. Rather, it is the honest admission of our sin and acceptance of the death we deserve. To refuse to confess our sin is to deny that we need forgiveness. When we confess we are able to receive the forgiveness that Jesus purchased for us as He hung



there dying beside this criminal. He had no sin of His own for which to die; His death was for the sins of others — the criminal beside Him, you, me and all people in this world.

The poor in spirit

The criminal said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He had nothing to give to Jesus. He had no life left to live for Jesus. He had no worthiness. By his own true confession he was getting what he deserved. This was a cry of helpless dependence on Jesus alone. Here was a man completely at the end of himself. He was truly poor in spirit. In Matthew 5:3 Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What was the result of this man's interaction with Jesus? There was an eternal benefit for him. After his coming to faith, after his true confession of sin, and after his cry from the depth of an impoverished heart, he heard these wonderful words from Jesus: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Olson is a pastor with the AFLC-Canada and is currently on loan to the World Mission Prayer League.

The SHADOW

of the cross

By Pete Eckrem



In our home hangs a picture that depicts Jesus as a toddler, playing on the floor of His father Joseph's carpenter shop. Joseph is standing at the workbench. Behind him on the floor, Jesus is playing with three large nails. As the sunlight streams through an open window and lands on Jesus, it casts a shadow in the form of a cross upon the floor. The picture reminds us of the work Jesus came to do.

One of the stanzas of the hymn, "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," states, "Help me walk from day to day with its shadow o'er me." Scripture speaks of the protection that is found when we are walking under the shadow of almighty God. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1). "Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 17:8). "Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 36:7).

The shadow of the cross extends the outstretched arms of God to the entire world. When we trust in the completed work of Christ there is relief from worries and fears, a cleansing from the guilt of sin and a constant shelter under the shadow of the Almighty.

Sometimes our own shadow negates the shadow of the cross. When we want things our own way, when we boast of our own accomplishments and deeds, we cast a shadow on His wonderful name. We are to be casting the shadow of God's goodness, love and healing power. We pray it might

be God's grace that falls upon the people we meet.

On a hill overlooking the harbor of Macao, China, Portuguese settlers once built a massive cathedral. A typhoon proved mightier than the work of man's hands. The building fell into ruins except for the front wall. High on the top of that wall, challenging the elements down through the years, stood a great bronze cross. When

Sir John Bowring saw it in 1825, He was moved to write the words: "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time. All the light of sacred story, gathers round its head sublime."

The cross casts a towering shadow over all that man has made and done. From the cross, Jesus cried out the victorious words: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). He had removed the last barrier between God and man. The road was now opened up. Jesus had paid it all. All glory belongs to the crucified Christ.

The shadow of the cross may look insignificant or not even be noticed by the world. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18). With eyes of faith we focus on what God has done and we look at all of life in the shadow of the cross.

Eckrem is a member of Calvary Lutheran, Everett, Wash.

STRESS

UNDER

Helping teens deal
with life's pressures

You will need to list your college of intent and the major you plan on pursuing," says the school guidance counselor. "You will be asked for this information as you begin next fall." The student looks back with a mix of confusion and disbelief.

Why? What is so difficult about this request? Probably it's because the student in this story is just an eighth grader.

Academics is just one of three key stressors that today's teens face. Dr. Walt Mueller, from the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, presents academics alongside appearance and athletics as the top three pressures students face nationwide.

A student is hit left and right with how to look. This reality may be summed up by the prevalence of cosmetic surgery in our nation. According to the American Medical Association, cosmetic procedures among 18-year-olds and younger numbered more than 223,000 during 2003. Teens are finding ways to address the pressure of appearance, and these ways are leaving them empty.

Appearance and academics are fully rivaled by athletics as a pressure for today's youths. Although much is made of how high school sports are leading teens to be productive young adults, in my mind the jury is still out because of the amount of pressure being hoisted upon teens.

My family turned down an opportunity for our fifth-grade son to be in a traveling basketball team that would have required his participation every weekend (Saturday and Sunday) from mid-December into late February or March. Because of a cancellation, our son was asked to join a temporary team for one tournament in January. After watching him play three games on Saturday, I saw him physically and emotionally spent. The words from a youth ministry rant by the late Mike Yaconelli came to mind:

"Why would anyone who understands the Gospel encourage young people to play sports in America?"

Our teens are navigating a complex world with pressures at every turn. It is helpful to know some students are more deeply impacted by just one of these stressors, but it is vital to remember that other students are feeling the massive weight of all three.

What can be done? Maybe the lesson we received on how to cross the street could help us on how to navigate teen pressures.

STOP

We know that the Lord has called us to be guarded in our actions and to walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:6-7). Are we as adults guilty of feeding these stressors among teens? If so, how can Jesus guide us to stop?

LOOK

We need to help the teenagers in our lives to examine these pressures. Ephesians 5:15-16 tells us, "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." The first words could be rendered, "look carefully." Let us be ones who aid teens to look carefully at their lives and priorities.

LISTEN

We see the pressures, but teenagers may not have a handle on them. As adults, we can provide a listening ear for them to process what they are experiencing. Since we understand the Lord's will (Ephesians 5:17), we can engage students about these stressors and hear them out. If you have a conversation with a teenager, are you more likely to talk or to listen?

Holt is director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

First graduation for AFLC India pastors

Ceremony held for 20 pastors and two Bible women finishing pastoral training program

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

In 2005 the AFLC of the United States and AFLC India developed a plan for the training of pastors, church leaders and Bible women of India. The goal was to encourage and train the leaders of the congregations in India so that they could be used by God to teach their congregations God's Word and reach people for Christ.

Since 2005, 13 pastors from the United States and Canada have traveled to India to teach classes. Pastor Luther Sastry, AFLC India president, has also taught classes. A total of 24 classes were taught. On Jan. 17 a graduation was held in Chirala, India, for the 20 pastors and two Bible women who have completed the courses.

The students are serving congregations, some of which are a distance away from Chirala. Most of them have to travel by public transportation. For one pastor it was a five-hour bus ride one way. For another his journey from the fishing village where he lives involved two boat rides and three different buses. Yet, on many Monday mornings they came. They listened and learned during the week. They often slept wherever space was available on campus. Most would return to their villages on Friday evening and come back on Monday for a second week of training.

There was a sense of celebration at the graduation ceremony as the graduates received a certificate of completion of the pastoral training course. Caps and gowns were rented for the event, held at the headquarters of AFLC India. It was the first such graduation to take place in the life of AFLC India.

During the ceremony, Pastor Sastry brought the message and the graduates shared a number in song. Dr. Francis Monseth — dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary who had been involved in the development of the program and taught one of the classes — presented certificates to the graduates. World Missions Director Del Palmer presented gifts to the graduates on behalf of AFLC World Missions. AFLC Canada President Al Pinno, World Missions Committee member Lyle Mattson and I prayed for the graduates.

These courses have been the most biblical and pastoral training these students have had the chance to receive. Solid biblical training is difficult to find in their part of India. Few of the books that commonly sit on a U.S. pastor's bookshelf have been translated into their language of Telegu.



TOP: Graduates line up outside the AFLC India headquarters in Chirala.



LEFT: Pastor Del Palmer (center) and Pastor Luther Sastry (right) congratulate a graduate.

For the most part the congregations they serve are in poor villages. Those who attend services are mostly women and children who are on the bottom rung of India's economic ladder. They have a difficult time supporting their pastor and congregation financially. The pastors and Bible women want to devote themselves to serving their congregations and reaching the many in their villages who don't know Jesus. They also want to support their families and find it a challenge to do so.

Life isn't easy for these servants of Christ and His church. But they press on. And they rejoice in opportunities they receive to get training in God's Word and have fellowship with brothers and sisters in the Lord.

I give thanks for those who are faithfully serving the congregations of AFLC India. I respect them and admire their dedication. I encourage you to pray for them. Pray that God would give them more opportunities for growing in God's Word; that they might "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18, NIV). Pray that God would provide for their needs and the needs of their families and congregations. Pray that the Lord might use them to reach their communities for Jesus.

2008 Annual Conference housing information

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 10-13 at Oklahoma City, Okla. Hosts at First Lutheran in Oklahoma City have compiled a list of housing options, listed below.

Hawthorn Suites

5701 Tinker Diagonal
Midwest City
405-737-7777
hawthorntinker@hotmail.com
\$94/night up to 2
\$104/night 3 or more

Motel 6

6166 Tinker Diagonal
Midwest City
405-737-6676
m60479bo@motel6.com
\$47.36/night single
\$54.13/night double

Value Place Hotel

3033 Tinker Diagonal
Del City
405-677-5700
www.valueplace.com
(These are weekly rates. Rooms have kitchenettes and laundry avail.)
Studio: \$196/single, \$207/double
Sleeper: \$229/single, \$240/double
Double: \$251/single, \$251/double

La Quinta

5501 Tinker Diagonal
Del City
405-672-0067 ext. 5500
lq0632gm@laquinta.com
\$69/night single
\$75/night double

Comfort Inn

5653 Tinker Diagonal
Midwest City
405-733-1339
www.choicehotels.com
\$94.95/night single, AARP \$85.45
\$114.00/night suite, AARP \$102.60

Holiday Inn Express

1700 S Sooner Rd
Midwest City
877-611-4654
hiexpress@flash.net
\$94/night up to 2
\$10 each additional person

Studio 6

5801 Tinker Diagonal
Midwest City
405-737-8851
S6603bo@staystudio6.com
\$246.33/wk or \$55.13/day single
\$291.41/wk or \$64.13/day double
(These rooms have kitchenettes)

Camping

- **Rockwell RV Park**, (888) 684-3251
www.campusa.com/ok/rockwell
Swimming pool, hot tub, wifi, laundry, coffee and muffins, 8 miles from church
- **KOA**, Call (800) 562-7056 or visit
www.koa.com/where/ok/36133
Swimming pool, wifi, 18 miles from church.
- **Twin Fountains RV Park**,
(866) 693-1469.
www.twinfountainsrvpark.com
Wifi, fishing pond, playground,
7 miles from church

Bed and Breakfasts

Redstone Inn

405-427-0383
www.redstoneinnokc.com
8 miles from church

Willow Way

405-427-2133
www.bbonline.ok/willow/index.html
8 miles from church

Conference registration forms, child care and meal information will be published again in the May *Ambassador* and is also available online at www.2007aflc.org.

Childcare offered at conference

Send in your information for VBS, daycare and activities

Vacation Bible School will be offered from 9 a.m. to noon Monday through Friday, June 9-13, during the Annual Conference in Oklahoma City, Okla. Evening childcare will be available for children ages 4 and younger.

The conference hosts at First Lutheran in Oklahoma City are considering a wide variety of afternoon activities for children ages 5 to 18, which would be offered after VBS on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for an additional cost to be paid upon arrival at the conference. Possibilities include a trip to the Oklahoma City Zoo, Whitewater Bay (a good-sized water park), or the Oklahoma Indian Tribe Historical Center.

To assist us in the preparation, including the price of the activities, we need you to please send us the following information:

- Name(s) and age(s) of children
- Days in daycare, if needed (mark M, T, W, R, and/or F)
- Names of those attending VBS
- Names of those participating in special activities
- Emergency cell phone number
- If your child has food allergies, medical/special needs

Send this information along with the registration form on page 19.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee accepted a resolution of affiliation from **St. John's Lutheran**, Newark, Ohio. The congregation recently voted to leave the AALC and is served on an interim basis by Pastor David Barnhart.

Licensed Pastor Al Bedard has resigned from his position serving Salem Lutheran Church of Oxford, North Branch, Minn.

Licensed Pastor Warren Swanson has accepted a call to Our Savior's Lutheran, Argyle, Minn. He leaves his position as associate pastor at Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash.

Pastor Tom Olson has resigned from his position serving Faith Lutheran in Mineral Point, Wis.

Campus Days has been scheduled for March 28-30 on the campus of AFLBS in Plymouth, Minn.

Don Edlund has been added to the licensed pastor clergy roster. He serves as the youth pastor at Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn.

conference REGISTRATION

June 10-13 in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Hosts: First Lutheran, Oklahoma City, and Faith Lutheran, Durant, Okla.

Conference site: St. Luke's United Methodist, 222 NW 15th St., Oklahoma City

For a downloadable form, and for more information, visit www.aflc.org and click on "conferences"

First name: _____ Spouse's first name: _____

Last name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Congregation: _____

(Circle)

You are: Pastor Visiting Pastor Lay Member Lay Visitor

Your spouse is: Pastor Visiting Pastor Lay Member Lay Visitor

Name of person attending WMF Convention on June 10: _____

(Note: If you have children attending, please see childcare information printed on page 18.)

Meals

Breakfast and evening dinners are on your own, except as noted. A general lunch will be available at noon on site.

Special meals and banquets

Tuesday WMF luncheon	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Tuesday WMF banquet	_____ X \$11.50	\$ _____
Wednesday WMF advisory board breakfast	_____ X \$7	\$ _____
Wednesday general lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Wednesday Schools Corporation dinner	_____ X \$11.50	\$ _____
Thursday Mission Corporation breakfast	_____ X \$7	\$ _____
Thursday general lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Thursday ARC Corporation lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Thursday Pastors and Wives banquet	_____ X \$20	\$ _____
Friday general lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____

Total lunches/special meals \$ _____

Conference registration fee (\$30 single/\$40 couple) \$ _____

WMF Convention registration fee (\$7) \$ _____

Total registration and meals \$ _____

Make checks payable to: First Lutheran Church
Mail to: First Lutheran Church, Attn.: AFLC Conference Committee,
1300 N. Robinson, Oklahoma City, OK 73103



YOUR *Gift*

BY TODD & BARB SCHIERKOLK

This past Christmas we had an outreach program in our two Kid's Clubs here in Jerez, Mexico. Both of the programs were well attended by the kids in each of the neighborhoods. The six teachers and helpers in the clubs put on two puppet skits and we watched "Red Boots for Christmas." At the end of the program each of the kids received a shoebox type of gift with an Arch Book Bible story along with it.

Those programs during the week led up to our Christmas program at church where all of the kids in the two clubs and the Sunday school formed a choir and sang Christmas songs that they had been working on for several months. It was the first time they had all sung together and they were surprised at how big and loud they sounded. The youth group sang several Christmas hymns and Pastor

Dan Giles shared a Christmas evangelistic message that was well received. Afterward, members of the youth group helped give away many quilts to each family that was present.

Thank you to all who had a part in helping make these events effective in sharing the gospel of Christ's love to those who live in our town. We appreciate all those who were praying with us, the many people who put much time into the quilts that were made in Christ's love, and all those who helped us with the shoebox Christmas gifts. Your partnership in the gospel has been much appreciated.

Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk are AFLC missionaries serving in Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico.

KEEP *Going*

"The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

• Luke 23:55-56

Awash in grief, disoriented by cruelty to one of their beloved, and dismayed by unmet expectations, the women who followed Jesus while He lived continued their service to Him in death by preparing the spices to anoint His body. They also followed Jesus' command to rest on the Sabbath.

Their joy at the empty tomb erased all the profound human emotions that had been weighing them down. They were witnesses to the greatest miracle — the culmination of all history — the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their beloved was not dead; He was risen!

Perhaps in your life there is isolation from loved ones emotionally or physically, disappointment from unmet expectations, or anger at your present circumstances. Follow the example of these women, who, while going

about their God-given tasks, were part of the greatest moment in history. They continued to do as God commanded even when they were small in number and weak in human strength.

God is always faithful. When He promises salvation to us, He delivers on His promise. Even death, the death of His own Son, becomes but a tool in His hand to deliver victory over sin and death to His children. In His victory over our greatest enemies, He promises to work through all things for our good.

God's timing was perfect; it wasn't early or late, then or now. Follow Him and His will? Why not? He was faithful then; He is faithful now. In obedience we experience His faithfulness, His victory, and His resurrection power in our lives.

Teddy Roosevelt, one of North Dakota's heroes, admonished his Rough Riders before they stormed San Juan Hill, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." God has a plan. Even when we can't see the broad picture or even a glimmer of hope, His plans will not be thwarted. He is there even when we don't understand.

Wellumson, Williston, N.D., serves as treasurer for the National WMF.

THE WMF CONVENTION

LADIES: WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US FOR THE WMF CONVENTION on June 10 in Oklahoma City. We look forward to this day of encouragement and fellowship geared especially for women.

Our speakers include Nancy Holcomb, the 2008 Bible study writer; Jane Rasmussen, mother and pastor's wife; and Darwin and MaryAnn Jackson, AFLC missionaries on loan to WMPL. We are also pleased to have Sandra Weaver, Wendy Westlake and Pastor Michael Brandt as our workshop leaders. Dr. Lyle Mattson, who recently returned from India, will speak at the Mission Festival service on June 11.

All women who are leaders or have the desire to become leaders in their church or district women's organizations are invited to a special breakfast June 10. Please use the AFLC conference registration form (page 19) for registering for the convention, luncheon, breakfast and banquet.

Set aside this time to relax, get away, and be inspired as we learn that "Our Times Are In His Hands" (Psalm 31:14-15a). We look forward to seeing you in Oklahoma City!



► January memorials

AFLBS

Vardon Quanbeck (2)

AFLTS

Douglas Ulvestad

Jeanie Loomis

Dale Benz

John Henry

Parish Education

Edwin Aho

Phyllis Trulson

Vardon Quanbeck

Ingeborg Berge

Valborg Hedman

WMF

Stella Kjelland

Oscar Ostert

Gladys Olson

Jerri Johnson

Thelma Behrens

Mary Barschdorf

Jeanne Bouhoule

Vardon Quanbeck

Evelyn Hinchliffe

Eunice Johnson

World Missions

Charles Albertson

Laura Watne

Harry Weisenberger



Letter to the editor

Dear Lutheran Ambassador,

Thank you. The Lord found me in the grips of depression. He was able to come to me through your magazine articles. Because of your magazine, I have come back to God. Thank you and God bless.

• From an inmate in the Montana prison system

ARC events this spring/summer

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., will host several AFLC retreats this winter under the theme: "God's Plan of Salvation (Ephesians 2:4-5).

The **Women's Retreat** will be March 28-30, with Vicki Tiede leading under the theme, "Grace Lessons." The cost is \$80.

The **Men's Retreat** will be April 18-19 with Pastor Jim Ritter leading under the theme, "Every Man Needs a Life." The cost is \$65 with the option of staying Sunday night and breakfast for an additional \$20.

Summer camps

Fire Up Youth Camp, a week-long camp for those in grades four through seven, will be held June 22-27. The cost is \$185 per student. Studies will be led by Scott and Jill Lee.

Kids' Camp, a weekend camp for kids in grades one through three, will be held June 27-29. The cost is \$75 per student.

Family Camp will be held July 20-26. Speakers include Pastors Michael Brandt, John Eidsmoe, Mark Olson and more. Come for a fun and uplifting week for the whole family! Please note, 2009 dates are July 26-August 1.

For more information on the retreats and camps listed above and other retreats, call (800) 294-2877 or visit the ARC's Web site at www.arc-aflc.org.

Plan now for FLY Boot Camp

Best rates available if you register by April 1

AFLC Youth Ministries is excited to announce that national speaker Mark Cahill will be sharing at FLY Boot Camp this summer. Mark is the author of *One Thing You Can't Do in Heaven* and ministers to thousands nationally each year to encourage and equip the saved to go out and reach the lost.

FLY Boot Camp is July 14-19 at the Association Retreat Center (ARC), in Osceola, Wis. The camp is a student leadership conference that equips junior high and high school students in personal witnessing and discipleship.

The best rate is \$279 per student, which can be secured by sending a registration postmarked by April 1. For more information or a registration form, please visit www.aflc.org/youth and follow the link to "FLY Boot Camp 2008" or contact AFLC Youth Ministries at (763)545-5631 or youth@aflc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Jan. 31, 2008

FUND	TOTAL (Subsidy)	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$360,331	\$40,742	\$40,742	11
Evangelism	113,084	11,180	11,180	10
Youth Ministries	71,249	10,309	10,309	14
Parish Education	116,771	11,615	11,615	10
Seminary	220,252	19,069	19,069	9
Bible School	346,706	24,712	24,712	7
Home Missions	332,985	20,802	20,802	6
World Missions	288,948	28,146	28,146	10
Personal Support	457,495	54,823	54,823	12
TOTALS	\$2,307,821	\$221,398	\$221,398	10
TOTALS 2007	\$2,220,688	\$235,821	\$235,821	11

Goal 8%

These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.

look not back

I've stood at a bedside and listened to labored breathing. Before that time I've often heard the person's clear testimony of faith in Christ. I've seen them serve the Lord. Now I stand beside them as their time on this earth comes to an end. What do you say in those situations?

In *The Hammer of God* by Bo Giertz, a young pastor is faced with that kind of question. He is called to go to the home of a man named Johannes who is dying. As Johannes thinks about his life and the prospect of soon meeting the Lord, he is full of fear. He keeps remembering his many sins. The young pastor talks to him about his good deeds, his upright life and how faithful he has been at church. It brings no comfort.



Pastor Craig Johnson

A neighbor lady arrives and takes a different approach. Johannes tells her, "Katrina, I am a sinner, a great sinner." She replies, "Yes, that you are, Johannes. But Jesus is a still greater Savior." She doesn't tell him to think about good things he has done for God and others. She urges him to "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

When I stand by people who are about to face death, even if they've been faithful followers of Jesus, I don't spend a whole lot of time talking about what they have done. That might build up the ego, but it doesn't bring comfort that overcomes the fear of death. It doesn't give hope that endures for eternity. The kind of hope a person needs is found in looking to Jesus. It is found in the gospel, the good news of what Christ has done.

Later in the novel, the story is told of another pastor who also arrived at the home of a dying man. His daughter was with him. She told the pastor that when she got there she said to her father, "You are thinking about Jesus, are you not, Father?" He confessed to her that at that moment he was having difficulty even thinking. "But I know that Jesus is thinking of me."

Comfort is not found in how well we do in thinking about Jesus. It is found in the great truth that Jesus thinks of us.

Too often we make the dreadful mistake of looking to the law, looking to what we have done and what we're suppose to do, to try to find hope and encouragement. The law kills. The gospel brings life. The law tells us of our sin and the punishment we deserve. It shows how far short we fall of the glory and holiness of God. The law points out

"The kind of hope a person
needs is found in looking to Jesus.
It is found in the gospel, the good
news of what Christ has done."

our need. "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

We can be right with God not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done. All the glory belongs to Him. Our confidence and hope is in Christ alone. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (I John 2:2). "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The hymn writer of "I Look Not Back" (*Ambassador Hymnal* no. 400) wrote: "I look not back, God knows the fruitless efforts, the wasted hours, the sinning, the regrets. ... I look not inward; that would make me wretched; for I have naught on which to stay my trust. ... But I look up — into the face of Jesus, for there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled; and there is joy, and love, and light for darkness, and perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled."

We look to Jesus, crucified for our sins and risen again. In Him we find strength to carry on, peace that surpasses understanding and hope that endures forever.

something to share

Tell the *truth*

BY NATHAN OLSON

As we go through the time of Easter, I am reminded of Pontius Pilate's question: "What is truth?" Although Pilate asked this question almost 2,000 years ago, people still inwardly struggle with this same issue today.

Easter is the perfect time for each of us to examine this question — first and foremost on an individual basis.

Jesus said in John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!" But what is this freeing truth that we have? The dictionary defines *truth* as something that is verified, something that is an irrefutable fact. At first glance, one might say, "Yeah that's great, but how does that relate to my discovery of the real truth?" The answer is simple. This definition could not come closer to what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not only verifiable, but is also irrefutably the risen Savior and Conqueror over the grave: the only way to salvation! This is our freeing truth!

Uniquely, Christians have the amazing gift of having the truth of Jesus as the ultimate certainty in our lives, but how well do we know the truth that each of us has within us? Even though Christians have the only truth, why is it that so many believers seem confused by it and don't share what they have with others? Why aren't

Christians today telling the truth? What are you going to do with this truth?

"What is truth?" is also a question we must answer for the world. A lot of the time it can be easy for Christians to sit around with acquired knowledge, but not take any action. Christians in our age would rather sleep in, relax, and do what they feel like doing. But as followers of the risen Christ, we are called to so much more than that! As Psalm 96:3 says, we are to "declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples."

As Christians, it is our role to share! Paul wrote in Romans 10:14, "How can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard?" Therefore, as you come into this Easter season, I would encourage you to live the adventure of telling the truth! Share about the hope that you have within you. Maybe it means a time of reprioritizing, a time to be bold and be courageous, or a time to become a new creation through our risen Savior.

So what are you going to do this Easter? Are you going to *tell the truth* to the nations?

Olson, a junior at AFLBS, is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.