THE LUTHERAND MARCH 2012 AMBASSADOR

THE .
passion
PILGRIMAGE

Easter

BY CHRISTINA OSTHUS

have to admit, I spent the first 15 years of my life nearly indifferent to Easter. Compared to Christmas, how could a feastless, presentless holiday like Easter really compete? Even more obvious than that, a holiday celebrating a birth is a whole lot more fun than a holiday about a death. Then again, maybe I had forgotten that Easter wasn't really about a death ... or maybe I didn't fully understand the death behind it.

Good Friday music probably started the process of reversing that indifference. One year my youth group did a human video to Ray Boltz's song, "Watch the Lamb." In spite of the giggles and jokes that interrupted our practices (visions of a lamb dragging two little boys through the streets of Jerusalem), I was shaken during the performance by that beauty in God's sacrifice which reached perfection in the ugliness of sorrow.

After I realized the ugliness and the beauty of Good Friday, I could more fully appreciate the "bursting forth in glorious day" of Easter. That line is from a rich modern-day hymn titled, "In Christ Alone," and to hear the shouts and cheers during this line on the radio or in church can make any day glorious, Easter or not. Only after I understood Christ's victory was my soul able to heartily thrill at the words of "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" and "Up from the Grave He Arose."

I also had to ask myself the eternal Easter question: Why did Jesus have to die? More often than not, I wind up trying to use the "deep magic" of C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* to explain it: all who have chosen to join in the rebellion against the King of kings are consigned to a traitor's death without a Hero to rescue them, the King Himself.

What we so often do not understand is that it is not Satan who demands this satisfaction, but God the Father, who is so pure



and just that to ignore our sin would be going against His very nature. His unfathomable justice and mercy were both satisfied in the deal He proposed: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righ-

teousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21). That is just one of many verses that explains the exchange that took place on the cross. We, who are nothing special in ourselves, are poor sacrifices either way—whether we are taken to be eternally punished for our own sin, or we humbly give ourselves to our Lord in gratitude. This is why the Father's substitution was effective, because His blameless Son soaked up every sin that had been or would be committed throughout earthly history, and in turn imparted His righteousness to those humans who hear His call. In this way, God's wrath against sin is perfectly satisfied, and He accepts us as His own children with His Son's righteousness.

This year, I must confess that Christmas only increased my anticipation of celebrating Jesus' sacrifice and victory, and my longing for His return. This year during Lent, I pray we would all be pierced by the meaning of Jesus' death, and that the shout of victory we raise on Easter would be heard around the world by those who long for reconciliation.

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Jesus suffers in his passion the torments inflicted upon him by men, but in his agony he suffers the torments which he inflicts on himself. He was troubled. This punishment is inflicted by no human, but an almighty hand, and only he that is almighty can bear it.

—Blaise Pascal

The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.

—John Stott

Passion is a kind of waiting—waiting for what other people are going to do. Jesus went to Jerusalem to announce the good news to the people of that city. And Jesus knew that he was going to put a choice before them: Will you be my disciple, or will you be my executioner? There is no middle ground here.

—Henri Nouwen

Christ is risen! In fact, the very existence of the New Testament itself proclaims it. Unless something very real indeed took place on that strange, confused morning, there would be no New Testament, no Church, no Christianity.

—Frederick Buechner

Dassion PILGRIMAGE You've heard it said that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" (Lao-tzu, Chinese philosopher). Neil Armstrong's single step in 1969 was pretty momentous. "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." There have been many exceptional journeys made by man throughout history. Long journeys. Outstanding journeys. But none so significant, so essential and earth-shaking as that passionate pilgrimage made by the God-Man. Though this journey of Jesus Christ may have begun with a few simple steps "as usual" to the Mount of Olives, the next 24 hours would be anything but ordinary in the life of our Savior.





Walk with Jesus IN THE GARDEN

John 18:37-38

By Pastor Wayne and Solveig Hjermstad

t is meaningful to walk where famous men and women have walked. Great deeds and missions accomplished in time past can evoke impressions previously unfelt. During our recent visit to the Holy Land, we followed

Jesus' footsteps with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. The experience penetrated our hearts as we attempted to comprehend the events of those hours before the crucifixion.

Just east of Jerusalem, standing on the Mount of Olives presents a breathtaking panorama of what was the Temple Mount. Jesus would depart Earth with His mission accomplished from that same location. With His ultimate victory in our minds, we descended the path to the garden, which continues further down through the Valley Kidron before ascending to Jerusalem en route to Calvary. We gained a true perspective of the scenes which unfolded that first Holy Week.

As we entered the place of Jesus' agony, we found it still marked by ancient gnarled olive trees growing from the roots of trees that lived in the first century. Nothing could prepare us for what we encountered. Did it seem familiar? Yes. Though similar to visiting one's ancestral home, we knew this place so

much better. We return here in spirit each Lenten season because of the One who loved this place and visited it often. And whenever we do, we personalize the words of C. Austin Miles, "He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am His own. And the joy we sharwe as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

The memories of events in Jesus' life linger in this place, making it special. It isn't unlike the garden that was there before. He came here with His friends and enjoyed sweet times of fellowship away from the noise of the city. Included in the garden is the Church of All Nations, built over a rock which tradition claims as the place where Jesus prayed while His disciples slept. It is incomprehensible to think that each of us were there in His mind and

heart that day.

The presence of olive trees are an appropriate setting for events which took place there. Olives are entirely pressed because much of the oil is found in the pit. Massive stones were used to press out the oil. It was here Jesus felt the crushing weight of the burden He came to bear on behalf of us all. Matthew and Mark record the passion of Jesus in His own words, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38, Mark 14:34). Bloody sweat dropped from body and soul. Sorrow and love flowed as He considered what was about to happen.

The thought of bearing the corruption of humanity weighed heavily upon Jesus. There was the unthinkable feeling of separation from the Father that our sin would cause. For the first and only time, the Author of life would experience death, as the Author of our salvation. Never did man pray as Jesus did that night. It was an agonizing cry that reached heaven with no reply. None was needed, for the answer was fully known. His prayer acknowledged the reality of His situation, but also an overwhelming desire for His Father's will concerning us. "He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him

from death, and He was heard. because of His reverent submission" (Hebrews 5: 7).

It all happened in this serene garden, just as the Gospels recorded it. Every Christian visits this site whenever reading or thinking about it. We will always find Jesus there, praying for His Father's will and determining to do it whatever the cost.

Here He agonized over our sins and for Himself fully as much as He did on the cross the following day. Having rededicated Himself to the task before Him, the victory was already won and redemption as good as done, and "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22:43). Then Jesus rose from prayer to meet His friend who would betray Him, and the journey to the cross continued.

We left the Garden of Gethsemane that day, but its significance remains with us. Heaven and Earth met in that garden. Sin and grace met there, too. If ever our love grows cold, walk with Jesus in the garden.

Pastor Hjermstad serves Grace Lutheran, Bruce, S.D. Solveig is the former managing editor of The Lutheran Ambassador.

Christ before the SANHEDRIN

John 18:37-38

By Joel Erickson



n order to fully appreciate the experience of Christ in the courtroom before the religious authorities of that day, it is important to look back on the circumstances of His arrest by the soldiers and high priests servants in

the Garden of Gethsemane. In John 18:3-6 (NASB) we read, "Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus the Nazarene? He said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground."

The soldiers had their weapons at the ready in order to seize Jesus, who offered no resistance. In fact, when Peter cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants (Malchus), Jesus immediately healed the ear. Yet the fact that Jesus offered no resistance to His unjustifiable arrest seemed to have no tempering affect upon the soldiers and the religious authorities in company with them at the time of the arrest.

Jesus was taken by the soldiers first to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest, Caiaphas. We should be mindful here that Jesus was to be tried as a criminal offender. This was not simply a civil matter, where money and property rights are in dispute. Criminal trials are much more daunting experiences because the accused offender's continued freedom and very life hangs in the balance. The outcome of

the trial could well result in the sentence of death. At this period of time in Roman history, death was by crucifixion, a particularly brutal form of execution because of how it maximizes the suffering of the individual before death occurs.

When most of us think about the prospect of being the accused in a criminal trial, we take for granted that the judge and the jury have as their goal to be as fair-minded and as careful in weighing the evidence as humanly possible. But in Matthew 26:59-61 we read, "Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward and said, 'This man stated, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days."

Given the prevailing attitude of the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day, the disciples must have known that the chances of Jesus receiving a fair trial in front of the Sanhedrin were non-existent.

The bar of justice is thought to be a place where justice is done and punishment is meted out when crimes are committed. But if we don't have a proper understanding of human frailty, we may find ourselves having expectations of receiving justice in the courtroom when those with decision-making responsibility are driven by an agenda which results in a pre-determined outcome. The trial itself becomes just a formality with a wink and a nod toward proper procedures.

Once again in Matthew 26:63-66 we read, "But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God, that you tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Iesus said to him. 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.

"Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, we have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?' They answered, 'He deserves death!"

Perhaps one of the better modern illustrations we have of the type of trial that Jesus received at the hands of the Sanhedrin would be to consider the proverbial Nazi show trials from the late 1930s and early 1940s. Jews were put on trial for trumped up charges such as racial pollution (physical relationship between a Jew and an Aryan. The German courts with Nazi judges (who had been required to swear their allegiance to Adolf Hitler) possessed the power to deprive Jews of their freedom or even take their lives through execution. It made a mockery of the concepts like "justice" and "fair trial."

We cannot know the thoughts of other people. Only

God can read the hearts of men. In I Samuel 16:7 we read. "... God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Since Jesus is the Son of God, He has the power to know the minds of all men. He certainly knew what was on the minds of the members of the Sanhedrin. They were just looking for an excuse to get rid of Him.

In II Corinthians 5:10, the Scripture declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." That should be a sobering thought for any human being. However, we know that the character of God is perfection, which implies "perfectly just" in his dealings with men. Though the thought of appearing before God is sobering, we are assured of fairness because of God's character. Jesus had no such assurances when He appeared before the Sanhedrin in the courtroom.

Jesus suffered unspeakable shame and brutality during His trial before the Sanhedrin, vet He chose to be obedient to the Father. What a marvelous thing Jesus has done to take on Himself all of our sins and bear the penalty. All of them. Salvation is truly an amazing gift to undeserving sinners such as ourselves. We should praise the name of Jesus every day of our lives for what He endured in the courtroom before the Sanhedrin and later on the cross on our behalf.

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In the Hall of JUDGMENT

John 18:37-38

By Rob Buechler

A

s we come to the judgment hall of Pontius Pilate, we see a spectacle that we would do well to reflect upon during Lent and Holy Week. We see Jesus standing before Pilate, and our Lord Jesus says the following: "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). Pontius Pilate replied to our Lord in the following

way: "What is truth?" (vs. 38). Within this interaction we see that truth is on trial, and the main issue standing before us today is this: Who determines the truth?

First look at Pilate's question, "What is truth?" It is important to realize the ingenuity of this question. Pilate wasn't looking for an answer. He thought he had the answer already. This is instructive in itself. Notice that after Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Jesus responded with silence. If we do not come to the Lord genuinely seeking Him and His guidance, then we ought not be surprised that we have only silence before us.

For Pilate, the truth was relative; that is to say, in his mind what determined the truth was the individual or the culture. Truth, then, is defined by human reason, human experience, and human need.

For Pilate then, what passed

for truth was really a lie. It was the first lie ever told to the human race, that lie that led to the fall of our first parents Adam and Eve, the lie of Satan: "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5b).

This is something worth considering as we continue on this journey of Lent and Holy Week. If I examine my own heart I confess that this lie has often found a home in me. Too often I have allowed mere reason, experience, and feeling to determine how I will live, speak, think, and interact with the church and those outside the church. Yet in living this way, I fall into the same lie that caused Adam and Eve to rebel. If I determine truth I make myself out to be God or a god. I end up living to glorify me and not

glorify the Lord who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.

We see this kind of idolatry of self played out in the trial of Jesus. Pontius Pilate realized that Jesus was an innocent man. However, his way of dealing with truth meant he first had to protect himself. So even though he desired to release Jesus, he saw that he could not reason with the mob. He determined it was better to kill an innocent man than allow himself to be destroyed.

When human beings are at the center of what is true, the truth they come up with always acts to support and protect the self. This also means that anyone not useful or who is threatening to the self is rejected and destroyed.

Our very human nature is warped because of sin. Not only is human-determined truth self-centered and destructive, it also isn't truth. How so? If a compass isn't right, it can never give you a true reading. If a board is warped, then it can never be used to determine if another board is straight and true. So too, if human beings are sinners and warped in their human nature, it is not possible for human beings on their own to determine the truth. All our reason, experiences, etc., have to be measured and determined by another, not ourselves, if we are to know the truth. Who is that other?

Jesus Christ has come to show us the truth, and we know that He is true because God



the Father raised Him from the dead. By His resurrection, the Father made it clear that every word, every work, every promise, every claim of Jesus is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

The Lord Jesus makes it clear over and over again in the Gospel of John that He is the truth. He says in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." When God raised Him from the dead, He proved to the world that what Jesus said here is the absolute truth, for the resurrection is the Father's "Amen" to all Jesus said and did. The ascension of Iesus into Heaven is the Father's declaration that this word and the entire Word of God is the Word of Truth that reigns in heaven and on earth. The giving of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, signifies that all Jesus said and did belong to us. His truth is the truth the Holy Spirit brings to us (see John 16:4bff).

It is the Lord and His Word that determines the truth of all things. This has application to our lives that we often do not appreciate or observe. Too often we let the circumstances of life dictate what we will do, our attitudes, our thinking and speaking. Yet we are told by the Word of God that God is not dictated by circumstances. He causes the circumstances to conform to His will.

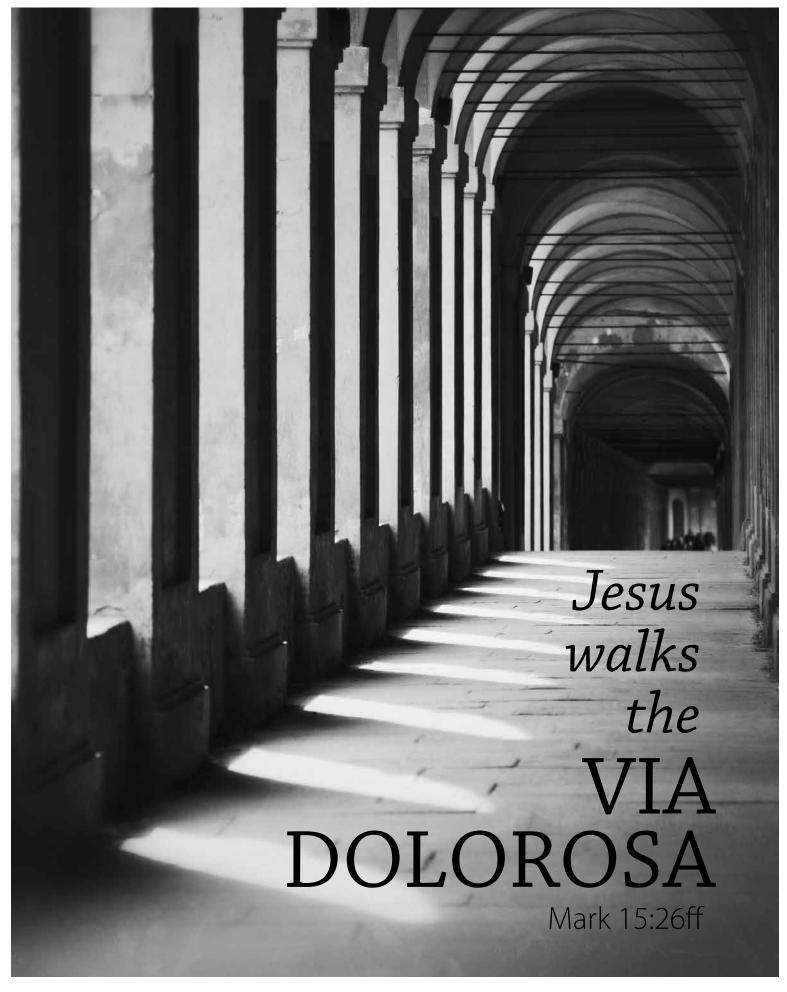
If we would at once see this and put it into practice in spite of the circumstance of life, we

would see the manifestation of the truth we read in Romans 8:28, "... all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." If we would focus on the Word of God and not ourselves, we would see the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives in such a way that we would be able to confess what is written in 1 John 4:4: "... you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Iesus savs those who are of the truth listen to His voice. As we consider this season of Lent and Holy Week, let us pay heed to our Lord, not to our own reason and not to the dark circumstances of life. It is not the darkness surrounding you that

overcomes. It is not your self that overcomes. It is the Light of the World who overcomes. Those who put their faith in Him overcome with Him. Let His Word determine the truth in your life and how you will act, think, speak, and work. His Word is the final authority over what makes for life. Anything else is a deception meant to keep you from the new life and heavenly destination purchased for you on the cross of Christ.

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By Heidi Anenson



here is an ordinary stone path in a distant land, and yet the story from this road 2000 years ago would change the course of history forever. The *Via Dolorosa*, or "Way of the Cross," is actually Latin for the "Way of Sorrow" and is symbolic of the sorrowful path of suffering our Savior Jesus Christ followed on the way to His crucifixion.

According to Roman Catholics, the Via Dolorosa winds through the Old City of Jerusalem, containing 14 stations of Christ's sufferings between His sentence of death to His actual crucifixion at Golgotha. Though there are various opinions as to the actual path, exact locations along this path, and even the location of Golgotha itself, one thing is certain—God's only Son 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).

God gave His beloved Son completely over to darkness, exposing Him to more shame, brokenness, fear, sorrow, pain, rejection, and disappointment than any human being has every faced. Regardless of the actual path, He traveled it rejected, ignored, grieved, and hated in order that we might be accepted, pursued, comforted, and loved. I Peter 2:22 says:

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.' When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered. He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed."

Over the past few years, God has blessed me with several

opportunities to visit Israel on various mission trips. My heart has fallen in love with the people who walk these streets but do not yet stand in victory, knowing the One who walked this way of sorrow for them. Though I love these people so much, one day at the end of summer 2010 began with a plea that if the Lord was going to make that day count for anything for Him, He was going to have to carry me through every step and conversation. As that day progressed, I soon found my crabby, tired self praying with a few others from our group just outside the Damascus Gate (the main Arab gateway for the Old City of Jerusalem). When we finished praying, I noticed an Arab woman standing by a tree near us. The Lord moved me to begin speaking with her. We began with small talk, but she quickly gathered that I was from the United States and asked me about the places I had visited during my past few months in Israel. I explained that we were actually on our way to visit my favorite place, the Golden Gate. She could hardly believe I was excited for the day that Jesus would return through that gate on Judgment Day, the day that she, along with all other Muslims, so fear. When her friends walked up she said, "This is Heidi, and she's excited for the Judgment Day because she believes that Jesus has taken away all her sin. She believes she will be with God in heaven for sure." Even after that day, the Lord opened the door for continued conversations with her through email and Facebook. What a privilege to stand near the "Way of Sorrow" proclaiming joy and victory.

Before the *Via Dolorosa*, one of the most accurately proved sites—where Pilate held Jesus—is also one of the most sobering. It was my sin that put Him there, that caused Him to begin this journey of suffering. I do not deserve this victory and joy, but the *Via Dolorosa* ends at the crucifixion. The "Way of Sorrow" was completed at the cross. Sorrow has been defeated. Forever! We do not worship the path, but the One who walked on it. He bore our sins and carried all our sorrows so that we would never again have to carry them ourselves.

In this world we do have trouble. Are you clinging to your sorrows, or are you continually handing them over to the One who bore your sins and carried your sorrows once for all? Dear friends, Jesus is coming back for us. We eagerly await the place of no more pain or sorrows (Revelation 21). But in the meantime. He has called us to live in the victory that we have in the Name of Jesus. Soon we will be standing forever in His presence, but if we cannot enjoy His presence now, we will not enjoy Him for all eternity. Are you living in that victory with Jesus today?

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He traded his crown for a crown of thorns He picked up His cross and laid down His sword He stumbled down the road bruised and beaten for Jesus walked the way of grief, Hallelujah! He knew it was to come from the very start But his love for the world beat inside His heart He climbed the road of suffering to the hill of calvary Where the saints would be redeemed, Hallelujah! Jesus fixed His eyes upon the

world would be forgiven! Hallelujah, Jesus rose again! On the cross He shed His blood on Calvary I'm thankful for the journey of my King! On the via dolorosa

Soon he would arise and the

new horizon

All my sin was carried away And the power of hell was broken

As He gave His life away

—Via Dolorosa, by Leeland

Arriving at GOLGOTHA

Mark 15:22

By Pastor Paul Kneeland



s we climbed to the top of the hill, I felt as though we were racing against a crooked sky, trying to reach the summit before the sun set behind the distant mountains and their jagged ridges. With a few minutes to spare, the 17 of us arrived at the top and found a large rock to sit on that had been split, with multiple other pieces nearby. From there, we read from

Scripture this very account of Christ's journey.

The arrival of Jesus at Golgotha is a difficult portion to read. Not only does it force one to deal with the painful physical aspects of this pilgrimage, but we also must face head on the emotional and spiritual consequences of this phenomenal event.

Simply reading the passage is powerful. Experiencing a similar location is also effectual. But without the Holy Spirit to teach us and give us insight and wisdom into this miraculous scene, one could end up responding as those who passed by that day: mocking, scorning, insulting, shaking their heads with a total lack of understanding.

So much is culminating in

these very hours. Prophecy is being fulfilled with each passing minute. Jesus has been abandoned by many friends and is about to be abandoned by His Father. He is all alone with the weight of the world's sins upon Him, yet He shows such great love in His voice when He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Only a few hours earlier Jesus had said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). The love that was on display at The Place of the Skull, at Calvary, was a love that had never been witnessed in this way before. This was a new covenant. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). This was a demonstration of true love. This was a demonstration of true righteousness, true justice, true kindness. This was a demonstration of the true heart of God.

We stared in amazement at a vast expanse of land, including both the United States and Mexico, as the sun disappeared behind a distant range. We were overwhelmed as we laid our eyes on the ribbons of beautiful colors across the sky painted on faraway clouds.

The vastness of God's love, of God's heart, is so hard to



comprehend, isn't it? Countless times I've tried to understand. I've tried to make sense of many things in Scripture, but have often come up short. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?" (Romans 11:33-34). Certainly not I.

Why would God show such love for a sinner such as me? Why would He show such patience with someone who



has such little understanding of Him? I can't even adequately explain the Trinity. It's not like I don't strive to learn all the little details of the Almighty. But the longer I walk with Him, the more I find myself resting in simply knowing and understanding His heart.

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

With my voice beginning to quiver, I came to the part that said, "And when Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50). I read that "at that moment ... the earth shook and the rocks split," (vs. 51) jolting my senses to a greater alertness of our surroundings. In silence, I was unable to understand it all. However ...

I understood that Jesus died

on that cross out of love for me and you. My sins had separated me from Him, and out of love He paid the penalty for me and gave me the faith and grace to repent of my sins and receive His Spirit and His gift of eternal life.

That's the understanding that I want. I want to know Him. I want to know that this God-Man who died on that cross at Golgotha is in me, and I in Him. I want to know His heart of love. I pray that you, too, will desire that understanding and receive Him as your

Savior today.

"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (I John 5:20).

Kneeland serves Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Tucson, Ariz.

At the empty TOMB

By Pastor John Kiehl



esus began and ended his life in a cave.

Bethlehem is built on a rocky hill full of many such caves. The Church of the Nativity is built over the cave which is traditionally identified as the one in which

the Christ-child was born. In a cave, into the darkness of this world, the Light of the world was born.

Jesus was also buried in a cave. This cave was a tomb carved out of the rock in a garden near Golgotha, Jesus' crucifixion site. Joseph of Arimathea, with the help of Nicodemus, placed the lifeless body of our crucified Lord into his own tomb. They wrapped Him in linen and anointed Him with myrrh and aloes. There He lay until the third day after His death.

But did Jesus ended His life in a cave? Indeed He did not, since God raised Him from the dead that first Easter morning. Jesus did what He had promised His disciples many times: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise" (Mark 9:31). He would do this because He was, and is, Emanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh. Again, in Jesus' own words, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ... I have authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up again. ..." (John 10:17-18).

Jesus is alive! As the Alpha

and Omega, He is "alive forever and ever" (Revelation 1:17-18). He lives to "prepare a place" in heaven for every believer (John 14:1-3). He lives to "save completely" and to "intercede" for all who come to Him (Hebrews 7:25). He lives to "[sustain] all things by His powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3).

The empty tomb is a witness to all these things. For the empty tomb testifies that death could not hold Jesus, the Lord of life.

Some have undertaken to explain why the tomb is empty apart from Jesus' divinity and resurrection. Variations of the "swoon theory" suggest that Jesus wasn't dead when He was buried. Dozens, or hundreds, of witnesses knew He was dead, including the Roman executioners. Who could believe that anyone could undergo such torture as a Roman flogging and crucifixion, go without food, be entombed, and three days later roll the heavy stone door aside and, completely recovered, walk away? Besides, even Jesus' opponents knew He was dead, according to Matthew's Gospel.

Others have suggested the disciples visited the wrong tomb. Sheer numbers disprove this. Many women went to the tomb, most of whom accompanied Joseph and Nicodemus when they buried Jesus, so as to mark its location. Peter and John also went there. Besides, how many tombs in Jerusalem do you suppose were being guarded by Roman soldiers? They would be hard to miss. Even Jesus' enemies conceded the tomb was empty.

Others suggest Jesus' body was stolen. The disciples were in hiding; they would not or could not have done so. The women were not able to, by their own admission, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?" (Mark 16:3). And if Jesus' opponents had done so, they would surely have produced the body to expose a hoax.

No, Jesus' tomb is empty praise God! It is empty because He is alive!

If you visit Washington, D.C., you will see many impressive monuments to presidents and great men in American history. The Interstate Highway System is a monument to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Constitution a memorial to James Madison, the Declaration of Independence a memorial to Thomas Jefferson. But in all cases, the memorials, no matter how impressive, mark the life and accomplishments of a mortal human being. You can also find the body of each of them in their graves. The death rate for humanity remains at 100 percent.

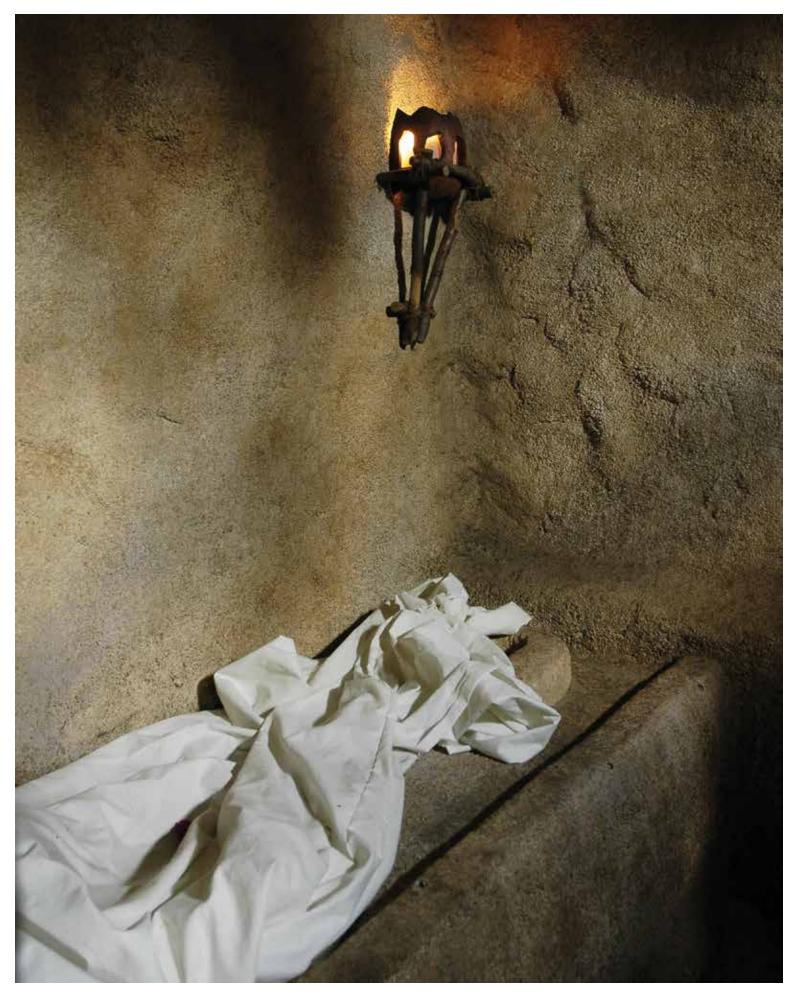
But the tomb of Iesus is empty. It is a memorial to the indestructible life of Jesus Christ, our Creator, Redeemer, and Lord.

A first century tomb, the Garden Tomb, is located near Gordon's Calvary in Jerusalem—an alternative site to the traditional and more likely site at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This empty tomb is a quiet, yet powerful, witness to the glorious resurrection of Jesus our Savior. But the best memorial of all, the most powerful witness to the resurrection is a life lived for Jesus. "You vourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone," writes Paul in II Corinthians 3:2.

And Jesus told the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). And to His disciples He said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). And later, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and now lives in all who believe. This is the message of the empty tomb: "... Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Kiehl serves Faith Lutheran, Metropolis, Ill.



Women with a vision

From the minutes of the organizational meeting of the national WMF

BY LORILEE MUNDFROM

he organizational meeting of the WMF of the Lutheran Free Church (not merged) took place at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Thief River Falls, Minn., on Oct. 27, 1962, at a noon dinner meeting.

Mrs. Ole K. Ose acted as chairman of the meeting. She also led devotions on John 17:21-22. The ladies were reminded that we can have true unity of purpose only as our wills become His will. There was a short time of prayer following.

Many ladies participated in the business meeting discussion and it was generally agreed that the WMF "should have an entirely new program." The attention was first turned to their mission projects. What should they do? Discussion concerned the "My Missionary for a Day" (MMD) project and how they could continue the financial support that was sent to the missionaries. There was some question about whether they could continue to support the missionaries through a church headquarters of their own. We are thankful for the vision these ladies had. Other possible mission venues discussed were the World Mission Prayer League, a church extension fund to aid congregations needing home missions support, and a mission to the Jews. They also looked to the conference in general for suggestion of a mission field they could support.

"It was suggested that we have a page in the new paper to be published as the official organ of the church," according to the minutes. Today this page still continues as a result of the vision of these ladies.

Here is an excerpt from the minutes: "We were reminded that we are responsible for our MMD missionaries' salaries for this year of 1962, but were told that what contributions come in over and above what is needed for support of the missionaries will go into the Merger and Missions Fund. It was suggested that each local aid keep their MMD money until the year nears end and then check at headquarters to see if our obligations have been met before sending in any more money. If it is not needed for MMD salaries, our money will be very useful in starting our new WMF work." Again the vision these ladies had continues today.

Discussion about Bible study materials followed. There were a



Members of the newly formed WMF Board elected in 1962 included Alma Ose, Dorothy Presteng, Leone Snipstead, Elaine Ose and Marit Hermunslie.

variety of suggestions including: using the Bible alone; using correspondence courses from the Lutheran Bible Institute; or forming a literature committee to investigate and suggest material that would be suitable for Ladies Aid work. In the end, it was decided to elect a committee to look into Ladies Aid Bible study material.

Temporary officers were elected who would act until the Annual Conference of June 1963. Mrs. Ole K. (Alma) Ose was elected as president. Other officers (whose positions were determined by votes received) were: Mrs. Richard (Leone) Snipstead, secretary; Mrs. Julius (Marit) Hermuslie, Mrs. Torkel (Elaine) Ose, Mrs. Herbert (Dorothy) Presteng. These officers served as a working committee until June 1963, when the first annual conference was held.

God has truly blessed the WMF of the AFLC with a great heritage. There are two themes that the WMF is using in this 50th anniversary year: "Jesus—Yesterday, Today, Forever," from Hebrews 13: 7-8, which is the theme for the WMF Retreat at the ARC, March 23-25. The second is "Thus Far has the Lord Helped Us," from I Samuel 7:12, which is the theme for the WMF Day in Thief River Falls, Minn., on June 12. As we look back over the years that the WMF of the AFLC has been in existence we can truly say with Samuel, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." Glory be to God.

Mundfrom, president of the WMf, lives in Beresford, S.D..



orry, Mom," I said sheepishly.

It happened again. Another window in the barn was broken, smashed by a baseball that I had hit. I gripped my bat, walked up to my mom for what seemed like the hundredth time, and confessed what I had done.

During my little league years I spent most of the warm Illinois summers throwing baseballs onto the roof of my parent's garage. The balls would roll perfectly in the grooves back down to me where I would perfect my baseball swing by hitting the balls against the side of the garage, which happened to be sided with the bottom of an old tin roof. Every once in awhile I would pull the ball, miss the garage completely, and hold my breath as I watched the ball sail in the direction of the barn. Crash! My heart would sink, a sense of guilt would sweep over me and my face would glow the redness of shame. I'm sure I cracked every single window in that barn, and the process would repeat itself. As a youth I knew what "brokenness" meant.

Dear young person reading this, I'm sure you know the feeling, too. Something you have done has brought about something broken: a broken object, a broken relationship, a broken heart, a broken situation. Now think about how this relates to our relationship with God. When we sin, we break the commandments of God. What do we do?

In my story, I could have run and hid from my Mom—that was an option. But sooner or later my parents would have found out what I had done. They would have found me. It is far better to know our guilt and take it to the Heavenly Father. In that moment as we approach God, gripping the object that we have used to bring about this brokenness, burdened with the sense of guilt over all the brokenness we have brought about, He lovingly welcomes us. But, here's the point: He doesn't simply sweep our sin under the rug, wink at us, and say, "You're fine." No, somebody has to pay for the brokenness that we have brought about.

As we celebrate the seasons of Lent and Easter in our congregations, we remember and recognize the One who has paid the debt that we owed. Jesus Christ, as He died on the cross, was "broken" for you. Isaiah 53:5 declares to us, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed."

This beautiful theme in Scripture will be the focus of the 2013 FLY Convention in Estes Park, Colo. During that July week we will hear speakers touch on the theme, "Broken," taken from Isaiah 53. Yes, indeed, Jesus Christ has been broken for you. Would you consider coming to FLY 2013 and hearing this message as it applies to all of life?

Boe, president of the 2013 Free Lutheran Youth Committee, is an associate pastor of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, Dalton, Minn.

At life's intersections

BY PASTOR CRAIG WENTZEL

n the way to the AFLC Pastors' Conference in January, I had an unexpected experience. I had an accident while turning left at an intersection. A van coming from the opposite direction turned left in front of me. I started to turn, but suddenly there was a vehicle right behind him, which hit the corner of my car and shattered my bumper, grill, and headlight. I couldn't believe this had happened

I called my insurance company, wondering all the time what God's purpose was in allowing this to happen on my way to His meetings in order to be spiritually refreshed. Was I right in even going? As I reflected on the accident, I came

away with three lessons about our Christian life and missions.

First, sometimes we unexpectedly run into people going the other way in life. I never expected to run into the other driver that morning. After dropping off my traveling companion at a meeting, I was returning to the motel to have devotions and check out. I wasn't ready to have any kind of encounter, but that's what happened.

Every day, we run into many people going the opposite way spiritually. Are we prepared to meet them? Peter tells us the necessity of "always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you ..." (I Peter 3:15). Don't let them take you by surprise.

Second, I learned that everyone experiences suffering. It is common to hear these days a prosperity gospel that says that if we trust in Jesus, nothing bad will come our way. In my accident, I was reminded of the falseness of that gospel. Both the other driver and myself experienced suffering that day. We both suffered damage to our vehicles, and we both received citations. My car had more damage, but the other driver was had no insurance



and a suspended license. Her vehicle was towed and impounded.

We all experience suffering in life. Christians are not excluded, and sometimes we believers even cause the suffering of others by our sins or mistakes. Our message of good news is not about an escape from suffering in this life—only in the next.

Third, I was reminded that despite these truths, Jesus takes the edge off of our sufferings. I felt sorry for the other driver and the troubles I had caused her. And I pray that the Lord will use this crisis in her life to bring her close to Him. Perhaps, that's why this happened.

However, I see a difference between the sufferings we each went through, which Jesus must have

made. Her sufferings were just beginning because of her decisions before driving. I felt the peace of the Lord through the whole experience. The accident happened at 8:15 a.m., and by 9:20 a.m., my insurance company had made arrangements with the body shop and the car rental agency, and I was nearly on my way. I sensed it was the Lord who was moving things along so quickly. Jesus takes the edge off our sufferings.

Missions, whether here or in a foreign land, have these three components: First, missions is a chance meeting with people going in the opposite direction from us (away from God). Second, we are no different than they are—we all experience troubles in this life; and we offer them no escape from the troubles of this life, only from the troubles of eternity. And last, we do offer them a Savior who takes the edge off our troubles, and who will someday bring us to the eternal destination we seek.

Wentzel, a member of the AFLC World Missions Committee, serves Living Word Lutheran, Edmore, N.D., and Zoar Lutheran, Hampden, N.D.





AFLC pastors and wives conference

Attendees met Jan 17-19 under the theme: "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

Winter finally arrived in the Upper Midwest, gifting our AFLC pastors and wives with the coldest days of the season as they met Jan. 17-19 at the Association Retreat Center (ARC) near Osceola, Wis., for their annual retreat.

The theme this year was "Faithfulness," and two topical Bible studies (God's Faithfulness to Us and Our Faithfulness to God) were presented by AFLC Schools New Testament professor Jerry Moan. Kicking off our 50th anniversary year, representatives from each common endeavor (Seminary, Parish Education, Youth, Evangelism, Home Missions, and World Missions) presented unique and inspiring histories of their ministry during the workshop hours, using skits, multimedia,

and personal stories. Representatives from the Bible school conducted the opening Tuesday evening session with choral selections by the concert choir and student testimonies, with an emphasis on pastors' appreciation.

Pastor Michael Brandt, AFLC vice president, presided over the Wednesday evening banquet, and Pastor Brent Olson, new AFLC Schools Old Testament professor, was the speaker, challenging the pastors from the writings of Tim Keller to be truly gospel-centered preachers. Following the banquet, AFLC President Elden Nelson conducted the traditional communion service.

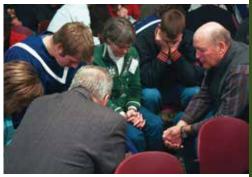
Most of the 126 pastors and wives in attendance came from Midwestern communities, but there were some from California, Oregon, Washington, Texas, and even Alaska, and a season of refreshing was enjoyed by all.

-By Pastor Robert Lee, editor









TOP: Pastor Glen Frecks, Bertrand, Neb., and Pastor Lee Hoops, Kindred, N.D.

SECOND: Pastor LeRoy and Marcia Peterson, Greenbush, Minn.

THIRD: Pastor Michael Brandt prays for Pastor Brent Olson, who was th featured speaker during the Saturday night banquet.

BOTTOM: Conference attendees and Bible school students pray together.

AFLC memorials: January 2012

AFLBS

Ruth Claus Sheldon Knutson Douglas Mikim

AFLTS

Sheldon Knutson Wallace Charles Gladys Williams

Home Missions

Ruda Hanson Herbert Stuegelmeier

Parish Education

Sheldon Knutson

World Missions

Sheldon Knutson Irene Siebert Ruda Hason

Conference housing options

Hosts of the 2012 Annual Conference have compiled a list of housing options in Thief River Falls, Minn., for those attending the 50th anniversary conference June 12-15. Blocks of rooms have been reserved under "AFLC Annual Conference." A limited amount of space is available.

- Americas Best Value Inn & Suites 1915 Hwy. 59 SE Phone: (218) 681-6205 Reservations: 1-888-890-9568 www.americasbestvalueinn.com
- AmericInn of Thief River Falls 1920 Hwy. 59 SE Phone: (218) 681-4411 www.americinn.com
- Best Western Inn

 1060 Hwy. 32 S
 Phone: (218) 681-7555
 or 1-800-569-8123
 www.bestwestern.com
- C'mon Inn 1586 Hwy. 59 SE Phone: (218) 681-3000 or 1-800-950-8111 www.cmoninn.com
- Cedar Lodge

 1009 Main Ave. N.
 Phone: (218) 681-6800
 or (218) 689-5185
 www.cedarlodgetrf.com
- T-59 Motel 1510 Hwy. 59 SE Phone: (218) 681-2720 www.t59moteltrf.com

Camping in Thief River Falls:

- Petro Pumper
 Hwy. 59 & Hwy. 1
 Phone: (218) 681-3546
- Thief River Falls Tourist Park Hwy. 32 S & Oakland Park Rd. Phone: (218) 681-2519 www.citytrf.net/tourist.htm

Surrounding communities also offer housing options.



The 2012 Youth Worker's Retreat was held Jan. 20-22 at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola. Wis.

AFLC Schools host Missions Conference

Pastor Todd Schierkolk was the featured speaker during the annual Missions Conference held Jan. 22-26 at the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn. Schierkolk, an AFLC missionary to Mexico, spoke ont he theme, "You Shall Be My Witnesses." Other speakers included Pastor Del Palmer, director of AFLC World Missions, Pastor Charles Lindquist from World Mission Prayer League, and Pastor Paul Nash, director of Home Missions.

Cox was generous supporter of seminary

A funeral service for Alice Erickson Cox, 97, was held Jan. 3 at Lake Lillian, Minn. Mrs. Cox and her husband, Joe, who lived in California for many years, were told about our seminary by Pastor Orville Hiepler, and as a result provided generous support for several students over the years. After Joe's death, she moved back to her home area in Minnesota and donated a large gift, which made possible the construction of the two newest seminary apartment residences on campus. Mrs. Cox was honored on Oct. 6, 2011, by the Willmar Area Community Foundation for her philanthropy, and she gave the glory to God for her good fortune, testifying, "The Lord and I are partners."

Mass choir planned for 2012 conference

Plans are under way for a mass choir to sing at th 2012 Annual Conference June 12-15 in Thief River Falls, Minn. All singers are welcome. Watch the next issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* for details.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-January 31, 2012			
FUND	rec'd in January	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$25,264	\$25,264	\$29,216
Evangelism	14,231	14,231	10,785
Youth Ministries	8,092	8,092	35,214
Parish Education	10,897	10,897	13,444
Seminary	23,179	23,179	20,126
Bible School	26,483	26,483	53,220
Home Missions	83,773	83,773	54,448
World Missions	33,954	33,954	66,304
Personal Support	60,935	60,935	41,963
TOTALS	\$286,808	\$286,808	\$324,720

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

It is finished

xample one: One of the pastors of a large congregation in the Twin Cities was interviewed for an article in our leading newspaper. He was quoted as saying, as I recall, that there is not a cross displayed in their sanctuary, since they did not want to emphasize something that was completed in the past, but rather that which is taking place today.

Example two: A series of Lenten messages on the Seven Last Words of Christ from the Cross, each one emphasizing a personal application. The lesson of the third word, for instance, "Woman, behold your son ..." according to these messages was thoughtfulness for others,



Pastor Robert Lee

especially our mothers. Perhaps the lesson of the sixth word, "It is finished," might be that since Jesus finished what He came to do, so we need to take care of the unfinished things in our lives.

Example three: An older pastor spoke during an evening service on Reformation Sunday. "There are only two religions in the world," he simply declared. "The one says DO ... the other says DONE!"

The gospel is really hard for us to grasp, isn't it? One even might say that it is impossible. We understand law, for it is evident from creation and is written on our hearts. Cause and effort make sense to us; we understand that our deeds have consequences. This is why the tendency is so strong within us to turn gospel into law, to convert the DONE into a DO.

"It is finished" (John 19:30). Our three words in English are only one word in the original Greek language, tetelestai. It might be possible to understand this as merely

a statement that the life of Christ had come to an end. But the word should not be heard as a whimper of defeat; rather, it is a cry of triumph. It is interesting to note that the other three gospels do not include the word itself, but declare that He died with a shout on his lips (Matthew 27:50, Mark 15:37, Luke 23:46). The old hymn by Philip Bliss puts it well:

Lifted up was He to die, "It is finished" was His cry;

Now in heaven exalted high: Hallelujah, what a Savior!

This word from the cross should remind us of another word of Christ, spoken by Him twice in the gospels in connection with a great banquet: "Everything is ready" (Matthew 22:4, Luke 14:17). This is the good news that we proclaim: It is finished, everything is ready, Jesus Christ has suffered and died for the sins of the world, for your sins and mine. Come!

Example four: A man under deep conviction of sin said to his pastor, "What can I do?" The pastor replied, "Too late!"

In great consternation, the man cried out, "Too late? What do you mean? Is it too late for me to saved?"

"No," the pastor responded, "It's too late for you to do anything to be saved. Everything has already been done—for you—by Jesus Christ on the cross. He has paid the full price for your redemption. Believe and receive it."

Lent is good for the soul. The message of the cross makes us aware of the depth of our sin that required such an awful sacrifice ... sin that is not only what I have done, but what I am. The message of the cross highlights the completeness of Christ's sacrifice, and there arises from our hearts a new spirit of grateful worship:

The theme of this issue, The Passion Pilgrimage, reminds us that the word "passion" has many meanings. Today one hears it used as an enthusiastic commitment to something, i.e., "My passion is politics." Its literal meaning, as well as its spiritual significance, however, refers to the suffering of our Lord during the last hours of His life. Karl A. Olsson, in his little book Passion, wrote that it is possible to write the whole story in the passive voice. "In this context passion is the contrary of action. ... During the last hours he was delivered up into the hands of men. He was betrayed, bound, led, tried, humiliated, scourged, and finally crucified."

"Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling" (Rock of Ages, Cleft For Me, Agustus M. Toplady).

Easter is even better for the soul. The late Dr. Iver Olson, former AFLC seminary dean, used to say that Easter was God's "Amen" to Christ's words, "It is finished." The message of the empty tomb is the good news of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, who promised, "Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19b). It is not a call to do, it is an invitation to believe and rejoice.

P.S. Don't try to turn the message of the resurrection into a metaphor for springtime, comparing Christ to a tulip bulb or something equally trivial and horribly heretical.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

Looking back 50 years

BY PASTOR RAYNARD HUGLEN

t will be 50 years in October since the conference which organized the non-merging congregations of the Lutheran Free Church into a new fellowship. Why, it only seems like yesterday. No, I can't really say that. In a way it seems like all of 50 years. So much has happened, so many people have departed this life, so many have had a part, for a shorter or longer time, in the life of what became the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

And now to try to recall events and to reconstruct why, how, and when they occurred. Not an easy task. Almost like the times I sat down to write one or more editorials and not really knowing what to write. But in the beginning of the effort, the words and, I hope, the inspiration, came.

The desire for merger in the LFC with other Lutheran bodies was very much in the air in the 1950s, certainly from the time of my ordination in 1953. How good it would have been to have a ministry in the LFC free from the merger debates and arguments that resulted in votes in 1955, 1957, and 1961. But such wasn't to be.

Those not wishing to enter the union with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and later the American Lutheran Church, found one another through area prayer meetings, and an unofficial newsletter put out in Greenbush, Minn. The strength of the movement was in Minnesota and the Dakotas, not to forget Wisconsin and Montana, and, far to the west, in Washington. And if I may venture to say it, a core group of leadership was found in what was known as the Thief River Falls District (Minnesota) of the LFC. And so it was there, too, that the organizational conference was held Oct. 25-28, 1962.

But it was in Fargo, N.D., that so many of the early meetings for planning were held, both before and after the conference. Location was the main factor, and for awhile consideration was given to making the headquarters of the AFLC in Fargo. In the beginning the Powers Hotel in Fargo was as much the headquarters as any place. So much so that Pastor Ken Thoreson placed a free representation of the Powers Hotel in a montage he painted of historical sites and items of the AFLC. Also included in his picture is St. Paul's Lutheran in north Fargo, the first property owned by a corporation (missions) of the fellowship.

Who is left now to remember how, after a day of meetings at the Powers Hotel, and with perhaps an evening session to come, we enjoyed those excellent popovers which were served to begin our supper in the dining room?

It fell to my lot to be the first editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. My credentials: editor of the *Spotlight* in my senior year of high school, and a semester course in journalism in college, where I learned that a good news story must answer the questions: who, what, when, where, why and perhaps how? In the last full year of the LFC I had also written the devotional articles in *The Lutheran Messenger*, the church organ. Maybe because of that I was chosen to be the editor of the *Ambassador*.

In three more articles this year I will hope to share more thoughts and history about our fellowship of congregations.

Huglen, the first editor of The Lutheran Ambassador, lives in Newfolden, Minn.