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AN ENCOURAGING WORD

The genuine thing

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?
— James 2:14

Wasn't the question of James the concern in 1962 when the AFLC was formed? It was written: "Seeking above

all to be a spiritual movement, the AFLC believes that Christians are called to be salt and light in the world, separated from the ways of the world (pietism), and that this difference is to be reflected in the life of the congregation as well as in the institutions of the church body."

As James wrote his letter, he was not in opposition to salvation by faith alone as Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 anymore than we are today. Paul was confronting those who were saying that you had to perform the works of the Mosaic law in order to be saved. James was emphasizing that a **profession of faith** is to affect the way we live out that faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was concerned about this by calling it **cheap grace** in his *Cost of Discipleship*. Christians are not to subscribe to the attitude of *Do as I say and not as I do!* Paul and James would agree that saving faith will be evident in the way a person lives!

Isn't this a plague of the modern day church? Real and genuine faith does not conform to the pattern of this world, but is transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

James believed that genuine faith in Jesus Christ would be evident in love and obedience. "They will know that we are Christians

by our love." That love is to result in an active concern for "a brother or sister who is without clothes and daily food" (James 2:15-18). James challenged the early church by writing, *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.* Empty words and cheap advice are not descriptive of genuine Christian love or a demonstration of faith.

James also used the well-known example of Abraham to point out that genuine faith is evident in obedience. *Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ... You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*

What if Abraham had not obeyed God? By his obedience, the faith of Abraham was evident. If Abraham had disobeyed it would have shown his lack of faith in God. Genuine faith will produce fruit. Faith will be acted out in love and obedience. *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*



— Pastor Jerry Peterson
First Lutheran Church
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

sound bites

“A student at the University of Uruguay said to me, ‘Professor McDowell, why can’t you refute Christianity?’ I answered, ‘For a very simple reason. I’m unable to explain away an event in history — the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’”
— Josh McDowell

“The resurrection was the belief that turned heartbroken followers of a crucified rabbi into the courageous witnesses and martyrs of the early church. ... You could imprison them, flog them, kill them, but you could not make them deny their conviction that ‘on the third day he rose again.’”
— Michael Green

6 “Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won’t stay there.”
— Clarence W. Hall

2 “The return of Easter should be to the Christian life the call of a trumpet. It is the news of a great victory. It is the solution of a great perplexity. It is the assurance of a great triumph.”
— Frederick Temple

“On the day of Jesus’ resurrection I see Paradise restored. I see the portals of heaven swing open. ... I hear that Jesus addresses sinners as His ‘brethren.’ I see that sin has been atoned for, that believers are just, pure and righteous altogether in the judgment of God Almighty.”
— C. O. Rosenius

“I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.”
— Thomas Arnold

A certain hope because of a certain

Resurrection

I attended a mainline seminary in the late 1970s. It was the “heyday” of the various liberal and unorthodox theologies. They weren’t sure any of the Bible was really historically true, but the pretense of religious ritual and a belief in some sort of higher power was maintained. While not agreeing with much of it, I was very influenced by the spirit of uncertainty within it.

God mercifully rescued me from all this in my first parish, through a series of funerals. The empty platitudes and vagaries that I had acquired were hollow and useless. God used this need to draw me back to the Word where I discovered in its pages and promises, the real biblical hope provided for us by the real Jesus.

All of it centered on Jesus and His resurrection. He rose from the dead on the first Easter and in doing this He conquered death, sin and the devil. The good news of

the Bible is that He did it for us. It is a real event, not a made up story to put across a point. We can put our hope and faith each day and for eternity in Jesus, the Lord of the resurrection, and His real promises. Real death, grief, pain and despair have met their match in the real and risen Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Every Easter I am reminded again of Jesus dying for my sins and then rising again to conquer death for me and other poor sinners like me. I rejoice that all of our Bible and its promises are true and totally trustworthy. They are as sure as God Himself. How precious the promises of God have become at Easter, at the time of a funeral, and in our daily lives all year long.

A writer has observed that “God is in the business of resurrections.” He raised His Son Jesus from the dead. Trust Him to raise you from sin, death and uncertainties.



— Pastor Kelly Henning
Emmanuel Lutheran
Salmon Arm, British Columbia



Where is your sting?

— Pastor Michael Crowell
Elim Lutheran
Lake Stevens, Washington



already according to the Scripture and is doomed to die. Not only are we doomed to die physically, but spiritually as well.

Now we can see what Paul was saying. Even though death remains a part of the human experience in the physical sense, for those who are in Christ it has no hold. Christ's resurrection, which is referred to as a "first fruits" experience, promises to the believer that there is a resurrection for us as well. There is victory over that most feared of human experience — death. Though death is confusing, sorrowful and a great evil, in Christ there is victory over it. It's like the man who jumps to the conclusion of the book and finds that in the end, **we win!**

How then does one find this victory? It is in Jesus, and in Him alone. As Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica, he reminded them that we "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." He is stating that while those without Christ rightfully should and do sorrow over death (which means for them an eternal separation from God), the believer has a different outlook. We still sorrow over our loss, for we are separated from our loved ones for a time. But we do not sorrow for them, for they who died in Christ are with Him, and we are charged to "comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:18). There is victory, and for those who have departed this life in Christ, they experience already the reality of "no more sorrow, no more tears, no more sickness, no more death" as we read in Revelation.

The time of Easter should be for us a time of reflection. We miss those who have died in Christ, and we sorrow over those who die without Him. But what about us? Where do we stand? I believe that those questions speak to the heart of a discussion of the Resurrection: do we have hope, or do we have fear in our heart? When we come to faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we are given a new outlook of life and death. Paul says so clearly, "to live is Christ, to die, gain" (Philippians 1:21). The victory of the Resurrection is that we walk with Christ, both in this life and in eternity — including walking with Him through that still painful experience of death.



The words of Paul in I Corinthians 15 remind us of a great reality during the Easter season; that our Lord Jesus Christ won a great victory for us through His death and resurrection! These words are often hard for us to comprehend as we look at them from our worldly perspective. In our congregation, since last Easter we have suffered the death of seven of our members. Virtually every family in our fellowship has been directly impacted by these deaths, and it is sometimes hard to see victory in the midst of our sorrow! Yet that is precisely what the Word says: there **is victory**.

Part of applying this great truth lies in understanding what is not being said. Death itself is not a wonderful thing, in fact I Corinthians 15:56 reminds us that the "sting of death is sin." In Adam we find that "by man came death," and that death was not in God's master plan for His people. Illness, death and suffering are a result of sin in the world (not necessarily the individual's sin, but sin in general) and as such are a part of why Christ came. He gives us victory in an area where we cannot have victory in human strength. Apart from the salvation which we find in Christ, man is judged

The need for

Hope

— Jerry Nelson
Christ is Lord Lutheran
Onalaska, Wisconsin

S Spring is just around the corner. For many of us that will be a welcome relief from the dreary winter. However, springtime will continue to be dismal for many people suffering from fear, anxiety or depression. These emotions are often intertwined with chemical abuse, physical abuse, family violence or any number of interpersonal relationships which have gone awry.

We can experience emotional difficulties without headline breaking events shaking our lives. All of us experience low periods in everyday living. There's pressure on the job, possibility of the plant closing, a co-worker with a different view of how to accomplish a task, an unruly and rebellious child, an inattentive spouse, or a single person seeking a satisfying social life.

What is our typical response to these situations? Mental health professionals refer to our response as our coping mechanisms. Typically we respond to what we are thinking and feeling with some action designed to remove the pain our situation is producing. For some, they retreat to the numbing effects of chemical abuse.

We use our coping mechanisms to help avoid a crisis — defined as an emotionally significant event or radical change of status in our life. If our mechanisms fail and we experience the crisis of clinical depression, family break up or chemical abuse, where do we turn to for help? There are many crisis intervention programs throughout America and it's as easy as opening up the yellow pages to find help. Certainly in some situations that is an appropriate place to begin.

A necessity for making it through a cri-

sis is having a sense of hope. True, lasting hope is found in Jesus Christ.

For the Christian, the fact that Christ died on the cross and rose again is the basis of our hope! The believer's hope is **trustful expectation**, particularly with reference to the fulfillment of God's promises. Hope is the confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what He will do in the future.

The world defines hope as "a **feeling** that what is wanted will happen." This hope is often nothing more than a baseless optimism or a vague yearning after an unattainable good. If hope is to be genuine, it must be founded on something, or someone, which affords reasonable grounds of confidence in its fulfillment. The Bible calls us to base our hope in God and His saving acts.

Life can be hard. We need to understand God's definition of hope in order to truly cope with difficult situations. To effectively help at a time of crisis is to apply the preventive medicine of hope to our soul before the crisis occurs.

The Old Testament uses three different words for hope which have the following meanings:

1. *tiquah* — to look for something with eager expectation.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." — Jeremiah 29:11

2. *batach* — to rely on something reliable.

"Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you." — Psalm 9:10

3. *yachal* — trust.

"But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love," — Psalm 33:18

In the New Testament, hope means to trust, to endure, to expect and to wait. In Matthew 12:21, we read, "In his name the nations will put their hope." Our nation's motto is, "In God we trust." Romans 8:16-27 teaches that we are a lot like creation, moaning in eager expectation (hope) for the fulfillment to come when the Lord returns. In the meantime, we have a hope and are able to endure because the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we can only groan.

Creation is in a bondage of decay, but will see renewal. How much more will we be renewed when we place our hope, our trust in God. Our hope sustains us in our present suffering because the Holy Spirit is right there in the midst of our suffering.

Several years ago a good friend of mine was diagnosed with cancer. Her hope was based on a false hope that whatever she claimed in Jesus' name would happen. She didn't even tell anyone about her symptoms until after the disease was far advanced. Even then she denied the existence of the cancer. Her husband, on the other hand,

suffered from having no hope at all. He didn't understand that our hope is not to be placed in the things, or people of this earth, but on God. He became clinically depressed and eventually took his own life. He was not able to find rest within his soul. He did not trust in God alone and know that true hope comes from the resurrected Christ.

So what happens when we find ourselves slipping into difficult situations? Scripture teaches: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:1,2). Each one of us, not just the pastor, has a Christian obligation to "bear one another's burdens" as we support, exhort and comfort one another. The Christian's first coping mechanism is turning to the Lord and to a Christian brother or sister who can minister the Word of hope.

There are no problems under the sun which are new. Our God has seen it all and it is He who gives hope in any crisis. He has won the victory. He is the risen, conquering Son of God! That's the glad hope of the Easter message.



Because He lives, so does Terri

— Tim and Lori Isom
Bethany Lutheran
Astoria, Oregon

It was an evening church service. My sister Terri was asked to give a testimony. She told of the struggles with her illness and how Jesus was working in her life. At the end she declared, "Although the doctors say my body is dying, I know I'll live forever with Jesus."

I listened with mixed emotions. On the one hand, I had never heard her talk in such real terms about how she might die. On the other hand, I had never heard her confess her love of Jesus and her faith in Him in such a clear way.

My sister Terri Zweber went to be with Jesus on April 26, 1997, just two months short of her 35th birthday. Her five-year battle with cancer was a time of great hardship, yet we as a family saw how great God's love is.

The two things I remember most about Terri are her courage and her smile. She was able to face her illness and uncertain future on this earth with the reassurance that all is in God's hands. She trusted Him and taught us that we must trust Him as well. Timothy 2:11 says, "If we died with Him we will also live with Him."

Because Jesus lives, so does Terri.

I think of this every day and thank Him for replacing our grief and sorrow with hope and peace. We know Terri is waiting for us in heaven. What a wonderful reunion it will be when this place on earth is no more.

As for her smile, I'm sure it's even brighter than before.

Praise be to God for the assurance of salvation through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

“He is Risen ... Go and Tell!”

Mark 16:1ff

It happened so quickly. Early in the morning three weary women with heavy hearts approached the garden where the body of their Lord was entombed. “Who will roll the stone away?” they worried.

Suddenly they faced an open tomb and an angelic messenger. “Don’t be afraid ... He is risen! Go and tell!”

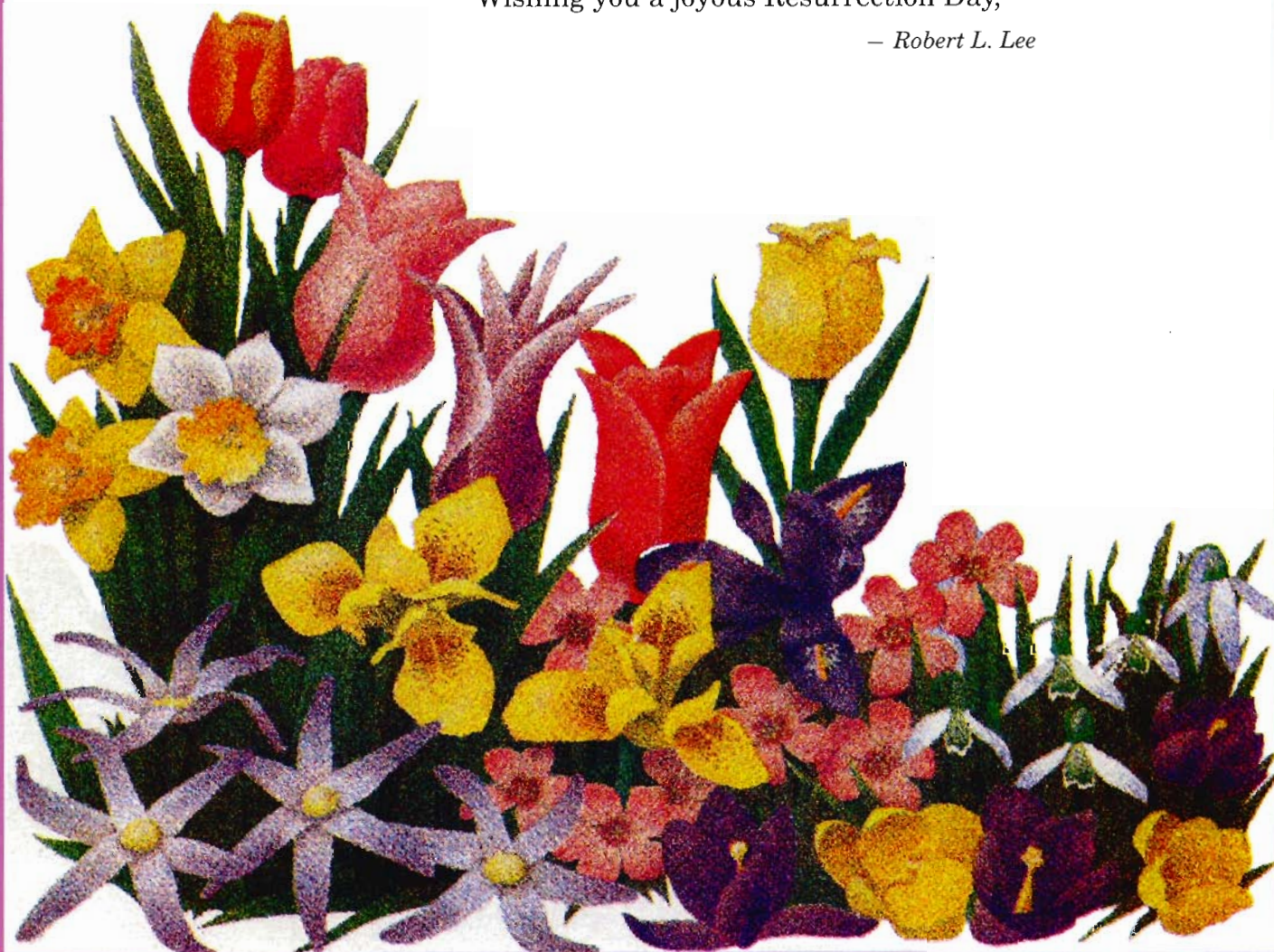
Tell what? The message of Easter. “He is not here” ... death is defeated. “Just as He told you” ... His promises are sure.

Tell whom? His disciples and Peter. The three women were the first messengers of the Resurrection, and they were to proclaim the message to the ones who would be entrusted with an incredible command: “Go into all the world and tell the good news” (v. 15).

We have heard the good news, and now the command is ours. The world is waiting. May we be faithful messengers.

Wishing you a joyous Resurrection Day,

— Robert L. Lee



A witness for life

— Mike McCarlson
Tabor Lutheran
Webster, South Dakota

In my high school years I had the privilege of being in a Bible study group with teens from a variety of church backgrounds. Besides our Bible study, we enjoyed a ministry of doing musical programs for many groups around our community. The bulk of our program was singing and skits and although it has been over twenty years ago, I remember many of them to this day. One skit started with a girl pulling pedals from a flower and saying "He loves me! He loves me not ..." And finally with the last pedal, she would say with excitement, "He loves me, He loves me, oh wow, He really loves me!!"

A friend watching the procedure quietly asked, "Who loves you?" The girl, with now just a stem in her hand, proclaimed, "Jesus loves me!"

The friend then turned to the girl and said, "I could have told you that." Bewildered, the girl responded, "Why didn't you?"

The question pierces. Each Christian can likely recall a time when we were presented with the opportunity to share how much Jesus really loves us, and yet we failed to speak. One week before my high school graduation, a classmate died in an alcohol-related car accident. Prior to that fatal crash, there were many opportunities for myself and other Christians from our school to witness to Dick about his need to put Jesus Christ first in his life. As Christians, it is not only our responsibility, but our privilege to witness to others about what Jesus means to us, and how others can come to know Him in a personal way and claim Him as their Savior and Lord.

Our motivation to witness is also the primary point of our witness. When Jesus died on the cross and shed His innocent blood, He became the once-for-all sacrifice needed for our sin. This by itself should be such fantastic news that we would want to tell everyone. But what sets Jesus Christ's sacrifice apart from all others, is the fact that He rose from the dead and defeated sin, the devil and even death itself. In that first Pentecost sermon, Peter said it best,

"And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:24).

So why is it that we don't witness as we should? Perhaps it's because we are not prepared in the Word or in prayer. Certainly Satan thwarts our efforts at witnessing with discouragement, low self-esteem, pride, and the list could go on. Focusing on that would only succeed in defeating us more.

We witness to the resurrection of Christ because Jesus Himself commands us to witness. Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 are just

two examples of Christ's command to share His message of salvation. These two references occur after Jesus had risen from the dead. How futile and vain our witness would be if He had not risen from the dead. I am amazed at the loyalty and dedication followers of other cults and religions display. Their leader or god died and was buried, remaining in the tomb to this day.

Scripture promises that one day the believer, too, will be resurrected. Luke 14:14, John 11:25, Philippians 3:10-11, and I Peter 1:3-5 are thrilling promises to look forward to.

Think of that glorious day when we will stand hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder with our loved ones, with all the saints of all time and sing that *Hallelujah* chorus for eternity. Someone rightly said, "We are an Easter people and Hallelujah is our song."

There are those around us who have not yet come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Scripture makes it very clear that we do not know the day or the hour when Christ will return. But it is certain there are many souls dying to a lost eternity every moment of every day. That Day will come when Christ returns to take the believer home with Him and to judge the unsaved. So until that Day let us do as Jesus said in John 4:35, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."



Supper at Emmaus





— Pastor Orville G. Heippler
Community Lutheran Church
Oceanside, California

Because of the Resurrection we are the “Jaws of Life”

A serious truck accident happened on Highway 405 at the edge of Los Angeles. Police, firemen and an ambulance with a doctor rushed to the scene. All of these trained men were helpless as the man was unreachable, trapped inside a mangled mass of iron. Facing this hopeless situation with the danger of a gasoline explosion any minute, they called for the “Jaws of Life.” The equipment and its master operator arrived and this battered and bruised man emerged with a newly appreciated freedom. His wife and family, who were expecting the worst, were filled with unbelievable thankfulness.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, had their fear, depression and hopelessness turned into unbelievable thankfulness as the angel spoke so clearly and forthrightly, “He is not here; He has come back to life.” After Christ’s appearance at the tomb near

Emmaus, and to the eleven, their doubting and bewildered hearts “were filled with mighty joy, and were continually in the temple praising God” (Luke 4:53).

Each of the seven times I have stood at the empty tomb, known as Gorden’s Garden Tomb, I have seen different phases of “God’s Jaws of Life.”

Imagine it

Already You are weary and Your day has but begun.
The force of the sun beats down on Your bleeding brow.
The thorns are now deeply embedded in Your temple.
Your back aches as the lumber forms wedges on your shoulders.
You slow to adjust Your grip,
only to feel the sting of yet another whipping.
The gawkers spit and curse.
Your eyes meet with a young boy’s;
he is fisted with a granite rock.
The impact of the hit is dull.
You look down to Your weathered feet;
the blisters bleed into the leather straps.
You falter. One sympathetic soul bears Your cross.
Side by side, You trudge on.

The Place of Skulls ... You are finally here.
Your stomach rolls over and over again.
You search Your soul for strength, for Your body is weakening.
Ropes tie the others to the tree; but no ropes are left for Thee.
Tightly fisted, You squeeze Your fingers into Your palm one last time.
The mallet pounds; the nails break skin.
The piercing shoots writhing pain to every nerve —
winching, blood-curdling pain.
Hanging from nails; tearing the flesh; bones separated by iron.
How much more pain can You bear?
Mounted on this tree for all to see.

Darkness falls. Black night at noon.
“Lord of the Jews, save Yourself,” they call.
Mother cries. John looks on.
You must endure. You must go on.
Sinner beside You dies with belief. Other sinner dies only in grief.
Three hours to hang, drug down by weight.
How much more can one bear?
How much longer to wait?
“Dear Father, good Father, is it not done?
Let death be a gift to Your Son.”



First

I am so aware that the machine (you and I) is useless in freeing God's loved and created children, unless the Master Operator works through us.

Second

He has already provided and consummates the plan that is necessary — Christ's perfect life, death and resurrection.

Third

Many Marys today are facing the hopelessness of "rescuing the perishing" from the mangled mass of their own materialism, secularism, and hedonism until they let the Master Operator take over. Then they stop wringing their hands as they submit to Christ.

Fourth

With the power of Easter, you and I are commissioned to be the "Jaws of Life" to bring others the good news.

Ingmar Bjugan said to me one Sunday when we had the reception of new members, "Today has been the greatest day in my life." I asked him why. This 50-year-old business man had experienced many good things in his life.

He responded, "Today I saw and heard Joe and Susan confirm their new life and faith in Jesus Christ as their resurrected Savior and I was the first one to invite them to the church and the Lord." Ingmar was truly the "Jaws of Life."

Recently, I had the opportunity to be the "Jaws of Life" when, after ten weeks of instruction, I baptized a lady who had been reared as a Mormon.

Last March on our tour to Israel, one the most exciting impressions came to me as I peered into the empty tomb: "Easter empowers me to be the 'Jaws of Life' to as many souls as I am willing to reach out to!" This caused my steps away from the tomb to be perhaps even lighter than those who were there at that first Easter. I also realized that there is something far worse than death and that is a wasted life: a life that could have advanced the cause of Christ, but did not.

It was about forty years ago when the New York Yankees were the dominant team. Their manager would say to the rookies: "Boys, it's an honor just to wear the New York Yankee's pinstripes. When you put them on, play like a World Champion. Play like a Yankee!" Paul encouraged the Christians at Philippi, "Walk worthy of the name." The world needs active and sacrificial "Jaws of Life." Yes, the world needs Jesus, the Master Operator.

He is not here. He has risen!
To that good news may each of us respond, "Here am I, send me."



your journey

— Amanda Varland
Faith Lutheran Church
Ottawa, Illinois

One final cry, one final breath.
Then at last, at peace in death.
This final work, a job well done, and death a gift to the Son.
The earth quakes, the dead do wake, the curtain torn in two.
"The Son of God brought to death," said but by a few.
A spear in His side, His death not denied.
Brought down from the cross, they dressed Him in linen,
And laid Him to rest in a tomb that was hidden.

The entrance was sealed with one great stone.
Two guards stood watch two days all alone.
The third day came and just as He said,
"Jesus was risen, no longer dead."
The angel of the Lord appeared to the Marys,
"Be not afraid, He is not here.
He is risen from death, go quickly and tell."
The disciples met in Galilee. They hurried to greet Him.
They needed to see.
And what they saw was that great man that lived
and died for every man.
He said, "Go forth and teach as I command.
Now the Word of God is in your hands.
And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

This sacrifice was meant for us. Our debt we can't repay.
Our sins are now forgiven on this Blessed Day.
Let us remember each day of the year, our duty to God,
and the sacrifice that He made.
Let the blessings be upon us, and the memory never forgot.



Dying to live

— Donna Seldal
Grace Free Lutheran
DeKalb, Illinois

tomato plant and revel in the mystery of growth and change. As the plant grows, the small green fruit turns to a fine red palatable tomato.

One day you walk into the garden and ask these tomatoes: "Which one of you wants to lose yourself in me — your life in mine? For lunch today I want a tomato. Whichever one of you gives yourself to me shall find a more abundant life. You shall live fifty or sixty years instead of only two weeks. You shall travel for miles and miles and see and hear things you would never experience in the garden."

Some won't believe it. They can't comprehend how anything could live for that length of time or how one could move from the spot in which it was planted. They know that to

One of my favorite hobbies is gardening. Very often in the middle of winter when the ground is covered with ice and snow, my thoughts turn to my flower beds and vegetable patch. It never ceases to amaze me how one tiny seed can produce an abundance of beautiful flowers and veggies.

Children in school are taught about the three kingdoms of the world — animal, plant and mineral. Here is a different perspective than what they likely heard at school.

Now let's suppose that the subjects of the mineral and the plant kingdoms are endowed with feelings and wills just as the humans. The root of a tomato plant invades the dark gloominess of the mineral kingdom and speaks, "if you minerals will lose yourselves in me," it says, "I will take you up into a kingdom such as you have never dreamed of. I will take you into a world where there is light and sunshine and wind, a gold-

en moon, a blue sky and sailing clouds. I will show you flowers of red, blue, yellow and violet. You will hear the song of birds and the music of the wind rustling through the tree tops a hundred feet about you. I'll give you a more abundant life if you will lose yourself in me."

Some of the minerals are skeptical. They cannot comprehend such things. They reason among themselves and the most intellectual ones conclude that such a life is not possible. Whoever heard of color and sunlight and moonlight? And so they reject the root of the tomato plant.

But some of them reply: "I can't understand it, but it appeals to me. Take me and do with me as you will. My heart responds. I'd like a life like that."

And so the tomato root absorbs them and as they go, their incredulous companions laugh and remind them of all the excitement they will miss when the earthworms go by.

These trusting minerals find themselves at first as a tiny green

AI look forward to the sweet fellowship, sharing of gifts, faithful example and encouragement of the other ladies in our

Women's Missionary Federation meetings. Getting to the meeting is sometimes a challenge and so is trying to listen with understanding and respect to each woman's contribution. But I am always blessed in some way and glad to have made the effort. I heartily encourage you to continue in or begin studying the lessons on Hebrews in this year's WMF Bible Study. If you are unable to attend the meetings, find a way to go through these lessons each month.

The April lesson in *Joy for the Journey*, the 1998 WMF Bible Study, leads us in understanding the work of the high priests.

Since the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, sin has separated mankind from their Creator. Right then and



leave the vine means death and so because the promise seems so foreign to them they turn aside and laugh at the tomato who does yield itself to you. "He's dead now," they jeer the moment you pluck it from the vine.

Truly it has died, for its life was in the vine. But you eat it and those vitamins turn into sparkling eyes, shiny hair, muscles, and energy. The tomato finds a life more abundant than anything it could have dreamed of with its limited intellect.

Everyone agrees that these three kingdoms exist, but few are willing to acknowledge the fourth kingdom — the Kingdom of God. John 3:3 says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As the tomatoes live their allotted few weeks and then fall from the vine

and lie there, a corrupting mass of matter, unfit for human consumption, just so, the one who refuses to make Jesus Christ the Lord of his life dies, only to find corruption and torment forever away from the presence of God. The person who receives Jesus as Savior thanks God that he has been delivered from the power of darkness and has been translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. There he finds an abundant life and one day will enjoy the fullness of life in the kingdom of heaven. There is a place with no sin, no sorrow, no tears, no death, no need of the sun for Jesus is the Light.

Praise the Lord for His wonderful gift of salvation that is available to everyone who will receive it.



My High Priest

there, God made known His great love for us by promising a Savior to provide the way for us to come back to our holy God in a right relationship. Later God also established the way we could come to Him in worship and who could lead in the worship.

Melchizedek was an early king and priest (Genesis 14) who blessed Abram and received Abram's offerings. Later Aaron and his sons were chosen by God to be priests (Exodus 40) in the tabernacle to serve the Lord as priests then and for generations to come. (Priests were all human males chosen by God.)

Jesus, the Son of God, became man (John 1:14) and was chosen by God, His Father to be obedient to His Father's will, just as the earthly priests were chosen to obey the detailed instructions God gave for worshipping him and making sacrifices in the tabernacle (Exodus 38-39).

This high priestly appointment

by God meant he was a representative of mankind in coming before God to offer gifts and sacrifices (the shedding of the blood of animals) for sins. These had been offered repeatedly: some daily, some during festivals or special events and some were offered annually. But Jesus came now as our representative before God. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice that was offered once for all. It was His blood that was poured out to cover the sins of all mankind. Jesus gave His all — His life, His will, His throne, His glory.

Before Christ, the high priests were sinful humans. They sacrificed for their sins as well as those of the people. Jesus knew temptation but was without sin. He understands and looks upon us with compassion. He is God the Son who humbled Himself to be a man, suffered greatly, wrestled with death and separation from His Father. Through it all He learned obedience to the Father through suffering so the way of sal-

vation could be made available to all mankind.

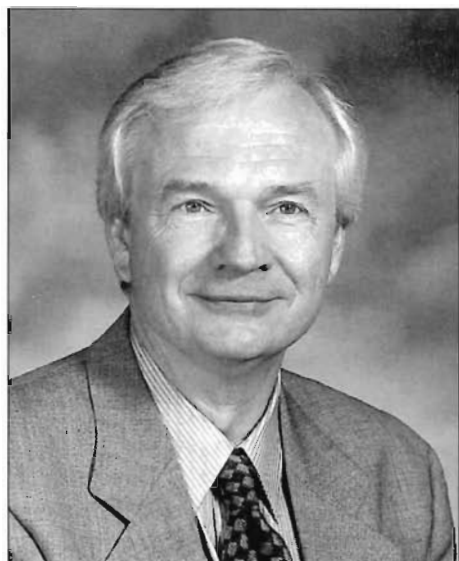
So what is my response to such great news given to me by Jesus, the great High Priest? I come to the cross and confess my sins daily. There I receive God's gracious forgiveness and I put off my sinful self and daily put on Christ. Each day as I learn from His Word and obey it by the power of the Holy Spirit, I offer a sacrifice of worship and praise to my Lord. I do the good works he has planned for me to do in Christ. I accept the orders He gives me. If I am to go, I go. If it is to stop, I stop. At times He tells me to wait, so I wait.

Now washed by Jesus' blood, I am clothed with His righteousness. As God received Jesus, the perfect High Priest, so now I can approach God's throne of grace through Christ. It is the only way we can go before our holy God. What an indescribable privilege!

What a promise I have from God. He is my everliving High Priest, always there to receive me in mercy, to forgive me, to pray for me and help me in every need.



Introducing the seminary seniors



Ivars J. Krafts

I was born in Riga, Latvia, in 1939, to Rudolfs and Ermine Krafts. My father was a Lutheran pastor. When the communists closed his church, our family fled to Germany where we lived for the duration of World War II. In 1949, we were sponsored by a South Dakota farmer for emigration to the United States. After a year of serving community churches in Onida and Blunt, South Dakota, my father accepted a call to the four-point Lutheran Free Church parish in Dalton, Minnesota. He was their first non-Norwegian speaking pastor.

In 1953, we moved to Circle Pines, Minnesota, where my father served Our Savior's Lutheran Church until his death in 1974. This is where I met my wife, Bonna Anderson. We were married in 1963, a year after I graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School. We remained in the Circle Pines area where Bonna taught school. In 1967 we were blessed with a daughter, Kristine, now completing her residency in pathology at the University of Minnesota. In 1996 we became the proud grandparents of Anna Grace.

My initial job was with Norwest Bank in Minneapolis. After working with several smaller law firms, I joined Peterson & Popovich, a St. Paul firm specializing in school law.

In 1975 I founded my own firm and have continued to work with school districts throughout the state.

During these years I was active in public service, having spent four years as a municipal judge and also served on a local school board. I was an officer of our church for a number of years and served on many committees. By the early '90s, Bonna and I were led to leave our congregation and join Maranatha Free Lutheran, then in Coon Rapids and now in a permanent church building in Spring Lake Park. We were warmly accepted into this fellowship of believers.

Although I have always known Jesus as my Savior, I did not feel any call to the ministry. However, I had always wanted to broaden my knowledge of the Scriptures. When Pastor Tonnes Pollestad came to Maranatha, he encouraged me to take courses at the AFLTS Summer Institute. Immediately, I recognized that the true Word of God was indeed taught by dedicated and believing professors. Upon completing the Institute, I asked Dr. Monseth if I could continue to take more classes at the seminary on a part-time basis. Though I told him I

was not interested in the ministry, Dr. Monseth graciously allowed me to enroll. By the end of my first year, I truly felt the call of God to serve Him. With Bonna's support and encouragement, I applied and was accepted as a full-time seminary student.

My years of study have been a wonderful example of God's power and leading. Could a 55-year-old mind survive "suicide Greek"? Could my law practice integrate with class and homework schedules? Would I continue to feel the call? The answer to all of these questions is "Yes."

My internship experience has affirmed my call into the ministry. I serve with Pastor Pollestad at Maranatha Free Lutheran. What a joy it is to preach the crucified and risen Savior!

The four years have passed too quickly. There is still so much to learn and so much to know. But there is also so much to do. "Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). Bonna and I look forward to the opportunity of serving in parish ministry.



Marshall Nessa

I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home. My parents, Mick and Carole, faithfully taught my

brother and me the Bible, our need to know Jesus as our personal Savior, and that we should live out our faith. More than that, they were and are examples of what being a Christian is about.

I came to know Jesus as my Savior when I was seven or eight years old at a tent crusade held in my hometown. I don't know who the speaker was or what he spoke on, but I do remember realizing that I was a sinner in need of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins that He offers. When the pastor gave the invitation I asked my mom if I could go forward and receive Jesus. She responded with, "Of course," and took me to the front of the tent. There I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior. "Faithful is He who has called you and He will bring it to



Rev. Eenok Haamer, rector of the Tartu Theological Academy, Tartu, Estonia, conducted a brief speaking tour in the United States during early December, including a visit to Minnesota. He was the speaker for the AFLC Seminary Christmas banquet on December 8 and at an all-school chapel on December 9, following an evening fellowship at Faith Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis, sponsored by LEAF (Lutheran Estonian American Friends).

While in Minnesota he was a

guest at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Francis Monseth, with whom he became friends during Dr. Monseth's teaching assignments in Estonia the past five years.

Pictured with Rev. Haamer are the co-chairmen of LEAF, Rev. Robert Lee and Rev. Charles Eidum, who were both in the original group of Lutheran pastors who visited Estonia in 1992 and encouraged the establishment of the academy there for the training of public school religion teachers.

pass" (I Thessalonians 4:24).

I was born and raised in the small Iowa town of Garden City. I have one brother, Mark. He is one year younger than I am. We grew up playing whatever sport was in season. Sports were and still are the hobby that I enjoy relaxing with.

After high school, I attended a technical college in northern Iowa and received a degree in the electrical program. I returned home to run the family business with my cousin for about five years. After this time, God called me to Bible school where I was blessed with meeting my wife, Tara. We have been married for five years and have two precious girls, Alyssa, 4, and Rachael, 2.

It was also at Bible school where God impressed upon me His call for my life. After finishing col-

lege at Northwestern in Roseville, Minnesota, I started my training at AFLTS. My internship was shared between Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minnesota, and the mission field in Brazil.

There have been many blessings throughout these four years of seminary, but probably the greatest is seeing God's daily provision. Whether it was a bag of groceries left by the church, a \$50 bill stuck anonymously in our front door, or a gift of money from a congregation we didn't even know, God has been good and gracious in supplying above and beyond what we've needed. In light of how richly God has blessed us it is our prayer that others can be blessed through our lives (Psalm 67).



AFLBS Campus Days

April 3-4

Join the 200 plus students expected to converge on the Bible school campus at 3120 East Medicine Lake Boulevard in Plymouth, Minnesota. The registration cost is only \$10 per student. This is the second Campus Days this year. The first Fall Campus Days hosted about 100 youth last October. Applications are already coming in to the Bible school office for the 1998 Fall Semester.

Campus prayer and praise notes

After four neighborhood meetings introducing the community to the proposed campus expansion, there is no united opposition. According to AFLBS Dean James L. Johnson, "The most vocal opponents have recently shown kindness to us for which we praise the Lord!" City approval of the building plans has been delayed until June in order to do a traffic study. Continued prayers are needed.

AFLBS is rejoicing that 1997 ended with a record benevolence of over 100% of the proposed budget! The AFLC Coordinating Committee has given the AFLC Schools Corporation \$100,000 from an anonymous legacy for the proposed building project. The coordinating committee also funded a new phone system and a software computer program which updated an approximately ten-year-old accounting program.



*Now the green blade rises
from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth
many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with
the dead has been;
Love is come again
like wheat arising green.*

*When our hearts are wintry,
grieving, or in pain,
Your touch can call us
back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that
dead and bare have been;
Love is come again like
wheat arising green.*

— John M.C. Crum
Ambassador Hymnal No. 112



March 17, 1998 17

AFLBS spring choir tours stay in Midwest

The April AFLBS Choir and Choral Club tours begin in central Minnesota and will travel throughout the Midwest. It has been twenty years since the choirs visited some of these older AFLC congregations. AFLBS Dean James L. Johnson will travel with the Choir and Pastor Tonnes Pollestad will go with the Choral Club.

Choir concerts

- April 10- Willmar, MN
 12 - Brandon, MN
 Fergus Falls, MN
 13 - Sebeka, MN
 14 - Abercrombie, ND
 15 - Roseau, MN
 17 - Thief River Falls, MN
 18 - Newfolden, MN
 19 - Grand Forks, ND
 Park River, ND
 20 - Portland, ND
 21 - Mentor, MN
 24 - Cloquet, MN
 25 - Cokato, MN
 26 - Plymouth, MN

Choral Club concerts

- April 10 - Wadena, MN
 12 - Bagley, MN
 Bemidji, MN
 13 - Northome, MN
 14 - Greenbush, MN
 15 - Grafton, ND
 17 - Argyle, MN
 18 - Edmore, ND
 19 - Tioga, ND
 Minnewaukan, ND
 20 - Arlington, SD
 21 - Freeman, SD
 22 - Canton, SD
 24 - Mankato, MN
 25 - Zumbrota, MN
 26 - Eden Prairie, MN

Please call to confirm concert date and time.

Former AFLBS students and alumni — Congregations are looking for parish workers and youth ministers. If you would like more information, contact the AFLC Home Missions or Youth Ministries office at 612-545-5631.



1997-98 AFLBS Choir

Great opportunities at the ARC

2372 30th Ave.
 Osceola, WI 54020
 1-800-292-2877
 e-mail:
 thearc@centuryinter.net

Couple's Retreat
March 27-29

Women's Retreat
May 1-3

AFLC Youth Leadership Conference

July 20-25

*Pre-register with \$50 before April 1
 for the best prices!*

Contact: Pastor Kevin Olson
 Youth Ministries
 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
 Minneapolis, MN 55441
 1-612-545-5631



The 1996 Leadership Conference met on the AFLC schools campus. The 1998 Leadership Conference will be at the ARC, near Osceola, Wisconsin.

Joy in the trial

All of us go through times of trial. Beginning last summer, I experienced a real trial. I praise God who has given me the assurance of His presence with my family and myself.

Last July, we had our AFLC-Mexico Annual Conference along with a visit from Pastor Eugene Enderlein. It was a special time of warm fellowship and brotherly love. We also began construction on our new church being built in memory of Pastor Kenneth Pentti, the AFLC evangelist who visited us in the summer of 1983. Two days after the conference, I fell into a hole at our new church construction site. I broke my left arm and was cut on my forehead.

While I write this testimony, I

am lying in bed because of the accident. To God be the glory because it is He who has taught me to love and serve Him with greater surrender and under His grace. I also have learned that when we most enjoy our communion with the Lord, the devil asks God for our soul. We are sifted like wheat but Christ, through His holy angels who dwell around us, defends us and strengthens our faith (Luke 22:31-32).

Pray for our congregation in Leon, Mexico. We hope to have our church ready for God's glory before the next millennium starts.

— Esther R. Flores
Leon, Mexico

Campo Mourão, Brazil — The new school year in Brazil at the Bible school and seminary began in March. Classes are now held in the evening and opens the door for many people to study who work during the day. Some students are taking one or two classes that will specifically help them work within their congregations. Missionaries Connely Dyrud and David Nelson teach classes for both first and second year students.

Pastor Earl Korhonen, Monroe, Washington, has resigned as pastor of Monroe Free Lutheran where he has served for three years, and has accepted the call to serve Hosanna and Timberland-Ringebu Parish in Cumberland and Barronett, Wisconsin. He expects to begin his new ministry on July 1. Cumberland's current pastor, Tom Olson, is completing his flying lessons in preparation to leave for mission work in Naknek, Alaska, in mid-June.

Curitiba, Brazil — Missionaries Paul and Becky Abel and the ARCA hosted the AFLC-Brazil Annual Conference during the third week of January. About 120 people gathered for the weekend of meetings and fellowship. The women have a parallel spiritual retreat at the same time. The theme of the conference was from Matthew 28:19 on evangelizing and making disciples. Missionary David Nelson wrote, "We were thankful for a spirit of unity and a desire to grow among the Brazilian church. Please pray for us as missionaries as we seek to find the best way to assist the Brazilian church in developing into a strong lighthouse for Christ. The nationalization of a church body can be a long and trying process, but we praise God for the Brazilian leaders who are stepping forward to be lay leaders in their local congregations."

Lake Alma, Saskatchewan — Faith Free Lutheran will host the Canadian AFLC Conference April 3-5, 1998. Special guest speakers at the conference will be AFLC Home Missions Director Paul Nash and AFLC President Robert Lee.

Apache Junction, Arizona — On February 24, the Second Annual AFLC Barbecue was held for the snowbirds in the Mesa and Apache Junction area. Pastors Paul Nash and Al Monson helped host the event. They visited home mission congregations in Tucson, Arizona, and California during the trip to the Southwest.

Thief River Falls, Minnesota — Our Saviour's Lutheran is hosting their annual missions conference March 22-25. AFLC World and Home Missions Directors, Eugene Enderlein and Paul Nash will be the speakers.

Chaplain Mark Benz, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, was included on the AFLC fellowship roster by the coordinating committee at their meeting on February 16, 1998.



Cumberland, Wisconsin — New members welcomed to Section Ten Free Lutheran last fall are pictured with their interim pastor, Jay Eberth.

Behold Your King

Bible Lesson: Matthew 21:1-11 Luke 19:28-38

Jesus has many precious names. Some of His names are Savior, Good Shepherd, Lamb of God, and Son of God. In our story today, Jesus is called the King.

Jesus and His disciples were walking to Jerusalem. When they came to a small town near Jerusalem, Jesus said to two of His disciples, "Go into this town. You will see a donkey and a colt tied there. Untie them and bring them to Me." The disciples obeyed Him and brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt, crowds of people ran out to meet Him. With great excitement, they spread their coats and palm branches on the road because a king was coming! The crowds were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" The people were happy and praising God. They thought Jesus was coming to be their king and to do many wonderful things for them.

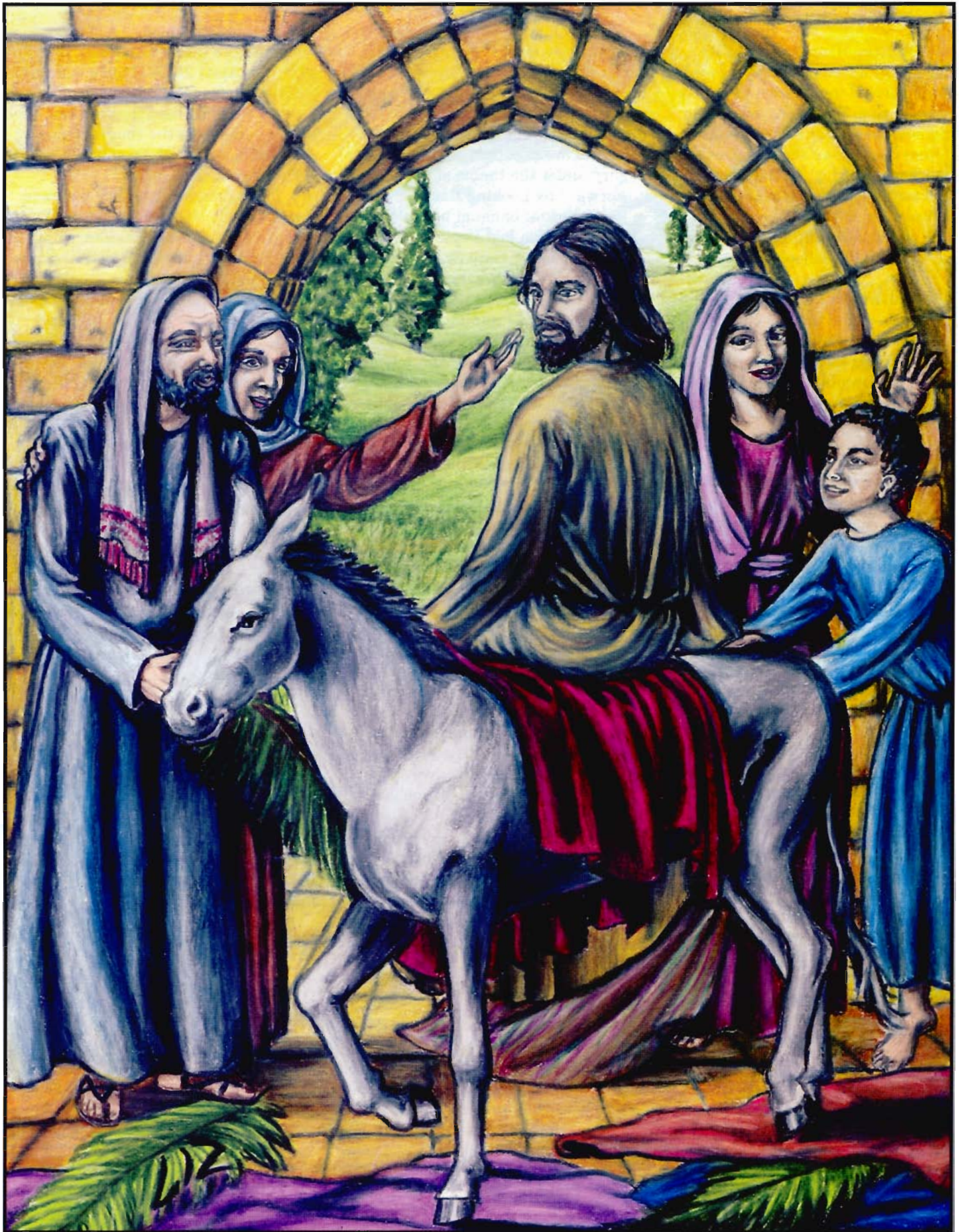
The people saw Jesus do great miracles, but Jesus was coming not only to heal people or to give them food. Jesus was coming to die on the cross so that all people could have their sins forgiven. Many people did not know this was the wonderful thing Jesus was coming to do for them.

Jesus came to die for your sins too. Jesus came to be your Savior. Ask Jesus to forgive your sins. Then you can be glad and sing, "Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King who came to save me!"

Memory Verse

"Behold your King is coming to you." *Matthew 21:5*

*reprinted from Ambassador Sunday School Series
Kindergarten Quarter Three
available from AFLC Parish Education*



Dexter, Minnesota — Zion Lutheran hosted a Saturday evening Valentine's Banquet for 113 guests. About half of the guests were from outside the parish. AFLBS Dean James L. Johnson was the speaker. The next morning, Pastor Johnson and some students from the Bible school shared during the worship service at Mt. Sion Lutheran in Kasson for their "Bible School Sunday."

Southwest Central Minnesota District — The Spring Youth Retreat will be held April 17-19 at Faith Haven Youth Lodge at Battle Lake, Minnesota with the theme "Jesus Is Sending You." The speakers will be Missionaries Dan and Debbie Giles.

Pastor Oscar Brown died August 23, 1997 at the age of 94 in Cordova, Alaska. Pastor Brown had served as an assistant pastor at Section Ten and Timberland Free Lutheran Churches from 1988 to 1990. He was born in Alesund, Norway in 1903 and emigrated to America in the late 1920s. After graduating from the Lutheran Bible Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Oscar responded to the call of God to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and headed to Alaska. During his time in Alaska he ministered on Little Diomed Island in the Bering Sea, founded two churches in the Naknek area, and served in the towns of Seward and Cordova. He also published Eskimo language song books, Bible study books in Korean and English, and an autobiography. He was preceded in death by his wife Ella. He left behind no earthly possessions because he was known for always giving away everything he had to those in need. Blessed be his memory.

Correction: The memorial gifts printed in the February 24, 1998 issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* listed Pastor and Mrs. Ernest Langness in the wrong column. They should have been in the "Given By" column. We apologize for the confusion.

Cloquet, Minnesota — St. Paul's Lutheran is in the midst of a year-long celebration focusing on the 100 years of ministry the Lord has given the congregation. Periodic events are highlighting the anniversary under the theme of "Moving Forward by Looking Back."

A kickoff banquet began the year of celebration last September with former pastor, Herb Franz, preaching. Pastor Franz served St. Paul's from 1960-87 and shared memorable moments of his ministry with the congregation.

In November the church had an ethnic supper with former seminary intern, Pastor Jerry Moan, speaking. Although the congregation has Finnish roots there was more than just Finnish food at the banquet. The only food banned was lutefisk.

In January the congregation hosted a youth rally with a son of the congregation, Pastor Mike Palkie. Pastor Palkie recalled how the congregation had an impact on his life while growing up at St. Paul's.

In February 1998, one Sunday was Missions Day with two of the men from the congregation who have gone into ministry sharing. During the morning services, Missionary Jeff Anderson of the Philippines spoke. The evening service featured Pastor Steve Kneeland of Duluth, Minnesota,

sharing on home missions.

On April 26, St. Paul's will celebrate Heritage Sunday. A layman's service will be held that evening with lay people from the congregation speaking on the theme "What My Heritage Means to Me."

The final anniversary weekend will be July 24-26, 1998 with a Bible conference. Former pastors, seminary interns, and sons of the congregation who are now in ministry will be some of those who will participate.

Beaverton, Oregon — Willamette Free Lutheran Church was approved as an AFLC congregation by the coordinating committee at their February meeting.

Beulah, North Dakota — Prince Of Peace Lutheran hosted a Mid-Winter Bible Conference during February 20-22. AFLC Schools' professor Jerry Holmaas and Missionary Dan Giles were the guest speakers. The theme was "Don't You Know Who God Is?" from Isaiah 40:27-31.

Pastor Mel Meyer, Milford, Illinois, has accepted the call to serve St. John's Lutheran near Milford where he has been serving as interim pastor since last fall.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences — January 1 - January 31, 1998

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$224,870.00	\$24,862.74	24,862.74	11
Seminary	112,558.00	8,352.79	8,352.79	7
Bible School	180,678.00	13,990.54	13,990.54	8
Home Missions.	260,263.00	23,948.47	23,948.47	9
World Missions.	420,686.00	34,675.98	34,675.98	8
Capital Investment	16,276.00	666.31	666.31	4
Parish Education	50,335.00	6,995.16	6,995.16	14
Church Extension	13,092.00	468.39	468.39	4
TOTALS	\$1,278,758.00	113,960.38	113,960.38	9
TOTALS 1996	1,223,901.00	113,697.29	113,697.28	9
Goal 8%				

Dealing with our doubts

Maybe there has never been a time when you have had some doubts. Maybe you have never wondered, is it all true? Maybe you have never questioned, are those who claim Christianity is just a myth and a hoax right?

There have been times in my life when I have wrestled with questions. I have pondered whether or not I was basing my life on something that was solid. I've had to consider whether I was heading down a road that led to life or to a dead end.

If the gospel, the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, isn't true my life is a shambles. The gospel is the basis for my hope and joy. It is my reason for looking at the past with peace, living in the present with purpose and looking ahead to the future with confidence. If it isn't true, I have nothing. I want to be sure. I have the same feelings as Paul when he says, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (I Corinthians 15:17,19, NIV).

When temptation to doubt has come, assurance of the truth has always come from the same solid source. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (I Corinthians 15:20, NIV). It all comes back to the cross and the empty tomb.

Feelings are so fickle. We cannot depend on them to be a faithful guide to truth. Circumstances are sometimes good, sometimes not. They do not inspire confidence. Other people can be solid rocks one day and shifting sand the next. They cannot give an assurance that effectively deals with doubts.

We need something more. We need something that remains true no matter which direction the wind of human opinion may be blowing. We need something that will withstand questioning and analysis, scorn, ridicule and attack. Since we are each so undependable, we need something we can count on that is greater than ourselves. We find all that and more in Jesus and His cross and resurrection.

The Resurrection is the hub, the core. Without it, the rest are like spokes on a wheel, dangling in midair, going nowhere. Because of the Resurrection, the rest makes sense.

I know I am forgiven, not because I feel forgiven, not because of good deeds I have done, but because the promise is made by the One who died on the cross and

rose again. "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25, NIV).

I know God loves me, not because I feel worthy of His love, not because circumstances prove I am loved, but because "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NIV).

I know I do not have to be afraid to die, not because somebody who had an experience on an operating table saw a bright, pleasant looking light, but because Jesus truly died and truly came back to life. Therefore, we declare confidently: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (I Corinthians 15:54,55, NIV).

A current, best-selling author and popular speaker was on television, describing his beliefs about how

we can know God and find happiness and meaning to life. Many look to him as a spiritual guide. His ideas do sound attractive. It is easy to see why they are appealing to many people. But if I had the chance I would like to simply ask him: What's the proof that what you say is true? I can dream up ideas about who God is and what's going to happen that sound just as wonderful as yours. Why should I believe you?

He wouldn't have a credible answer. But Jesus does. He points to the cross and the resurrection. That's why we believe what He says about

the nature of God, our standing as members of the kingdom, our hope of eternal life. He is not just another man with some good teaching about how to be kind to others and some nice sounding dreams about the future. He is different from all others. He died and rose again. Therefore, I have confidence in what He says and I trust Him with my life.

I have been in discussions with non-Christians where they have talked about portions of the Bible that confuse and bother them. I've admitted there is a lot in the Bible I don't understand either. But then I try to ask them: What about the cross and the Resurrection? Let's talk about that.

One thing I know for sure is that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. That makes all the difference in the world. That's the hub that holds everything together. That's what gives meaning to life.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

"When temptation to doubt has come, assurance of the truth always comes from the same solid source."

BUILDING THE BASE

The fish in God's aquarium – the sharks and tuna

The recent execution of Karla Faye Tucker in Texas raises some important questions for Bible-believing Christians. She had been convicted of a brutal pickax murder fourteen years before, but then had reportedly undergone a life transformation in prison when she came to know Jesus Christ personally.

Many who knew her appealed for mercy on the basis of this obvious change in her life. In the debate between those desiring mercy and those desiring justice, or vengeance, one member of the victim's family stated that you could "never rehabilitate out of Karla" that quality which caused her to commit such a horrible crime. They believed Karla's change into a "born-again Christian" was not real.

To answer such concerns, we must turn to the biblical doctrine of the two natures. To continue our analogy of this world as God's aquarium and human beings as the fish in it, we picture the old nature (that sinful, unspiritual, flesh-seeking, God-condemned nature we are all born with) as the sharks in the aquarium. The new nature, on the other hand (God's work born within us as we trust in Christ and allow Him to live in us) is more like tuna.

That shark-like old nature exists only to eat and satisfy selfish, fleshly desires. Like the shark, our

old nature can never be tamed. It will never change and we can only expect certain things of it. A shark has to constantly move in order to breathe. In similar fashion, that old nature is always restless and unsatisfied. Sharks are extremely dangerous killers and even eat other sharks. They are attracted by blood. Likewise, our old natures, conscious only of this world, tend to eat other people to satisfy their own desires — especially the vulnerable or hurting. The shark of our old nature is a bitter enemy of God. A.W. Knock wrote, it "cannot care for spiritual things" and it "can't serve or please God." By nature, the shark is swimming within each of us.

When we allow Jesus to enter our lives and live within us, He creates a new nature (II Corinthians 5:17) that is alive to God, and seeks the things of God, such as holiness and love. The Holy Spirit now living within us, begins to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) in our lives. This new nature is more like the tasty tuna. It is the one kind of fish that most people will eat! That new nature that Jesus creates in us is pleasing to others, even if they don't want it for themselves. Tuna are not eaters, rather, they are the eaten. The new nature from Jesus does not attack others or even defend itself (I Peter 2:21-23). We are called to be meek (Matthew 5:5). Christ's new nature within us will allow itself, like a tuna, to be killed,

cut and canned for others to eat. Because it has Jesus' label on it, it is of a consistent quality!

As believers, we will always have both natures within us. But which one have we allowed to dominate? Which nature do others see in us? As Knock wrote, "We will never eradicate the old nature." Therefore, we can never take the murderous old nature out of anyone, or make it good, or even improve it! Jesus, however, can put a new nature within that can grow bigger and stronger than our old one. In the Karla Faye Tucker controversy, we must remember that Karla's change followed her crime and that her new nature was clearly visible. Who finally ended up being the sharks and the tuna in that case?

"So it will be at the end of this age" (Matthew 13:40), all the sharks will be discarded by God and all the tuna will be saved for Jesus! "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (vs. 43). Jesus loves the tuna of the new nature!



— Pastor
Craig Wentzel
Zoar and Living
Word Lutheran
Edmore,
North Dakota