THE STANDANDASSADOR







EVERYDAY, ORDINARY LIFE

BY LIZ TONNESON



have been waiting all month for inspiration to strike. And now the deadline for this article is upon me, and I still have no profound thoughts, humorous anecdotes, or

stirring theological ideas to offer. Life has been ... well, in a word, *normal*. I get up in the morning, head to work, get home, make dinner, and eventually go to bed to start all over the next day. It is quite routine and unexciting, and I'm sure many of you can relate. It is fun when the huge things happen, when the spiritual breakthroughs come, and when we embark on wild adventures. There are times of spiritual mountain tops and low valleys, and also time spent somewhere in the middle. At the moment, life for me is pretty normal. And so I am taking a minute to look at what God might be teaching me in the midst of normalcy and routine.

I have been learning more about God's care for His children. He kept me safe last fall when I hit a deer with my car. (I like to tease my husband, Ryan, that I got a deer last season, and he didn't!) He watched over my sister Becca as she explored Nepal during her Christmas break. And He has answered our prayers and given us a baby. I am awed and humbled by the fact that there is a little life growing inside me, truly fearfully and wonderfully made.

I have also learned to be more grateful. I am grateful for a healthy, living husband as he tells me about the woman close to death whom he visited in the hospital. I am grateful for the job I have and the little girl I get to care for. I am also grateful that God has been gently pointing out areas of sinfulness in my life that need some work.

As I have taken time to be still and think about what God has been teaching me in this everyday, ordinary life, I am surprised by how much He is working when at first I didn't see it. Maybe He is doing a similar thing in your life, and all you need to do is take a few minutes and just notice His hand.

The words of David in Psalm 27:13-14 have been life-giving to me as I live my normal life. After praising the Lord for what He has done, and petitioning God that he would not be forgotten, David states: "I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

There is a lot of badness all around us. Terrible, awful things are going on all over the world, and our ordinary lives can seem insignificant. But we, like David, are to wait in hope for the Lord. Be strong, Christian, and take heart. We will see the goodness of the Lord, even in the midst of our everyday, ordinary, normal lives.

Tonneson, a former missionary kid in Ecuador, lives in Cloquet, Minn., where her husband, Ryan, is the seminary intern at St. Paul's Lutheran.



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soundbites

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead."

—Tim Keller

"Paul stakes everything on the basic factor with which he began, namely, that Christ arose from the dead. This is the chief article of the Christian doctrine. No one who at all claims to be a Christian or a preacher of the Gospel may deny that."

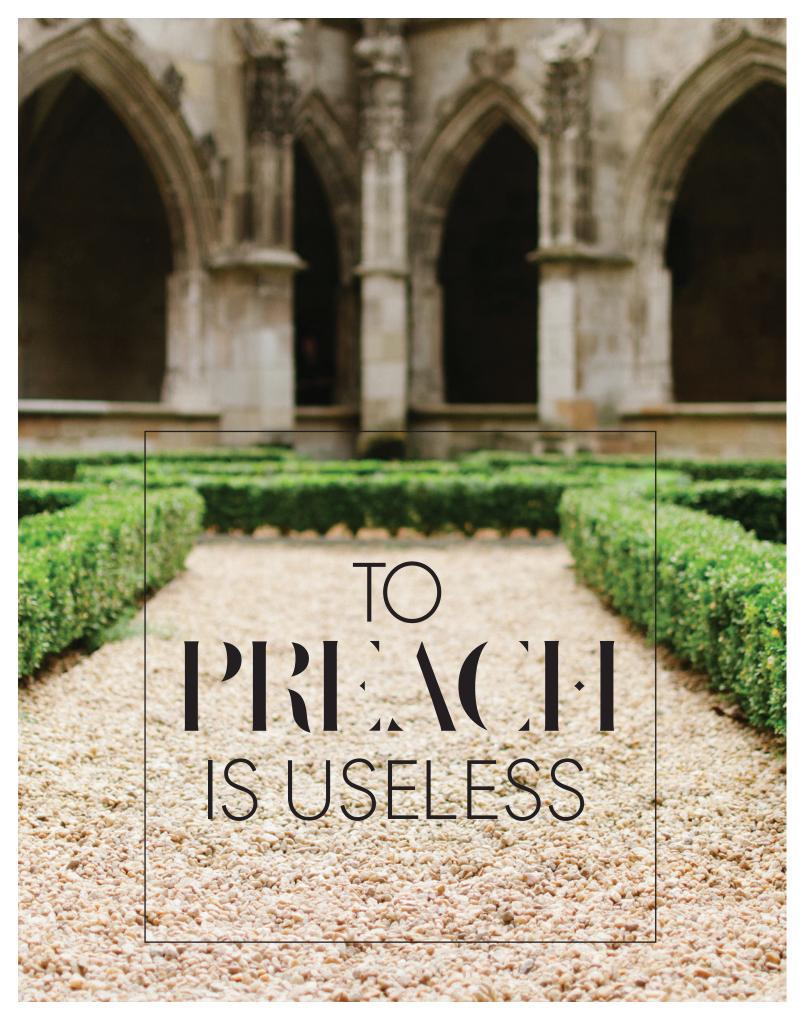
—Martin Luther

"It is not easy to convey a sense of wonder, let alone resurrection wonder, to another. It's the very nature of wonder to catch us off guard, to circumvent expectations and assumptions. Wonder can't be packaged, and it can't be worked up. It requires some sense of being there and some sense of engagement."

—Eugene Peterson

"The devil, darkness, and death may swagger and boast, the pangs of life will sting for a while longer, but don't worry; the forces of evil are breathing their last. Not to worry ... He's risen!"

—Charles Swindoll



BY PASTOR MATTHEW BALLMANN



t was a desperate plea. Paul was beckoning the congregation in Corinth to remember the gospel he first delivered to them. They had a theological smart bomb sitting in their midst and it threatened to take out that which they held most dear: the gospel. Everything the apostles

had been preaching, the very message of Christianity, was dangerously close to being lost. What was this theological smart bomb? It was the denial of the resurrection.

Hearing about this dangerous new belief, Paul begins chapter 15 of his first letter to the Corinthians with possibly the most succinct and beautiful summary of the gospel in Scripture: Christ died for your sins, He was buried, He was raised on the third day, He was seen by many witnesses, and all in accordance with the Scriptures. After providing this summary of the gospel, Paul proceeds to walk the congregation (and us) through why the denial of the resurrection is so lethal to the Christian faith.

His argument goes like this: if you deny the resurrection of the dead, then you also have to deny Christ's resurrection, and if you deny Christ's resurrection, then all of "our preaching is in vain." If the resurrection is lost, nothing else matters. It is all for naught. All learning, preaching, Bible studies, and caring for those around us are pointless. They don't matter one iota if the resurrection isn't true.

Upon first reading, one might get the impression that the apostle Paul is overreacting. All of our preaching is in vain if just this one point is missing? Yes, that's exactly what Paul is saying.

So why is the resurrection of the dead so significant to the Christian faith? Let's look at three related—but distinct—reasons. All three highlight why if the resurrection of Christ is lost, our preaching becomes useless, pointless, and of no worth.

First, the denial of the resurrection of the dead would also be a denial of Christ's resurrection. This is the first and most important point Paul makes in this passage. If a human being who has died cannot be brought back to life, restored, and resurrected, then Christ Himself could not have been resurrected from the dead. Christ either did or did not rise from the dead. If Christ was not resurrected, all of our preaching and believing is in vain. None of it matters if this point is not true. This brings us to the second major point.

The denial of the resurrection of Christ would also be a denial of part of the gospel. There are contemporary theological movements that teach that the resurrection of Christ is only of secondary importance in the gospel message; this movement is rightly described as gospel reductionism. In an effort to reduce the gospel to the bare minimum, the broader picture is lost. Going back to Paul's description of the gospel in verses 3-5, we see Christ's

death for the forgiveness of sin, burial, and resurrection as all key parts of the good news. To leave out part of that good news is to reject part of God's Word. While it is Christ's bloody and violent death that made atonement for our sins (Hebrews 9:22), Christ's resurrection is the proof of His victory over sin, death, and the devil. His resurrection is a clear declaration that death's cold hands could not hold Him in the grave; He was victorious! Our resurrection will be the fulfillment of the free gift of salvation accomplished through Christ's death and inaugurated by Christ's own bodily rising.

Finally, the denial of Christ resurrection would also be the denial of our resurrection. Because we are united to Christ through baptism (Romans 6), we also will be resurrected from the dead to live eternally in worship of the

Triune God. Christ's death is our death to sin, Christ's burial is the burial of our old man, and Christ's resurrection is our resurrection. The good news (great news!) of the Christian message is that we freely and graciously receive the benefits of Christ's work. Believers are called to live not with eyes on this world, but with eyes toward the world to come. Like a mother anticipating

... IF YOU DENY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, THEN ALL OF **"OUR PREACHING** IS IN VAIN."

the birth of the child she carries, we are to anticipate the return of Christ and our resurrection. The Easter season is filled with hope; hope in the life to come given to us by Christ Jesus.

What does this all mean for us living in the 21st century? It means the same thing it meant to the early Christians. Because Christ rose from the dead, our preaching is not in vain. Because Christ rose from the dead, we know that the gospel message is true, we know that our sins are forgiven, and we can live with a hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day. We must hold fast to the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection that we, too, will experience, because without it we lose part of the gospel.

May our hearts and minds be strengthened this Easter season knowing that because Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins and rose from the dead, we have our sins forgiven and will also rise from the dead and spend eternity worshiping the Triune God.

Ballmann is the pastor of discipleship at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

BY PASTOR TIMOTHY BANKS



hat does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to us as Christians? Well, if I were to sum the answer to this question up in one word I would use the word, "everything." The resurrection of Jesus Christ means everything to us as Christians. Without it, our faith is empty and useless.

This is why the Apostle Paul so emphatically states in I Corinthians 15:14, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." But more specifically, what does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to us as Christians? Several years ago I preached a sermon on this very topic and it completely transformed my view of Jesus' resurrection and how much I value it.

BUT IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, OUR PREACHING IS USELESS AND SO IS YOUR FAITH.

First, Jesus' resurrection validates His claims. Over and over again, Jesus makes the claim that He is the Son of God. What proof is there that His claims are true? The proof is found in His resurrection. In Peter's first sermon at Pentecost he highlighted Jesus' resurrection, proclaiming in Acts 2:32, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."

A couple verses later, in 2:36, Peter gives meaning to his prior statement saying, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." In Romans 1:4, Paul complements Peter's teaching by emphatically stating that Jesus "was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead." Jesus' resurrection verifies His identity. It proves that He is exactly who He says He is.

Now if Jesus is who He claims to be then we can also be sure that all of the other claims and promises about Him in God's Word are valid. The resurrection of Jesus Christ verifies His identity as the Son of God and validates all the claims that God's Word makes about Him.

Second, Jesus' resurrection vindicates us in the presence of God. Vindicate is not a word that we use very

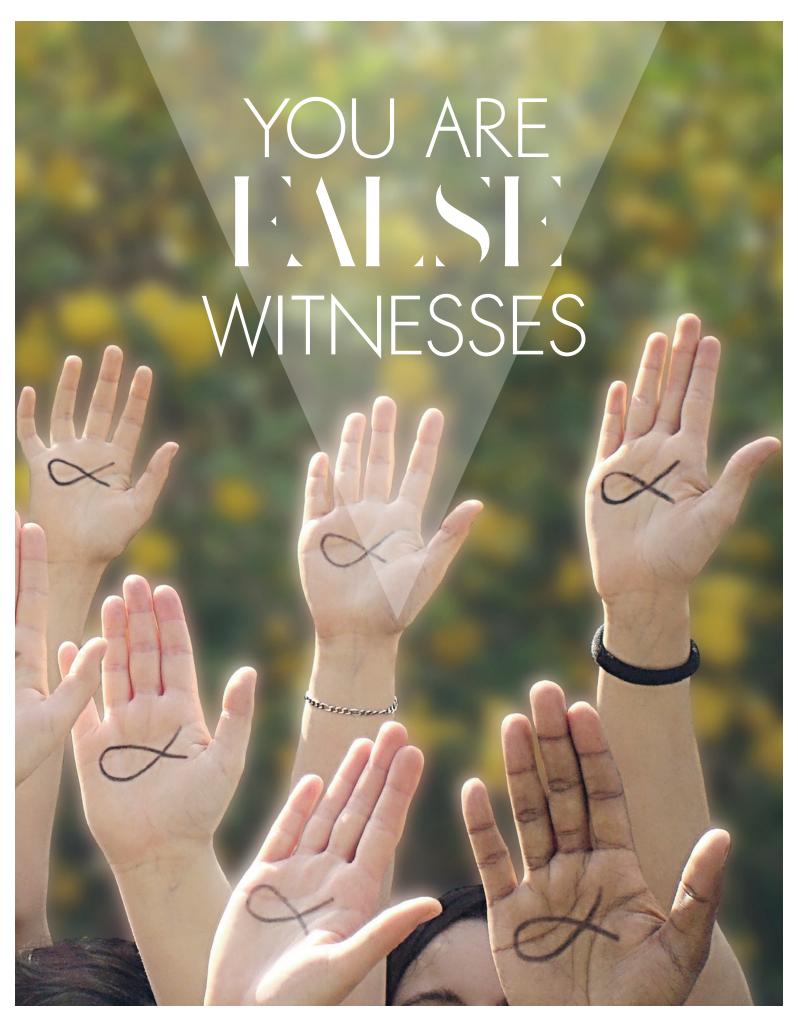
often. To vindicate means to justify, support, defend, prove correct, prove right, clear, exonerate, pardon, absolve, acquit, etc. This is what Paul teaches us regarding Jesus' resurrection in Romans 4:25, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." From there Paul goes on to say in Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." What has made this justification and access to God's presence possible? The fact that Jesus "was raised to life for our justification," just us we read Romans 4:25. Jesus' resurrection vindicates or justifies us in the presence of God.

Third, Jesus' resurrection asserts His victory over sin and death. What does Paul say has happened because Jesus has risen from the dead? He says in I Corinthians 15:54-55, "Death has been swallowed up in victory, 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" But not only does Jesus' resurrection assert His own victory over sin and death, it grants us victory over sin and death, as well. This is why Paul goes on to praise the Lord in I Corinthians 15:57 saying, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Because Jesus has granted us a victorious new life through Jesus' resurrection we can join in the praise of I Peter 1:3, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Jesus' resurrection asserts His victory over sin and death, and it grants us a victorious new life. Praise the Lord!

Think about this for a moment. If Jesus has not been raised then there is no verification of His identity or validation of the claims that God's Word makes about Him. If Jesus has not been raised then there is no justification of our sins. If Jesus has not been raised then neither He nor we have victory over sin and death. A faith that is void of such things sure sounds like an empty and useless faith to me. This is why Paul says in I Corinthians 15:14, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." But praise the Lord because Christ has been raised! Therefore we can be certain that our faith is not in vain.

Banks is the assistant pastor of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn. He has accepted a call to serve Our Savior's Lutheran, Cannon Falls, Minn.





BY STEPHEN LARSON



hat greater scandal than to be found a liar? Liars are the worst kind of people. And the worst kind of liars are perjurers, people who lie under oath, deny the truth before the one who has the power to judge, and, by their very words, obstruct and impede the administration of justice.

Testimony can be powerful. In a court of law, it can exonerate the innocent or damn the guilty. Imagine with me, you've been charged with murder, but you're innocent. The prosecution calls their key witness to the stand. The witness approaches the judge, takes an oath, and direct examination begins and ends without incident. The prosecution's witness has offered compelling testimony about your alleged guilt. It doesn't look good for you. You know the witness is lying, but, unless the witness and his false testimony are found out, the jury will find his testimony credible and, in turn, you guilty of a crime you didn't commit. Your attorney cross examines the witness. On a single but crucial point the witness' testimony is called into question. If the jury finds the witness' testimony on this point credible, they'll believe the rest of his story and find you guilty, but if not, nothing he says can be trusted, you'll be acquitted, and justice will be served. The entire case rests on the truth of this single point.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes to the skeptics to convince them of the resurrection of the body to convince them that on the Last Day Jesus will raise dead people from the grave and reunite them to their souls. The Corinthian skeptics denied the resurrection of the body because it contradicted the popular philosophy of their time. But for Paul it's all or nothing. He stakes everything on the resurrection of the body. "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ... And if Christ has not been raised ... we are found to be false witnesses." In other words, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then the testimony of the witnesses about Jesus rising from the dead, from Peter to Paul, is false, and nothing they said can be trusted. And if Peter and Paul can't be trusted, this religion is a sham, you're a phony, and everyone's still in sin. Put simply, Christianity without the resurrection of the dead is impossible.

Today, the resurrection of the body is not a hotly debated topic among Bible-believing Christians. We understand it, like Martin Luther did, as the "linchpin" of Christianity. It's so important that most of us confess it, at a minimum, every Sunday during morning worship when

we recite the third article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communions of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." But it's a mystery, a truth described and promised in Scripture that stands directly against worldly reason and defies the laws of nature. Dead bodies, walking out of the grave, repaired, whole, and reunited with a soul that left hundreds—even thousands—of years ago.

Worldly reason also denies that baptism, through water and the Word, washes away sin and that the bread is Christ's body and the wine His blood. It cannot believe that the dead will be revived on the Last Day and the body united with the soul.

Worldly reason so often stands against the truths of Scripture. It was no different for the Corinthians, it is no different for us today, and won't be tomorrow.

As you remember Easter, take great joy in the gospel message all of it. For everything that be, we believe, is linked together like a chain. And if one

MORE THAN THAT. WE ARE FOUND TO BE FALSE WITNESSES ABOUTGOD

article of faith stands, they all stand. Think back to the message of the apostles as they described that beautiful morning at the tomb when Mary ran to Peter after witnessing the resurrected Christ, His soul united with body and flesh before her very eyes. It is the same testimony told and retold through generations of believers: the hope we have in the risen Christ and, by extension, the hope we have in the resurrection of our very own bodies. The joy of Easter is more than the promise of life with Jesus in heaven after the death of your body. We would be false witnesses, indeed, if we failed to proclaim that just as He has risen, so will you and I. This is the gospel of our Lord. Thanks be to God!

Larson, a 2009 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth Minn., is currently working as an attorney in Crookston, Minn. He is a member of Trinity Free Lutheran, Grand Forks, N.D.

BY BARBARA BRUBAKKEN



ach Sunday when I join the congregation in confessing my faith through the "Apostle's Creed" I am making a statement that forms the foundation of my faith. I confess that Jesus suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried. But then comes that most astonishing statement: "He

descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty ..."

He rose again from the dead! It is a glorious truth. How could one call oneself a Christian and not believe in the resurrected Christ?

But when I read through I Corinthians 15 there were evidently a few Corinthians who held to that opinion and

BUT IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, ... YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SIN.

were opposed to the idea that Jesus rose from the dead. As Paul states in verses 12-13; "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been

raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." Did these particular Corinthians not understand the ramifications of what they were saving?

Let's examine the meaning of the Second Article according to *Luther's Small Catechism*: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, bought me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with silver and gold, but with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death ... even as He is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity."

If I believe there was no resurrection, doesn't the foundation of my faith begin crumbling? If there had been no resurrection, would I still be able to confess Jesus as true God, begotten of the Father, and also true man? If Jesus is not God's Son and if He died and remains in the grave, then who will redeem me? My faith is futile and I am still in my sins, and there is no way to reach God. What hope is there for me?

What a great delusion. That is what Paul is warning us

about in I Corinthians 15. If there is no resurrection of the dead, and if Christ has not been raised, then there is no foundation for my faith. Payment is still due for my sin. If the devil has not been defeated, I have no advocate against him. I shudder to think of the ramifications. My situation is hopeless, and hopelessness is a terrible state to be in.

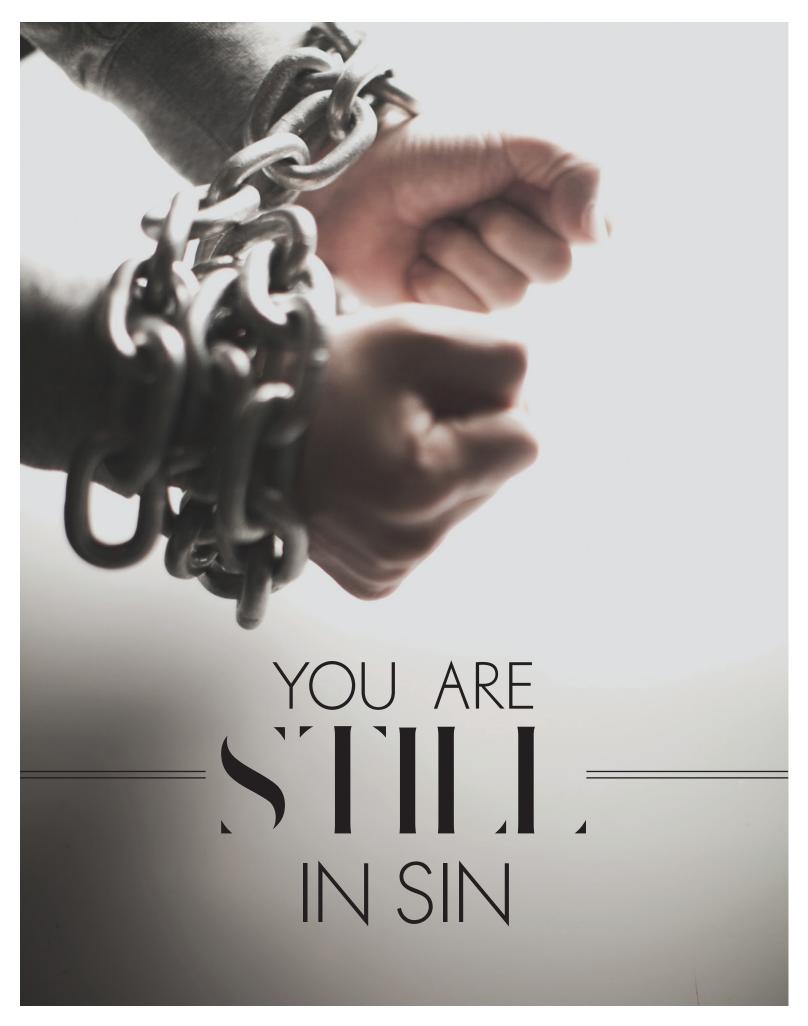
An important part of my Christian walk is to know how to fight against my adversary, to put on the armor of God. I can do so because Christ has already defeated the devil. But without the power of His resurrection, I think I would be a sorry looking soldier. The belt of truth would be the belt of "works" and the breastplate of righteousness would be no more than a covering of "filthy rags." My feet would not be shod with the readiness given by the gospel of peace, there would be no peace between God and me, and my footing would not be firm. The shield of faith would be an illusion and the flaming darts of the enemy would quickly burn through my filthy rags. The helmet of salvation might be a covering made of lamb's wool. And as for the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, how could I trust His Word?

It wouldn't take much for the enemy to crush such a poorly prepared soldier. Besides, how can one fight with a dead man strapped to the back? Isn't that how my sin will attach to me? There would be no relief, just one sin piled upon another, becoming a stench. I should be pitied more than anyone. I would be hopeless in my faith.

But hopelessness is swallowed up in victory! For as Paul continues in I Corinthians 15:20-21, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead." No, we are not to be deluded as these Corinthians were or led astray today by false teachers. I Peter 1:3-5 reassures us, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

I confess my sins before God and receive the forgiveness bought for me by Christ "with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity ... This is most certainly true"

Brubakken is a member of Cornerstone Lutheran, Argyle, Wis.





BY RUTH GUNDERSON



t's a desolate place, Mukawer. Hard to imagine anyone, let alone a Jewish puppet king, holding court amidst the dry rolling hills. But it is imposing, what's left of its fortress walls peering out over the landscape 5,000 feet above the azure haze of the Dead Sea.

It is a sad place, too. For here, one of the greatest prophets of God found his end amidst a terrible power struggle. That prophet was John the Baptist, and his life fell prey to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch who attempted to squelch a rebellion brought on by his own incestuous relationship with his niece.

Walking up the dusty road that circled the hillside, I thought about the life of John the Baptist. I wondered if he lost hope during his two years of imprisonment at Mukawer. Did the covenant God made with Israel, the promise of the Messiah, pale as he knelt down and bowed his head for the last time? Was his faith for naught?

In I Corinthians 15:17-19 we read, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

John lived in one of the most interesting times in history, caught between the lives of the prophets and Patriarchs of God and witness to the coming of the Messiah. Like all of the previous prophets, John did not live to see the fulfillment of Christ's redeeming work. Nor His resurrection.

Yet John's life certainly modeled a faith beyond this existence. As a babe still in his mother Elizabeth's womb, he leapt when Mary, heavy with Jesus, drew near. Then, as a grown man, he left the comforts of home and instead ate locust and honey in the wilderness and "prepared the way for the Lord."

A few days before visiting Mukawer we toured Bethany Beyond the Jordan, where historians believe John lived in a cave and prophesied about the coming Messiah. Thousands came from throughout Galilee to listen to John's message and receive the baptism of repentance. Some thought John was Elijah, others the Prophet, or Christ. But through every act, John testified, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7). When Jesus came to him, John obediently baptized the Christ, and said of Him, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

Like the prophets before him, it would seem John had put his faith, his resurrected life, in the hope of the Messiah. The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, that God would bless all peoples on earth through Israel, were the same promises John claimed. And

the promised redemption, foretold through the prophecies of Isaiah and others, were valid for believers who lived to see the Redeemer—and for those who came before.

The ancients, writes the author of Hebrews, were "commended" for their belief in the hope of the coming Savior, despite never realizing that hope in their lifetimes. Consider Hebrews 11:13, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance."

Christ himself testified, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). How could Abraham, who lived thousands of years before Christ, see Christ? Reading through the account of his life, we find God covenanted with Abraham again and again to bless all peoples through him (Genesis 12:3). From Abraham's seed would one day come a Redeemer. And Abraham believed, and rejoiced. He realized the hope of one day being resurrected with Christ.

But if Christ had not been resurrected, what then?

Paul's letter to Corinth makes clear that "all are lost." Not just you and I. Not just those who lived in Christ's day and witnessed His life and death. All mankind would be lost, those of us who live now and those who lived in hope that one day Christ would come, would die, and

THEN THOSE ALSO WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN CHRIST ARE LOST.

would rise. Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his own son, would be without hope. Moses, who led his people out of slavery into the promised land, would be without hope. And John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ and who gave his life at Mukawer, would be lost.

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead," wrote Paul (I Corinthians 15:20), "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Indeed! An awesome word declaring a promise made and fulfilled. And a promise that we, too, will not be lost. Christ was the first to be raised, that third day after Passover, and many will yet be raised. Paul describes it as a mystery, saying, "We will not all sleep, but we will be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (I Corinthians 15:51-52). Death, then, is "swallowed up in victory" (vs 54).

A victory, then, for John the Baptist that day at Mukawer. Not death, or sadness. But victory, for, "whoever believes in the Son has eternal life."

Gunderson, a member of Vision of Glory Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn., is the managing editor.

BY PASTOR TIM HINRICHS



s I stand before 60 elderly believers on Sunday morning and lead them in worship at the nursing home, it feels like a little taste of heaven. Here gathered are followers of Christ from so many different backgrounds and churches, yet we are all worshiping the risen Lord Jesus.

I am reminded of the story of the seventh century missionary Finabarr of Ireland. While traveling from town to town across the country sharing the gospel of Christ, he came to Cork where the Lord distinctly told him: "Here shall be the haven of thy resurrection." Finabarr spent the rest of his 17 years ministering at that haven until he was taken by God into His glorious resurrection.

BUT IN FACT
CHRIST HAS
BEEN RAISED
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FALLEN ASLEEP.

Mankato, Minn., may or may not be the haven of *my* resurrection, but for almost all of the worshipers around me, this is their last stop as they near the final days of their pilgrimage on earth. Is that hopeless? Is that depressing? Absolutely not. It is a joyful hope and promise for the future for those who look to Jesus in faith.

But our life on earth is also not simply passing the time until the Lord comes. Even if I die tomorrow, that one day is still part of my pilgrimage with God on earth. It's a day to bring Him glory. It's

a day to serve. Our life is to bring God glory in heaven but even more importantly, here on earth.

Thinking of our life as a pilgrimage on this earth is important. We are, as some ancient Christians called it, "guests of the world." We are just passing through because our home is with the Lord. We are part of the Kingdom of God and not earth.

With this pilgrimage, our journey is founded on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. First Corinthians 15:20 tells us: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Our eyes in this life must be focused on what Jesus has already accom-

plished for us on the cross and in His resurrection. Later in Colossians 3:1-2, we are reminded that through faith in Jesus we have already "been raised with Christ," therefore we "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." Wherever we go and whatever we do, it is vital to keep our eyes on where our home is—the resurrected life with Christ.

This motivates us to follow our Lord wherever He calls. Jesus, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). He was living the life of the cross—a life of rejection, hardship, and finally of sacrifice, for He knew the joy of the resurrection was coming—both His own and ours. His life wasn't here on earth but with His Father, and so is ours. That motivates us to live the cross life, to endure hardship, persecution, difficulties, and trials.

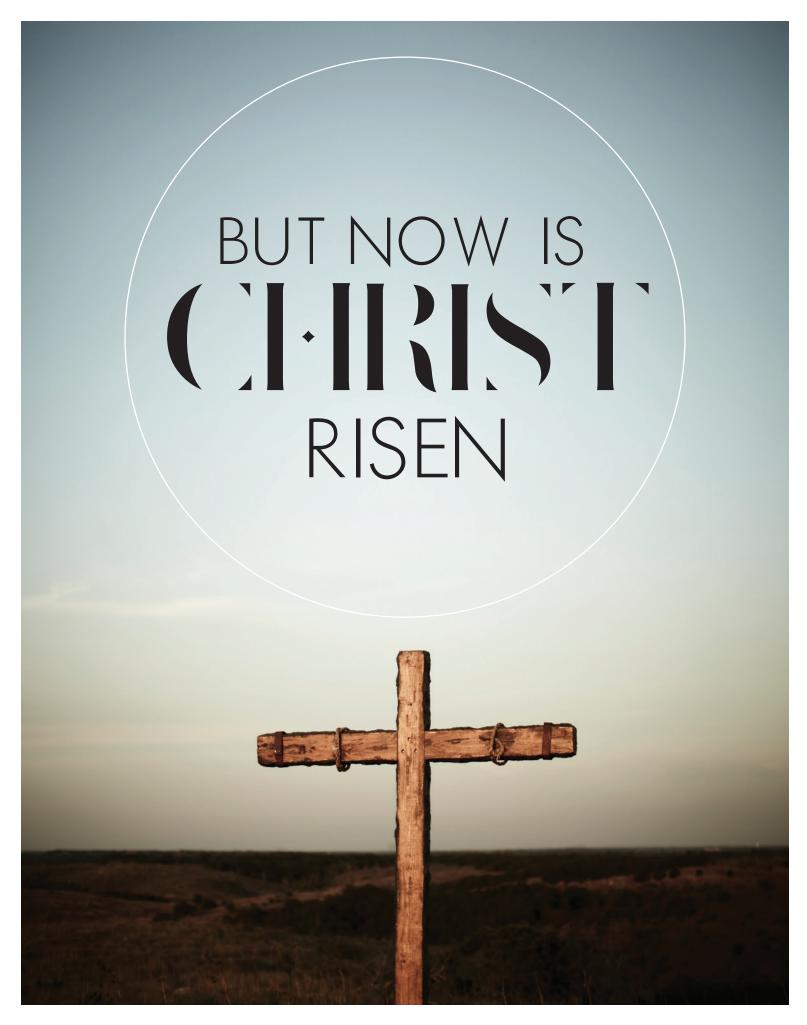
However, keeping our eyes on the resurrected Lord is more than motivation. We need the supernatural strength of God's Holy Spirit to live a life for God's glory here on earth where we don't belong. Jesus didn't just tell us, "follow me," and then leave us to figure it out. In His last words on earth He said, "I will be with you always, even until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

This pilgrimage also involves unknown journeys in life. When Jesus said, "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," I used to feel sorry for Him, as if Jesus were complaining. Yes, that is the life of the cross, but it's also the life that looks toward the resurrection. It's not a complaint; instead it's as if Jesus is saying: "I'm not tied down to any place. I am freed by my Father to travel wherever and do whatever He calls me to do. I've cut my permanent ties to Nazareth or any other place. I follow the lead of my Father because my home is with Him and not of this world." Jesus didn't belong on this earth. He was "not of this world," and neither are we.

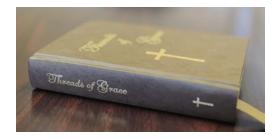
When living in Poland, I would get homesick for being back in Minnesota where friends and family live, where foods and culture and language are so familiar. Now I get homesick for Poland—for those beautiful mountains, the way of life, and the wonderful friends and family there. Homesickness is a part of life now because I can't be in two parts of the world at the same time.

Easter should bring to our hearts and minds that same homesick feeling no matter where we are in life. We should never be so settled on this earth that we don't look with longing to the risen Lord and our home with Him. Until He takes us home, we are on a constant pilgrimage on this earth following His calling wherever that may take us on earth. Rejoice in the journey.

Hinrichs serves Word of Life Free Lutheran, Mankato, Minn.







Threads of Grace

As I near the end of reading through our AFLC devotional book, *Threads of Grace*, I want to share with *Ambassador* readers how much I am appreciating the book. The meditations are well written. We expect articles by those with theological training, including Bible school alumni, to be sound scripturally, but those by "average" laity are that also. There is just a great collection of spiritual food.

While I recognize the names of most writers, and know so many of them, there are the unknown to me, but that doesn't take away from the blessing received. There are a few who are deceased, Francis Monseth and John Mundfrom, for two. Dr. Monseth wrote so well and has left quite a legacy through his writings. And Pastor Mundfrom had so much to do with the publication of *Threads of Grace* as a member of the Board of Publications and Parish Education. Both of these, being dead, yet speak (Hebrews 11:4). And that will be true of others as time passes by.

In [a recent] devotional ..., Miss Judith Wold is the writer. She was such a vital part of the first decades of the AFLC in her work with Publications and Parish Education and the Women's Missionary Federation. Today, in her 90s, she lives in a rest home in Thief River Falls, Minn., and, as you might expect, continues her witness among the residents there.

Her devotional is in the Advent section of the book and in it she reflects on the anticipation of the Christmas season in the period of Advent. It was there in the small country church of her childhood and youth and continues to this day in the assurance of God's love for humanity.

Threads of Grace is a worthy book and reveals the depth of spiritual life in our Association. Thank you!

Pastor Raynard Huglen Newfolden, Minn. / via mail



"Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).



ow often in His Word, God calls us to pray. It is the vital, life-giving, and sustaining link between Christ and the true Christian.

Christ here admonishes Peter, James and John to watch and pray.
He had returned to them after communing with the Heavenly Father,
and found them sleeping. Their spirits were ready to watch and pray,
but their flesh was indeed very weak.

How often have we determined to live more fully for God, then sought His will for our day by day—yes, even our moment by moment—walk with Him. But soon our zeal cools or is crowded out by our busy everyday living. We have neglected the needful things. We have allowed the reading of our Bibles to become just routine; our prayer life is shallow and shamefully neglected. Our flesh is weak and because we have failed to arm ourselves daily with Christ's strength, through prayer and obedience, our desire to serve God wanes and too often disappears.

Prayer is not just talking with God, but a conflict with Satan. He wishes us to stop this intercession, for he knows the great power of prayer. The enemy wants the victory, and is jubilant when the weak flesh is the victor. Only with fervent, unceasing prayer can we receive the necessary strength to make our spirit's desires for spiritual victory a reality.

Mrs. Edwin Swanson, now deceased, was from Pukwana, S.D.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. "Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls," wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.



KNOWING WHO WE ARE

BY PASTOR ADAM OSIER

watched a documentary on an

accomplished British musicologist named Clive Wearing. At age 46, Wearing contracted herpesviral encephalitis, leaving him with a certain type of

amnesia that erased most of his long-term memory and com-

pletely prohibited him from

and transferring them into

storing short-term memories

lasting ones. As a result, since

1985, Wearing has spent most

of his days waking up to a new

consciousness roughly every 30

tary, I realized in a new way that

Despite the fact that we

more insidious culprit of sin has

seconds. After this documen-

it is good to know who we are.

haven't suffered a disease like

herpesviral encephalitis, the

confused us and left us wak-

ing up to a new identity virtu-

ally as often as Clive Wearing.

and even we ourselves relent-

talk, think, and act in a host

of conflicting, not to mention

unhealthy, ways. This leaves us

want to look a certain way, but

with an impossible task. We

we are not satisfied with the

methods to do so. We seek to

belong to something, but we

are not always sure to what. We

lessly insist that we look, dress,

Culture, friends, family, enemies

sure how or by whom. We seek security in things that only make us even more insecure. We live in an age of identity confusion.

Youth of today feel these pressures perhaps more acutely than anyone. Many are wandering through their formative years without a compass. They trek through creation with little or no knowledge of their Creator. They are convinced that truth is relative. Yet, while they cannot explain why, in their hearts and in their experiences they are left empty and dissatisfied. They see real brokenness in their families and relationships. They've witnessed real tragedy. They're missing out on what it means to be truly loved. They long for a Savior.

These real and perplexing needs in the lives of youths will be confronted through the lens of Ephesians 1:3-14 at the FLY Convention, June 29-July 4, 2015, at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo. This passage reveals the believer's true identity as the chosen, adopted, and redeemed heir of God who has been sealed with His Spirit. Throughout the week, students will be given the opportunity to worship with one another in large and small group settings. They will be led by speakers each morning and evening through God's Word, and they will be called to trust the good news of His gracious gospel. They will spend afternoons enjoying both indoor and outdoor activities in the beautiful Rocky Mountain setting. They will be offered dozens of engaging elective sessions which will address the practical appli-

as family, culture, relationships, and emotional struggles, as well as many more.

It is the hope of the members of the FLY Committee that students will come and find their identity in the joy, peace, forgiveness, hope, and love found in the crucified and risen Savior.



▶ FLY Convention 2015 June 29-July 4 YMCA of the Rockies Estes Park, Colo. www.flyconvention.org

Daily Schedule

9-11 a.m. Electives 1 & 2 11 a.m. Bible study Noon Lunch 2-5 p.m. Recreation 5-7 p.m. Supper 7 p.m. Evening Session 9 p.m. NightLYF

Osier, who serves Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., is the first vice president of the 2015

want to be known, but we are not always sure for what. We want to be loved, but we are not cations of one's identity in Christ in areas such FLY Committee.



GOD AT WORK

BY LIZ MCCARLSON



am often asked, "How are things going at the Bible school?" Since I am the resident head in the women's dorm at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (AFLBS), I'm never surprised when the question is asked. My normal response is to say that things are going well, which is often a true statement as I continually see the Lord's faithfulness played out in

my life and in the lives of those studying and working at AFLBS.

However, I've come to realize that many people who ask me about life at AFLBS are looking for something more than the easy response I give to them. Sometimes, when they ask about "things" at AFLBS, what they really want to know is how the *people* are doing, and specifically what the Lord is doing in the lives of the students.

I posed this question to the young women in my dorm: "How have you seen God working this school year?" Here are some of the responses:

- "He has been teaching me a lot about patience. There are many things that I need, but He is the one who is in control, and I just need Him to take care of everything instead of trying to do it myself."
 - "I have seen God provide jobs for people to pay off school."
- "God has been teaching me that His ways are so much better than my own and He often works in ways that I never would have expected. This past semester and

As I have spent time with students, I have also heard how God has answered prayers for healing in the lives of family or friends, how He has provided money for those in financial difficulties, and how His Word is actively working in the students' lives—convicting of sin when needed, but also encouraging and strengthening their faith in Jesus Christ and their desire to share the gospel with the world around them.

Here at AFLBS, the Lord continues His faithfulness to us in many ways: financial support, donations of goods and services, the ability to move forward in the accreditation process, etc. Most importantly, He continues to be faithful through His Word, which "shall accomplish that which I [the Lord] purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I [the Lord] sent it" (Isaiah 55:11b, ESV).

Thank you for your prayers and support for AFLBS, where God's Word is taught and studied. And praise the Lord for His continued faithfulness as we seek to "establish students in the eternal and inerrant Word of God, for a life of faith in Jesus Christ, and faithful service in His kingdom" (AFLBS Mission Statement).

McCarlson, a 2003 graduate of AFLBS, is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.



BY JON NELSON

COMPARING MINISTRIES

Journey Missions,
a department
within AFLC
World Missions,
gives people the
opportunity
to visit AFLC
mission fields
through shortterm mission trips
or commissioning
mission assistants.



Nelson, Golden Valley, Minn., is the department head for Journey Missions. hether it be our favorite teams, our grades, or our social stature, we are a culture and society built on competition and comparison. It's what we do: we compare and we compete.

This struck me in a new way while I was in India recently. I came across John 21:21-22 which says in regards to John the apostle, "When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

Even Peter, the "rock" on which Christ would build His Church, wanted to ask, "Hey, what about this guy over here? What's his life/ministry/purpose going to be like?"

This conversation between Jesus and Peter played over and over in my head. How have I compared my life/ministry/purpose to someone else? The Lord began showing me how He's showered me with His favor, and I saw how I hadn't been satisfied. I wanted more: I wanted to be different.

It was honestly one of the most disheartening experiences I've had. I was so ungrateful, why did Jesus even want to use me? I'm selfish, competitive, and jealous of others. Then a resounding answer came: God uses sinners to make His glory known. God uses weakness to show His strength, His creativity, and His patience. God uses imperfect and incomplete people.

The response Jesus gave to Peter was pointed and needed, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" In essence, Jesus was saying, "Why are you worried

about what I have planned for him? You do what I've called you to do!" Wow.

Jesus has each of us right where we should be. He's working in and through the moments we have. Yes, He wants us to dream, have a vision, plan, and compare. None of this is wrong; in fact, life wouldn't move forward without these aspects of ministry. The challenge for us is our motivation, which is at the heart issue. Why are we pushing and striving? Are we doing this out of love and devotion to Christ? Or is it out of competition and selfishness?

Jesus took Peter, an imperfect man, and built the Church on him. Jesus continues to take our imperfections and use them to advance His kingdom. It's unbelievable what an amazing God we have. He loves us, forgives us, is patient with us, and continues to use us to fulfill the great commission. What an amazing God we serve.

And remember, God will always use you. Often we can be paralyzed by comparing ourselves to others. Thoughts like, "I'm not good enough," or, "I don't do this or that," can keep us from God-given opportunities. As I lead mission trips I emphasize that each person is there for a reason. Each person has a ministry on the team. Each person has influence. Everyone has a purpose and everyone has a ministry.

God has gifted you in specific ways to serve Him, no matter your age or qualifications. God created you and has a purpose for you in His kingdom. There's a reason you are where you are. He's planning to use you in ways you don't even know.



Pastor Don Richman (left), Bloomington, Minn., asks a question during the open forum.

Gospel topic of Sverdrup forum

The Georg Sverdrup Society hosted a discussion forum Jan. 30, at the AFLC Seminary.

Open to the public, the forum featured a presentation of a new translation of Sverdrup's writings by Larry Walker, "Justification by Faith and the Justification of the World."
Original papers were also presented by Pastor Craig Johnson, "Sverdrup and Law and Gospel," Pastor Martin Horn, "The Gospel-Formed Congregation," and Pastor Stephen Mundfrom, "Sverdrup and the Lutheran Confessions."



Pastor Craig Johnson, above, presented his paper, "Sverdrup and Law and Gospel," at the forum.

Kneeland installed at Solid Rock

Pastor Paul Kneeland (pictured, at left) was installed Dec. 14 at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., with AFLC President Pastor Lyndon Korhonen (right) officiating. Kneeland began serving Solid Rock on a parttime interim basis in June 2014 after relocating to the Twin Cities area from Tucson, Ariz. Kneeland is joined by his wife, Ruth, daughter, Alisha, and son, Carter.

Kneeland is also an adjunct instructor at AFLBS, Plymouth, Minn.



Business manager sought for AFLC

• Info: www.aflc.org

M embers of the Coordinating Committee are seeking applications for the position of Director of Business Management. This is a full-time, salaried position with benefits. This individual will manage the accounting, payroll, and human resource functions for the AFLC and oversee the personnel and budget functions for information technology and the reception area. Qualifications include a personal faith in Jesus Christ, membership in an AFLC congregation, a four-year degree, at least five years of experience managing an organization of comparable size and scope to that of the AFLC General Fund and its accounting department, mastery of accepted accounting principles and practices, experience in structuring an accounting system, and outstanding communication and strategic planning skills. Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled.

Interested individuals may request a copy of the complete position description by contacting the AFLC Offices at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Boulevard, Plymouth, MN 55441, by phone at 763-545-5631, or by e-mailing Karen Floan at kmfloan@aflc.org. Informal inquiries and questions may be addressed to the Coordinating Committee Chairman, Dr. Daniel Mundfrom, by e-mail at daniel.mundfrom@eku.edu, or by calling 970-302-7997. To apply, a letter of application that addresses how you meet the qualifications of this position and a current résumé that documents your education and experience should be submitted electronically to: kmfloan@aflc.org.



AFLTS Dean installation service set for March 15

An installation service is planned for 7 p.m. March 15 at the AFLC Schools Chapel for Pastor Wade Mobley, who began work as the new dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary and president of the AFLC Schools on Feb. 2.



On Mission

Schools host missions conference

he AFLC Schools hosted the annual Missions Conference Jan. 25-29 under the theme, "Thy Kingdom Come." Pastor Kevin Olson, department head of the Ambassador Institute, was the featured speaker. Services were held Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and during chapel on Tuesday and Thursday.

Also speaking were Pastor Del Palmer of AFLC World Missions, Pastor Paul Nash of AFLC Home Missions, Pastor Charles Lindquist of World Mission Prayer League, and Josh and Ruthie Wagner of Lutheran Bible Translators.

The conference is held annually in January on the campus of the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn.



Watch videos of the Missions Conference at vimeo.com/channels/missionsconference2015.

Pastor Kevin Olson, who heads the Ambassador Institute, a department within AFLC World Missions, was the featured speaker at the AFLC Schools annual Missions Conference.

Pacific Northwest District opens annual conference registration

We invite you to come to this year's annual conference June 16-19 at Warm Beach Christian Camp & Conference Center, Stanwood, Wash. The Pacific Northwest offers the grandeur of the Cascade and Olympic Mountain Ranges, highlighted by Mount Rainier and Mount Baker, and graced by the beauty of Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands. The conference site is 20 minutes from the nearest hotel or restaurants, so we encourage you to lodge and eat on site.

Because of the variety of housing and meal package options, the registration form is lengthy. It will not be printed in The Lutheran Ambassador, but it is available as a printable document at both www.aflc.org and www.aflchurch. org. Registration must be done by phone to eliminate duplicates in lodging. We would suggest printing the registration form, working through it, then calling in your registration to (360) 502-3452. If you are unable to print the registration form, we would be happy to mail one to you.

Register early (by April 25) for best lodging selection and a 20 percent savings.

We pray and trust that the upcoming conference will be a special event for all who can take part. A limited number of scholarships are available to those who qualify, please inquire during registration. Let us know how we can serve you.

The conference will offer something for the whole family. We are planning a full morning and afternoon schedule for all children and youths. Because Warm Beach is a Christian campground facility, it offers a wide variety of activities for the young while adults are in session. See you in June in Washington.

- Downloadable form www.aflc.org www.aflchurch.org
- **▶** Call to register 360.502.3452



The AFLC Annual Conference was last held at Warm Beach Christian Conference Center, Stanwood, Wash., in 2006 under the theme, "This is a Day of Good News," from II Kings 7:9.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Zap, N.D., held its final worship service on Jan. 25. The church, served by Pastor Tom W. Olson, officially closed Jan. 31.

Pastor Harlen L. Johnson, 69, Randall, Minn., died Jan. 11. His funeral was Jan. 16 at Shepherd of the Pines Lutheran Church, Rice, Minn. A graduate of the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Johnson served AFLC congregations at Newark, Ill., and Jewell, Iowa. Blessed be his memory.

Pastor Richard Gunderson, Cambridge, Minn., has accepted an interim call to Trinity Lutheran, Brookings, Ore.

Pastor Brian Ricke was installed Dec. 14, at Living Hope, St. Michael, Minn., with AFLC President Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Members of the Coordinating Committee removed **Pastor Nathan Minnich** from the clergy roster and his congregation, Salem Lutheran, Elizabethville, Pa., from the congregational roster at their request.

Pastor Tom Parrish is resigning as senior pastor of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, and Pastor Eugene Enderlein, who is the visitation pastor, will serve as interim senior pastor.

Pastor Jeremy Vance, Coon Rapids, Minn., has accepted a call as

pastor of Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn. Vance has served the congregation on an interim basis.

Pastor Peter Ward is retiring as a chaplain at Pleasantview Lutheran Life Community, Ottawa, Ill., and is moving to Pelican Rapids, Minn.

Pastor Andy Coyle, AFLC missionary on loan to EEMN in Ukraine, has been named the interim director of the Bible Training Center.

Pastor Bill and Sally Moberly are stepping down as director and short term coordinator, respectively, of East European Missions Network. They will focus on expanding ALWM, a teaching ministry started by Moberly in 2007.

Pastor Craig Scavo was installed Feb. 15 at Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Pastor Curt Emerson was installed Feb. 22 at Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn., and Bethany Free Lutheran of Blue Grass, Sebeka, Minn., with Pastor Terry Olson officiating.

Pastor Kent Sperry has accepted a call to serve Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D. He previously served Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D.

Pastor Roy Johnson has accepted an interim call to Faith Lutheran, Durant, Okla.



Abel called as full-time missionary to Brazil

Matthew Abel has been called as a full-time missionary by the World Missions Board. After completing his studies at AFLBS in 2010, Abel graduated from the University of Northwestern St. Paul with a ICS major and a minor in Bible and ministry. The son of AFLC missionaries to Brazil Pastor Paul and Becky Abel, Matthew returned to Brazil and worked as a short-term assistant for AFLC World Missions.

Matthew is engaged to Ednay Andrade, of Brazil, and they will be married this summer. Currently, Matthew is enrolled at AFLTS for spring semester 2015 while he travels to raise his missionary personal support. He plans to finish his seminary courses in Brazil.

JANUARY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Margaret Mundfrom (4), Ruth Claus

AFLTS

Margaret Mundfrom (6), Chinon Stalions, Pastor Harlen Johnson, Pastor Gilbert Schroeder

General Fund

Cliff Iverson

WMF

Orpha Sorteberg, Maija Carlson, Alice Olson, Clifford Iverson, Hazel Germundson, Donald Fifer

World Missions

Maija Carlson, Margaret Mundfrom, Sidney Rosholt, Glorianne Swenson

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-January 31, 2015

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$32,777	\$32,777	\$36,712
Evangelism	20,004	20,004	14,042
Youth Ministries	6,412	6,412	9,433
Parish Education	15,553	15,553	11,392
Seminary	25,593	25,593	28,180
Bible School	28,479	28,479	36,550
Home Missions	56,901	56,901	32,868
World Missions	32,023	32,023	48,628
Personal Support	34,255	34,255	35,886
TOTALS	\$251,998	\$251,998	\$253,690

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

THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

An Easter meditation

he scene was a meeting room in a church, with a crowd of people gathered around a large table. A pastor was explaining the plan of salvation and said that there was a certain mystery about God's work in our lives. A man interrupted him: "There's no mystery about it at all!" he declared with



Pastor Robert Lee

firm conviction, accusing the pastor of complicating something that God's Word makes quite plain.

Many of us may enjoy reading a good mystery or watching one on television, trying to guess who the culprit might be. We're usually

surprised in the end, and that's part of the pleasure. But we may not appreciate the idea of mystery in spiritual matters, preferring truth packaged in uncomplicated words that cannot easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted. The way of salvation is like that, so simple that even a child can comprehend it. Right?

When this editor listened to the above exchange, he recalled the words of a familiar old gospel song:

I know not why God's wondrous grace to me He hath made known ... I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart ... I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin ... But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.

(Ambassador Hymnal 525)

The word "mystery" can be found 27 times in the New Testament, mostly in the letters of the Apostle Paul. One Bible encyclopedia defines it as a divine truth supernaturally revealed, only understood through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The term refers, for example, to the Church as

the Body of Christ, including both Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 3:3-6); the Incarnation (I Timothy 3:16); characteristics of the spiritual kingdom (Matthew 13:11 and Mark 4:11); and the transformation of the believer when Christ returns (I Corinthians 15:51).

Most often, however, the word "mystery" is applied in the New Testament to the gospel message, centered in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul writes of the "mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19) and "the mystery of the faith" (I Timothy

3:9); "the summing up of all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:10); "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27); and "the mystery of Christ" (Colossians 4:3).

Yes, it is wondrously true that the saving gospel may be received and understood even by a child. We speak of John 3:16 as "the

gospel in a nutshell," and the good news should be joyfully proclaimed, not cluttered with confusing theologizing. God loved us so much that He gave His only Son, His beloved Son, to be our Savior. If we believe in Him, we shall be saved eternally. Yet it is also true that this gospel contains profound depths that can captivate the greatest minds, still not fully explored even after lifetimes of serious study.

This is where we should meet the mystery of Easter. It is sufficient for us to know that Jesus rose from the dead, as the Word clearly declares. This simple statement of fact, however, runs counter to everything that we know about life and death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be comprehended by the intellect, and

yet the combined intellect of generations of believing scholarship has not begun to exhaust all of its treasures. Job once asked, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (14:14). The skeptic replies scornfully, "Of course not!" Simple faith answers with Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" (19:25). Yes, this is a mystery, indeed.

Here is a challenge for our readers this Easter season: Take your hymnal and read the songs listed under this heading. Each one of them, some old and some new, is

But we may not appreciate the idea of mystery in spiritual matters, preferring truth packaged in uncomplicated words that cannot easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

> a sermon in itself, highlighting the resurrection gospel in various ways. You will notice the repetition of the word "alleluia" or "hallelujah," praise the Lord. To borrow a phrase, there is doxology in their theology, for these hymns are permeated with solid teaching and a spirit of joyous worship.

"Ponder anew what the Almighty can do." Death and the grave do not have the last word. Because Jesus lives, we shall live forever with Him. It sounds so simple, and yet it is galaxies beyond our minds' ability to grasp and comprehend. May our hearts cry alleluia this Easter season as we stand in awe before the wonder—and the mystery—of the empty tomb.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART

BY JOAN CULLER



ome people enjoy cleaning, but I am not one of them. Although I like the way my

home looks after a thorough cleaning, doing the work that goes into keeping it that way is a different story. Often I rush through my house doing a quick "lick and promise" neatening. This makes things look better superficially, but true cleaning is hard work when done properly. It involves moving furniture to see what's accumulated underneath, climbing on stepladders to reach cobwebs, and getting down on my hands and knees to examine and scrub all the corners and crevices. The worst part is, no matter how often or how strenuously I clean, dust and dirt soon creep back. Within a week, it's time to start

over. Keeping my house clean is an ongoing task that requires continuous attention.

Cleaning up my soul, or confession, is no different. Each week I confess my failings during worship services. Sometimes, however, I do this without real reflection or repentance. Once I start looking, I see sins I had completely forgotten or never noticed before. I see the bad things I do over and over again no matter how hard I try to change. Sometimes a sin is so ingrained I despair of ever entirely removing the stain it has left on my life. Others are buried so deeply I have trouble bringing myself to admit to them. I sigh at the stacks of "stuff" I have been carrying around, things I must sort through and examine closely in order to eliminate the garbage.

Such stuff includes a critical attitude, lack of trust, selfish desires or plain old laziness (just as a start!). It's a painful and unpleasant process, one that requires discipline and humility. Worse yet, my confession is never complete because I can't stop sinning. Like Paul, in the book of Romans, I mourn, "... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing" (7:19).

Thankfully, when it comes to my sinful nature, I do not need to rely on my own efforts. The psalmist cries out to God, "create in me a clean heart" (Psalm 51:10) because he realizes his helplessness. I am helpless, too. I can never clean up enough to make myself right in the eyes of God. A clean heart is His handiwork, accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ and

revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. The absolution I hear after confession each week does not just mean I am forgiven for the wrongs I remember and committed recently, it is an announcement that *all* my sins, past and present, known and unknown, have already been erased by the suffering and death of Jesus.

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25).

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