

THE LUTHERAN 

NOVEMBER 2007

# AMBASSADOR



*Give*  
*Thanks*

Thanks in affliction.  
Thanks in the midst  
of loss. Thanks for  
plenty. Thankful talk.  
Words have power  
beyond the temporal.  
Especially the words  
God speaks to us.  
Are you listening?

# Letting go

**I**s it hard for you to let go?

It is for me. On Labor Day weekend, I flew to Minnesota from our new home in California to accompany our daughter Elizabeth on her way to Bible school. In learning to let go of our firstborn child, I learned about surrender and letting go.

I also learned about what happens when a bull runs into a fire hydrant.

With Liz at my side, I stopped at the sight of a bull's demise at the Minnesota State Fair on August 31, where a tragedy was averted when a black bovine named Saber escaped a cattle trailer during unloading.

According to news reports, Saber the bull grew skittish when farmer Jim Wulf, Morris, Minn., was unloading the bull to show him at the fair. The 1,600-pound creature seemed agitated by the heat and the crowds of people. Shaking off his noose, the bull "charged through the fairgrounds, barreled past fairgoers," according to reports, then "butted a faded red fire hydrant." Miraculously, no one was injured, and no damage done.

Except to the bull. Saber died immediately after butting the hydrant, collapsing in a heap near the All-You-Can-Drink Milk Stand, where Liz and I were standing nine hours later.

Saber's error was the same one we make when asked to surrender and let go. We want freedom to choose. We fume and fight. We're trying to get away from something. But you can't take on an immobile iron post, even if you are a bull that weighs 1,600 pounds.

"I don't think he felt any pain," said a veterinarian at the scene. But the reality for people is that bitterness, anger and venting brings lots of pain — even death. Your

passions, your freedom, your anger can kill you. You need to surrender.

"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" asks James 4:1. "Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in

your members?" James 4:2 says, "You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask." Pride brings stubbornness. And stubbornness makes you an opponent of the Lord. "God is opposed to the proud," says James 4:6, "but gives grace to the humble."

Give up your passions, possessions and pride. Stop those bullish ways. You can try to run Him over, but God is not going to move.

I couldn't help but think about that bull while saying goodbye to Liz the next day. I've loved her since she was born. She's lived in our house for 19 years. But as with so many of God's gifts, we have to release them. He gives and takes away. Jesus wants to bring peace and resolution — that's why He gave up His life for your salvation. When Jesus died on the cross, the people "wagged their tongues" and circled around Jesus, "like bulls," says Psalm 22. They hated Jesus. But Jesus loved them.

He hung on a cross and asks you to hand over your sin. Ready to give it up? It may be bitterness or rebellion or a fight against God's call to mission. Or it may be just letting go of a daughter.

But hand it over to Jesus, who wants you to let go.

*Johnson serves Good Shepherd Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.*

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Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.

— Martin Luther

When I give thanks, my thoughts still circle about myself to some extent. But in praise my soul ascends to self-forgetting adoration, seeing and praising only the majesty and power of God, His grace and redemption.

— O. Hallesby

[ All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired, although not in the hour or in the measure, or the very thing which they ask. Yet they will obtain something greater and more glorious than they had dared to ask. ]

— Martin Luther

In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer



# Lesson in affliction

BY PASTOR TOM OLSON

“**I**t was good that I was afflicted” (Psalm 119:71a). I have used this verse in counseling dozens of times. But I could hardly speak from experience because God has blessed me with 47 years of excellent health and 20 years of rewarding ministry in precious congregations. The checkbook has dipped below zero a few times, and our daughter has a heart condition, but I have never had my own physical affliction. When I visit hospitalized parishioners I have true sympathy but no real empathy. That is changing.

My time of testing came this year, and I don’t know when it will end or where it will take me. If you listen to my sermons ([www.faithradiopodcast.com](http://www.faithradiopodcast.com)) you will notice that in about April my voice started to weaken. Sunday by Sunday it got worse until I had to quit preaching in August.

After numerous visits to the general practitioners and bottles of pills, I finally got referred to a throat specialist who put a scope into my voice box and saw what appeared to be a yeast infection. But the medicine didn’t help. My doctor told me from the start that the symptoms could indicate throat cancer, but since I’ve never smoked one cigarette it was very unlikely.

After doing their best for three months, local doctors referred me to a speech pathologist in Madison, Wis., who took a video scope expecting to find vocal chord nodes treat-

able by voice rest. When the image hit the screen, the ugly growth on the left vocal chord and the look on the doctor’s face said it all.

I went into the clinic with a perfect medical chart and came out diagnosed with cancer.

I went in a preacher and left uncertain that they could save my voice.

But I also went into that office bothered by petty issues and came out ready to start living. The fall colors were instantly brighter, my wife more beautiful, children more precious and friendships more important. Material possessions quickly lose their luster when serious illness enters your life. Relationships become paramount.

I currently have three choices to pray about: Cut out half of the voice box, remove all the abnormal tissue and lose my voice permanently; get one shot at pin-point radiation therapy to burn the growth off of the vocal chord and attempt to save my voice; or wait and see if it gets worse or God heals another way.

So what do I have to be thankful for? My damaged voice? My uncertain future? The mounting medical bills?

I have much to be thankful for. My affliction is teaching me lessons that will prepare me for a better ministry and deeper walk with God. It is already happening.

Those who know me would agree that I am a talker (no amens, please). Last Christmas I was singing in a commu-





nity madrigal and now I must go for days without uttering a word. But silence does not stop ministry. I can still counsel by pointing out a Bible verse and have the person read it. For the first time in my life I have been forced to listen. In fact, people seem to enjoy visiting with me more now with my pad and paper in hand than when I cut them off mid-sentence. I find it amazing how powerful eye contact or a slight gesture can be. Little children are much more responsive to me as I get down on their level and communicate with my hands.

The school of affliction is a quality program. God is using my time out of the pulpit to turn some ordinary laymen in our church into fantastic preachers. All I have to do is a little coaching and let them go. I would not be surprised if one or two of them will become lay pastors.

God is clearly working out every detail for me. Hundreds of Christians are praying. A trained health minister is coaching us in a nutritional program that has proven to effectively fight cancer. A doctor I attended church with during seminary has connected me with a renowned surgeon who has roots near our AFLC church in Bruce, S.D., and has agreed to take up my case. The AFLC Home Missions Department is making sure that all our needs are met. Christian friends in Minneapolis have opened their homes to me for my six weeks of radiation.

The blessings don't stop. In less than two weeks I have

given overdue hugs. A broken relationship of ten years has been reconciled with tears. I am eating right, exercising and feeling better than I have in ages. The beauty of daily life goes on. I look forward to attending the homecoming game tonight to see my son on the football team and my daughter in the band. I will do my best to silently cheer the Pointers on to victory.

The diagnosis and treatment are still uncertain. By the time you read this we will know more. I don't know at this point what kind of ministry I will be able to do. If my voice is not strong enough to preach, the thought of chaplaincy in a cancer facility has entered my mind. I am already counseling cancer patients who have gotten my emails forwarded to them.

It is kind of scary to think that I may never sing again or that I may have to pull my family out of a gorgeous old house, a fascinating community and our precious congregation. But I know that if new affliction comes our way, we will one day be able to say with the Psalmist that it, too, was good. One thing is certain: I will never quote Psalm 119:71 glibly again. For now I know, at least a little bit, from my own experience that "it was good that I was afflicted." So do many of you.

*Olson serves Faith Lutheran in Mineral Point, Wis.*

Deep  
Love  
&

BY CHERI RUSSUM

**F**ebruary 7, 2007.  
Today is a day that God peeled back the curtains and showed me a glimpse of his deep, unconditional love.

Two days ago, I received a call from *Evening Magazine*, a Seattle-based news program. They asked to bring a news crew to the hospital to do a story about infant bereavement photography — a program in which photographers volunteer their time to take beautiful, professional portraits of babies who are either stillborn or who are expected to die shortly after birth. These photos serve as a precious keepsake for families.

The crew suggested I go to a website (NowILayMeDowntoSleep.com) to learn more about how the portraits aid in the healing process. They were going to be doing a feature on a family whose baby was to be born in our hospital.

This morning Faith Marie was born. She was only 3 lbs. 9 oz. and had a severe birth defect called anencephaly. She was born with a brain stem, but no brain. Where a skull should have been, only a pinkish membrane was there. From the nose down, Faith Marie looked perfect, though tiny. But her eyes were bulbous, protruding some from her face. She wore a tiny pink stocking cap to cover her misshapen head. And when I saw her, I thought she was beautiful.

I admit that when I entered the room with the reporter and cameraman, I was expecting horror, grief and extreme sadness. But there was none of that. Instead, what I experienced was unconditional love, joy and acceptance. These parents were absolutely crazy about her. Faith Marie's father beamed with pride in his Little Miss. He simply could not stop kissing her.

Her mother, too, though groggy from the drugs of



a Caesarean birth, proudly exclaimed, "And the doctor said she would never be able to move or make a sound," as Faith lifted her tiny hands and let out a faint cry. The look of "See, my little girl is way beyond what the experts predicted," showed all the admiration of any doting new mother at this simplest of tasks.

But that dad, I'll never forget his tender touch, his delight at the patch of hair growing on the nape of her neck, his whispered words of love, how he

could not take his eyes off of her — but most of all, how he just could not stop kissing her.

It was the most moving scene I've ever witnessed. It was as though God had opened my eyes to how He sees me — created in His image, vulnerable, in need of Him, but most of all with eyes of love and immeasurable pride ... as a parent standing over a crib wondering, hopeful, accepting and loving toward a baby who can do nothing for itself.

Tonight Faith Marie died. Although her parents knew she would, they chose to give her birth. They chose to spend their few hours together in loving joy, and they chose to know her. I was privileged to get to experience some of their time with her. I felt as though I was on holy ground. I'll never be the same. Faith Marie will always be a beautiful symbol of the unconditional love a parent has for a child and my heavenly Father has for me. She was made in the image of God, stamped with His grace; and I saw it. There never was a more beautiful child, nor one more deeply loved.

*Russum, a member of Elim Lutheran, Lake Stevens, Wash., is the public relations manager at Providence Everett Medical Center in Everett, Wash. This article is an excerpt from her personal journal.*



BY ALICE DEA





# Our Table

**T**hanksgiving and Christmas always make me homesick. I miss the maple, oak and hickory trees in the front yard of our southwest Missouri home. I miss the sound of my feet shuffling through the thick carpet of their leaves. I miss watching the sun set from our front window with those softer pinks, grays and blues of the winter sky. I miss my parents' Christmas lights strung along the church porch, on the evergreens and around our dining room window, welcoming us inside.

I miss the smells in that rock house — homemade rolls, Christmas cookies, ham and scalloped potatoes, turkey and pumpkin pie and that hint of wood smoke from our fireplace that was always smoking in. I miss the voices of my extended family catching up with all the news and, in the background, the ever-present Christmas music on the stereo. I even miss the sound of that old furnace warming up like a 747 jet engine preparing for takeoff. It was replaced quite a few years ago, but I still miss it.

Most of all I miss our table. Big and wobbly, it takes up the entire dining room when all of the three or four leaves are added. The table is not a valuable piece of furniture, but its value is in the role it has filled in the lives of our family and in the lives of countless others who have sat around it. That table has been the heart of our home and the center of my parents' ministry, where we kids learned to share, to understand what family is, and to pray.

The table has seen a myriad of late night homework sessions, art projects, sewing projects, bill paying, church meetings, Bible studies, trip planning, as well as thousands of meals. The table has been a place of communication and community and communion. Holding countless cups of coffee and tea, the table listened into the wee hours of the morning as people shared and laughed, confessed and cried.

The table was where Dad told story after story, which always came back to Jesus, then opened the Word and

shared the God who will never leave nor forsake us. The table was where Mom filled the motherless with Jesus' love, along with her meatloaf and raisin spice bars. I used to hate it when she would take pictures of us all around the table. Now I'm glad she did. Someday I'm going to go through those photos just to see all the people who were "fed" at that table.

My parents took Jesus literally when He said to "go out into the highways and byways and compel people to come in." My parents fed hundreds, maybe even thousands — rich and poor, young and old, famous and infamous. All were hungry and all were welcome. There was always nourishing food for empty stomachs and spiritual food for empty souls.

Seems as though there were at least one or two extras at every Sunday dinner. I can remember being resentful sometimes and wishing it would just be our family. One day I realized, what if Jesus didn't make room at His table? I wasn't one of His natural family, one of His chosen ones. What if He hadn't come and died to make room for all of us at His family table? After that, I tried never to resent Mom saying, "Go put another plate on the table, Alice."

My family is scattered now from Pennsylvania to Washington state. The last time we were all together was for Dad's funeral in 2002. Now, although Mom continues her table ministry alone, Jesus is still with her. And even if our family is never all together at our old table again, the lessons we've learned there will go with us and prepare us to join our dad at the eternal family table God has prepared for us. In the meantime, I pray that the tables in our homes will be extensions of that wonderful old table in the lives of all who sit at them.

*Dea is the daughter of Eunice Will, whose husband, the late Pastor Vincent Will, served Immanuel Lutheran, Springfield, Mo.*

# Thankful



BY BECKY ABEL



# Talk

**W**hat is God's love language? Many have probably heard of the five love languages with which people communicate love to one another. One of these languages is categorized as "words of affirmation." This happens to be the love language that means the most to me personally. I enjoy affirming others with words, and I realize that my sense of feeling loved often depends on the spoken word. A word spoken critically or thoughtlessly often has a negative effect, whereas a word of encouragement or thanks really motivates me.

Have you ever stopped to consider how you communicate love to God? Although He speaks and understands every language and every expression of our love (or lack of it), the Bible teaches us much concerning the power of the spoken word. God desires that our words be used to bless and thank Him as an expression of our love for Him, and He admonishes us to avoid using our words in a negative way.

"Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:4). In this verse the apostle Paul speaks of three sins in speech — "obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking." He gives a reason for this prohibition, mentioning that those things are "out of place" for the Christian. He then goes on to suggest a substitution for overcoming these sins: "but rather thanksgiving."

Our speech is important to God. A Christian must consider not only what is fitting for him to utter and others to hear, but what is fitting for God to hear. Is your speech becoming for a saint? Is it edifying for others to hear? Is it pleasing for God to hear? Psalm 139:4 reminds us, "Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord." There is not a word we speak, that God doesn't hear. If we really believed this, it would cause us to be more cautious. If you have spoken carelessly, filthily or foolishly, the Lord hears, and you must give an account of it to Him.

The words that proceed from our mouths reveal the condition of our hearts. Jesus Himself taught this truth when He said in Luke 6:45, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth

speaks." What is flowing from your heart as your mouth speaks throughout the day? Is your speech filled with thanksgiving or with obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking? The world in which we live is filled with the latter. Just turn on the TV, watch a film, or listen to the conversations of those around you at work or school. How often do you hear people's expression of thankfulness to God or to one another? Criticism and complaining are commonplace, natural fruits of the sinful man.

Christians are called to put on a new nature, allowing the Spirit of Christ to fill their hearts and convert their tongues. Speaking carelessly grieves the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:29-30 warns, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." The place where the Holy Spirit abides must be clean and purified; therefore our hearts must seek to get rid of those things which grieve the Holy Spirit.

The chief use of the tongue is to glorify and praise God, to give the Lord thanks for the blessings we have received. The psalmist declares in Psalm 35:28, "My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long." Thankfulness is a sweet melody that brings joy to the heart of God. As we practice this substitution of giving thanks, instead of wasting words in futile ways, we will discover that our words are a means of worship. "Let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28b).

As you celebrate Thanksgiving this year, ask the Lord for forgiveness for the thoughtless words uttered which are "out of place" for Christians. Remember the many blessings you have received as a child of God. Follow the advice Paul gives in Ephesians 5:20, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Speak God's love language today — give Him thanks with a grateful heart!

*Abel is an AFLC missionary, serving with her husband Pastor Paul Abel, in Curitiba, Brazil.*

# *Power of the written*

BY PASTOR JOHN MUNDFROM





In 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, his purpose was to initiate a debate regarding practices in the Roman Catholic Church, which he believed were contrary to scriptural teaching. These “theses” were soon copied and printed for wide distribution in the city and surrounding areas. Luther had not anticipated the uproar that was going to come. But as a result of the printing press, news of his protest reached a far wider audience than he ever imagined. The

printing press was a major factor in the whole Reformation movement that

word

followed. This one incident clearly illustrates the power of the printed word.

When we as Lutherans commemorate the Reformation, we often focus on Luther’s three “solae” — *Sola Scriptura* (the Word alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace alone), and *Sola Fidei* (faith alone) — as the foundation for the revival and reformation that took place within the Christian Church of his day. We often credit Luther with moving Christians to a place of using Scripture alone as the basis for what we believe, rather than including tradition and other Church decrees to determine doctrinal truth. We know and recognize the power of God’s Word to change lives as passages like Romans 1:16 — “I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” — and I Peter 1:23 — “For you have been born again through the living and enduring Word of God” — clearly explain. Such is the power of God’s spoken and written Word.

But not as often do we consider the printed word. Obviously, when God inspired men to write Scripture, there was no such thing as a printed word. The modern printing press was not invented until 1450 by Johannes Gutenberg, who eventually printed the Gutenberg Bible in 1455. If not for the printing presses available to Luther and the other reformers, we can only speculate if the Protestant Reformation would ever have taken hold. The ability to mass produce books and other documents, instead of having to meticulously hand copy manuscripts page by page, changed the world.

I believe it was part of God’s design that Luther’s re-discovery of truth came only a few years after Gutenberg’s invention. In fact, Gutenberg has been considered by some

to be the most influential person in the second millennium (1000-1999), and the printing press was voted the most important invention of the same period by *Time-Life* magazine. Without modern printing methods, you would not have access to this publication you are now reading. And without the printed word, the spread of Christianity itself would have been greatly hindered.

It takes only a moment to realize why this is true. Words spoken are often forgotten, or at least subject to the inability of most humans to remember word-for-word what they have heard. The result is that words spoken orally often take on vastly different meanings than when originally uttered, since people inevitably reword and even change the message each time it is passed on. (Have you ever played the game “Telephone” where a word or phrase is whispered to the next person in a room, who then passes it on, until the final message is often completely different from the original?) This is referred to as the cumulative errors of mishearing.

But having a printing press dramatically changes the ability to retain facts as given in the first place. For the Christian Church, being able to print the Bible and other sound, biblical literature ensures that truth will be passed on correctly to future generations.

Herein lies the primary value of the printed word. It stands as a testimony forever and enables Christian believers to know that what they read and study is true to the original words of the writer. Whether it be the inspired authors of the Bible, or the valuable writings of men who are no longer living, such as Martin Luther, Johan Arndt, Hans Nielsen Hauge, C.O. Rosenius, or Iver Olson (Lutherans who have made valuable contributions to our AFLC and the Lutheran Church as a whole), the printed word has great power. These books and writings enable the gospel of Christ to spread throughout our world today, as well as to generations of Christians to come.

Serving on our AFLC Board of Publications and Parish Education has allowed me to understand more completely how important it is to produce and print quality material for posterity. Books and Christian education resources that give a clear, sound, biblical and Lutheran perspective to those who read them will be invaluable in preserving our distinct heritage of encouraging free and living congregations. Thank you for your part in supporting this ministry as you consider carefully the value and power of the printed word.

*Mundfrom, who is a member of the AFLC’s Parish Education Committee, serves Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.*



# Christ alone

BY PASTOR TERRY CULLER

**F**our hundred and ninety years ago a Catholic monk and theology professor at a small college was chosen by God to set the Christian world on fire. The Church had drifted away from what the New Testament writer Jude calls the “faith handed down once for all.” Doctrines devised by men and not by God defined the Church. The works of men were seen as the way to salvation. The act of Christ on the cross was good, but it wasn’t enough in the eyes of the official Church. All of us had to add our bit of effort if we were to be saved.

From personal experience, Martin Luther knew the agony that comes to people when they think they must earn God’s approval by their own efforts. He knew what it meant to feel defeated and lost because he could never be good enough; he could never offer enough, he could never repent enough to be assured of his salvation. When God opened the great reformer’s eyes to the true gospel, an explosion took place.

We mustn’t think that no one believed the truth until Luther came on the scene. God always keeps for Himself a faithful remnant. Men such as John Hus and John Wycliffe worked the same fields before Luther. Hus was burned at the stake, and while Wycliffe himself wasn’t persecuted, his followers were severely. During Luther’s lifetime other great reformers also answered the call of God to the task of reclaiming the biblical faith. Men such as Philipp

Melanchthon and Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and Martin Bucer were all used by God in His mighty work of reformation.

Central to the faith preached by these reformers was the scriptural understanding of how we are justified before God. The Reformation was driven by the teaching of Scripture that we are saved or justified by His gracious gift of faith in Christ, which the Holy Spirit implants in us through the hearing of the words of Scripture. In other words, our salvation is not ours to earn, it is God’s to give. In the familiar phrase, we are saved by grace through faith, without the works of the law. All of the reformers and all of the churches that came out of the Reformation cherish this doctrine. It has been rightly called the “one doctrine on which the Church stands or falls.”

We must not abandon this central teaching and place an inappropriate emphasis on what we have done. We get tempted to take pride in *our* decision to follow Christ and then act as if we are the ones who are in charge of our salvation. When that happens then no longer is this about grace alone. No longer is it about faith alone. No longer is it about Scripture alone. No longer is it for the sake of Christ alone. No longer is it for the greater glory of God alone. It is now *my* work, *my* effort, *my* action. In other words, when we claim to do our part for our salvation, we have abandoned the faith recovered in the Reformation and we are again medieval Roman Catholics.





The Church must always be reforming, today as much as 400 years ago. We are always tempted to put ourselves before God. Luther called this desire to be in charge of our own salvation the Theology of Glory, as contrasted to the Theology of the Cross. The Theology of Glory makes sense to us. It speaks to our view of the world and how things ought to be done. Of course, if I work hard and do the right things, I should be rewarded. And, what is more, someone who does no work should not get anything. After all, didn't the Apostle Paul write something like that?

But the problem with that view is that it is sinful, plain and simple. And when we teach it to people, we set them up for failure and apostasy. They will be worn down by the sense that they haven't done enough, they haven't been good enough, they will not be certain of their salvation. And one of two things will happen: They will become self-righteous toward others, or they will turn away from the

faith because they cannot stand the pain of failing.

The true Reformation faith, the faith that knows our salvation is solely in the hands of Christ, is an insult to the world. It makes no sense — except to God.

We have no need for a new Luther or another Calvin. We have their witnesses. What the Church must continue to do is vigorously and effectively proclaim the great good news, the true gospel: that God has taken care of salvation for us in Christ Jesus. People of faith in Christ do not have to worry. God's proper work is to make us right before His eyes for the sake of Christ. That is good news. That is what the reformers learned, and that is what our Church must learn again.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

*Culler is pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran, Leitersburg, Md.*

# Bless the LORD



**D**o you have a favorite Thanksgiving song? In Colossians we're told to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs ..." (3:16). Songs help me to actively express my thanks to God. For instance, "Count your blessings" or "Thanks to God for my Redeemer."

I've learned a new song in the last couple of years that helps me verbally bless the Lord and even gives me examples of when to do so. Check out these situations listed in the song, "Blessed Be the Lord," by the Newsboys. Each verse points out a time when it's easy to bless the Lord and a time when it's not so easy. "In a land that is plentiful, where Your streams of abundance flow, blessed be Your name." Thanksgiving is celebrated after the harvest when grain, fruits and vegetables are safely gathered in and we have seen the abundance our land produces, so we can easily say, "Blessed be Your name."

Now the song leads us to another theme, "When I'm found in the desert place, though I walk in the wilderness, blessed be Your name." This could be a time of spiritual dryness. What can cause me to bless the Lord in these times? The chorus of this song says, "Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise, when the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say, blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your glorious name." When God blesses us with such abundance, it can be easy to return with thanks.

The phrase, "still I will say," challenges me to bless the Lord even when rotten stuff is happening. I want to make every thought, even the complaining and depressing

thoughts, captive to Christ and in everything give thanks just as Scripture tells me to do.

The next verse is a contrast of situations again, an easy and not-so-easy time of blessing the Lord. "When the sun's shining down on me, when the world's all as it should be, blessed be Your name. ... on the road marked with suffering, though there's pain in the offering, blessed be Your name." Paul exhorts us in Colossians 3 and Philippians 2 to "set our minds on things above" and to "have the mind of Christ." So when the sun's shining, I'm blessing the Lord; but also when there's pain and suffering, I've got the habit developed to bless the Lord even then.

The song repeats the phrase that I want to adapt, "My heart will choose to say, Lord, blessed be Your name." Choosing to live a life of thanksgiving and gratefulness to God is a daily choice that affects my conversations with my heavenly Father, my family and coworkers.

The words "blessed" and "bless" are listed so many times in the Bible, I've lost count. It's very clear that God wants to bless us, and we're told to bless the Lord. So I'm singing the words from my new song, "Every blessing You pour out, I'll turn back to praise, and when the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say, blessed be the name of the Lord."

This Thanksgiving I'm going to sing my new song to the Lord. And I'm going to try teach it to others so we can bless the Lord as a body of believers.

*Pederson is a member of Zion Lutheran in Tioga, N.D.*





LEFT: Dr. Francis Monseth (far left) leads a training seminar for pastors and lay assistants in Uganda.

ABOVE: Pastor Nate and Rhoda Jore along with their sons, Elijah and Judah.

# ONE Year LATER

**G**reetings AFLC family!

We are grateful for your prayers for us and the work in Uganda. We have now completed our first year in Uganda and are looking forward to what God has in store for us in the upcoming year. Our first year here was designated for learning the culture and language of the people we have come to serve. We have a good base in the local language, Lusoga, but have a ways to go before we can converse freely.

It has been a great privilege to build relationships with the pastors of the ELCU (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Uganda) and to observe how they are carrying on their ministries. This past summer we had the opportunity to show the Jesus Film in 17 different villages in six different districts.

We were also blessed to have Dr. Francis and Ellen Monseth, Rhoda's parents, with us for the month of August. While they were here, Dr. Monseth and I were able to travel to Burundi to visit the Free Lutheran Church there. We also held two training seminars during their visit, one for the ELCU pastors and their wives, and the other for the pastors and their lay assistants.

As we move into this next year, we will be formulating plans for training church leaders with the goal to begin training around May 2008.

There have been many blessings in our first year here, as well as many challenges. One blessing has been watching our boys adapt and thrive in this new place. They are people-magnets wherever we go. Another blessing has been seeing life through a different perspective as we have come to learn more of the lifestyle and culture of Uganda. It has also been a blessing to see the local pastors' dedication to the Lord's work, even though they do not receive any form of earthly payment. One of the challenges we have faced is being so much wealthier than the average person. It is difficult to be set apart and sought after for what we have. It is also a constant challenge to know how to best help those who are in need around us in a God-honoring way.

Thank you for your prayers for us as we continue to learn and grow. We need much wisdom if we are to have an impact for the Kingdom of God.

*The Jores are AFLC missionaries serving in Jinja, Uganda.*

# Rightly PROUD

## Making plans for FLY Bootcamp

BY PASTOR JASON HOLT

“**R**ightly proud” is an unusual phrase for us as conservative Lutherans, but there it is in the explanation of the AFLC online. If you go to the AFLC website and click on the “Introduction,” you will find the phrase toward the bottom of the page.

It reads: “The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations is sincerely grateful for the work of other Lutherans; yet it desires to have its own peculiar share in the mighty work and witness of the Lutheran Church. It does not seek to pass judgment on the relative contribution to Lutheranism of groups small or large; it earnestly seeks to be kept truly humble because of the imperfection of its achievements, and *rightly proud* because of the greatness of its heritage.” (Emphasis mine)

Why are we “rightly proud”?

We are rightly proud of our heritage in Lutheranism grounded in God’s inspired and inerrant Word as well as rooted in a focus on each believer’s involvement in personal witnessing. We rejoice in the communication of God’s Word to build up saints and to reach the lost.

As I reflect on this last focus, it leads me to examine AFLC Youth Ministries’ involvement in this vital area of vibrant Christianity.

FLY Boot Camp (formerly Leadership Conference) is gathering next summer at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis., under the theme “On Your Way,” with a goal of training students in personal evangelism. Each teenager will be trained in writing out his or her personal testimony of faith in Christ using his or her own words. These young maturing disciples will learn how to hold conversations with their spiritually dying friends about the Savior who took their sin at the cross. Matthew 28:19-20 are the theme verses for this equipping event: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in



the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The Great Commission calls for each believer to evaluate his or her pursuit of fulfilling this command to make disciples. How are you and I doing in this directive from our King?

These closing verses of Matthew’s Gospel urge us to look beyond our temporal concerns and prayerfully consider our everyday role in speaking for Jesus wherever we go. This motivation continues to be rooted in His grace and love. The degree to which you and I will share Jesus is connected to the degree to which we see how great a salvation we have received from Him.

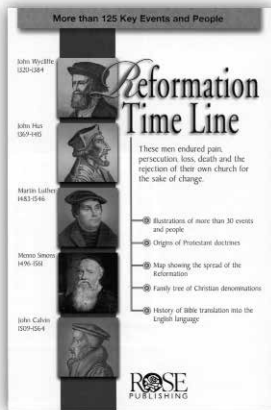
As the website wording directs our attention, our great God is providing avenues for us to be experiencing our heritage today. And yet another word from the opening quotation is instructive to us here: Humble.

We recognize the limit of our own efforts and achievements. As we are humble before the Lord God Almighty, it leads us back to being thankful to Him. We are grateful for the open doors for ministry that the Lord has provided. We are thankful for each one who is born again and is connecting with God’s heart for souls!

*Holt, a member of Living Hope in St. Michael, Minn., is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.*

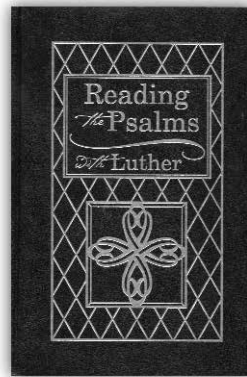
# resources

For more information on these resources, contact Parish Education at (763) 545-5631 or email [parished@aflc.org](mailto:parished@aflc.org).



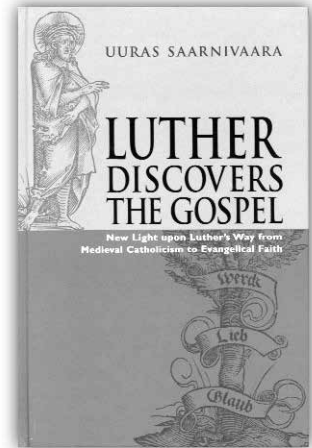
## Reformation Time Line

This foldout pamphlet is a time line of more than 125 key people and events surrounding the Reformation. Covers 400 years of church history alongside world history and shows 150 fascinating facts. \$3.95 (Also available as a laminated wall chart for \$12.50 or PowerPoint presentation \$39.95)



## Reading the Psalms with Luther

Luther's introductions to each of the 150 psalms demonstrate how he understood the Psalter as a Christ-centered book and used the psalms as the model for Christian prayer. Luther classifies each psalm as a psalm of prophecy, instruction, comfort, prayer, or thanksgiving and applies the message of the text to the life lived out under the cross. Luther also connects the psalms to the Ten Commandments and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Includes the ESV translation of the Psalms and a suggested reading schedule. \$13.50



## Luther Discovers the Gospel

Recently reprinted, this important book by Finnish theologian Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara traces how Luther moved from medieval Augustinianism to evangelical theology and highlights the pivotal role Johann von Staupitz had in Luther's life. The book also explores other theologies touted as evangelical that are revealed to be flawed. \$22

## Mission story illustrators sought

Ambassador Publications plans to publish a collection of mission stories in the spring of 2008 and would like to include several illustrations by children in this book. Interested individuals 18 years old and younger are invited to submit a sample drawing for consideration. Based on the submissions received, individuals will be selected to create one or more drawings to be published in the mission story book. Please send sample drawings along with name and age of artist to Ambassador Publications, 3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard, Minneapolis, MN, 55441, by Jan. 1, 2008.

## Schools set deans luncheons

The AFLC schools and the Vision office extend to you an invitation to have lunch with the deans of the Bible school and seminary. During the school year, the Plymouth, Minn., campus is open on specific Thursday dates for a firsthand look at what's happening at our schools. The schedule includes Nov. 15 this year, and in 2008 the dates include Jan. 10, Feb. 22, April 3 and May 1.

The Deans Luncheons begin with coffee and fellowship at 9:30 a.m.; class at 10:10 a.m.; a chapel service at 11:10 a.m., followed by lunch with the AFLC schools staff.

Call the Vision office at 763-412-2004 or the AFLC schools office at 763-544-9501 to make a reservation.



## PEOPLE AND PLACES

**Pastor Arlin Olson**, Elbow, Saskatchewan, Canada, has concluded his ministry at Bethel Lutheran Church of Elbow. He and his wife, Ruth, together with their youngest child, Tim, are returning to missionary service in Asia under the World Mission Prayer League.

**Pastor Brian Davidson**, Minneapolis, has accepted an interim call to serve United Lutheran in Laurel, Neb.

Members of the Coordinating Committee accepted a resolu-

tion of affiliation from **Immanuel Lutheran**, New Leipzig, N.D. The congregation is served by **Pastor John Amundson**, who was also received onto the AFLC's fellowship roster. Both the church and pastor are former members of the ELCA.

Members of **Ebenezer Lutheran**, Evergreen Park, Ill., held their final service on Aug. 28 with AFLC missionary Pastor Todd Schierkolk officiating.

**Pastor Richard Gunderson**, Cambridge, Minn., accepted the

position of assistant to the president of the AFLC. Gunderson began the part-time position on Oct. 1. He currently serves as interim pastor of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.

**Pastor Craig Benson** has accepted a call to serve St. Paul's Lutheran, rural Stanhope, Iowa, in addition to his present congregation, Salem Lutheran Church, rural Radcliffe, Iowa. Benson had been serving St Paul's for six months prior to the congregation's decision to call him as pastor.

## Resources available from Youth Ministries

The AFLC Youth Ministries department has several ministry resource tools available for AFLC church ministries at either a reduced cost or free for the asking. Items include: "Good Counsel for Counselors" (free); "Leadership Helps" (free); "Make Music to Our God" (Lyric book, \$1/each); "Here I Stand" (DVD set, \$35/each).

For more information on these items, please contact AFLC Youth Ministries at [youth@afcl.org](mailto:youth@afcl.org) or call (763) 545-5631.



The AFLC Schools hosted the annual Revival Conference Sept. 30-Oct. 3 with Pastor Kevin Garner, Marseilles, Ill., as the featured speaker. Above, AFLBS teacher Pastor Jerry Moan leads a service.



## Northwood church recovers from tornado

Members of Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D., continue to recover from damage left by a tornado on Aug. 26. Every building in the community, located in rural eastern North Dakota, suffered damage in the tornado. Damage to the church and parsonage, where pastor Tim Johnson resides, was extensive. Members of the congregation have decided to rebuild the church. An effort is currently under way to coordinate work groups through AFLC Builders Fellowship and FLAPS.



# Nelson installed as president of the AFLC



LEFT: Pastor Gary Jorgenson, vice chairman of the AFLC Coordinating Committee, installs Pastor Elden Nelson as president of the AFLC.

TOP: Dr. Francis Monseth, dean of AFLTS, brought the message during the installation service.

BOTTOM: Members of the AFLBS Concert Choir, directed by Jerry Nelson, provided special music.

**D**uring a special service on Sept. 23, Pastor Elden Nelson was installed as the fourth president of the AFLC. Nelson was elected by the Annual Conference, which met June 12-15 in Sioux Falls, S.D.

The installation service was the kickoff to the All Boards meetings, which were held on Sept. 24-25 on the campus of the AFLC in Plymouth, Minn., which allowed many members of AFLC boards and committees to participate in the special service.

Officiating at the presidential installation was Pastor

Gary Jorgenson, East Grand Forks, Minn., who serves as vice chairman of the AFLC's Coordinating Committee. Dr. Francis Monseth, dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary, brought the message, and members of several boards participated by reading Scripture.

Nelson, who formerly served as the AFLC vice president and assistant to the president, took over his official duties on Oct. 1. Pastor Robert Lee, who has served as president for more than 15 years, will begin as full-time faculty at the AFLC schools on Jan. 1, 2008.

# ► September memorials

## AFLBS

Isabel Johnson, Delbert Jones, Ingeborg Berge, Wallace Nelson

## AFLTS

Wallace Nelson, Jemina Mork, Dr. Uuras and Sirkka Saarnivaara

## Evangelism

Juanita Jones

## FLAPS

Floyd Lindstrom

## Home Missions

Wallace Nelson, Ingeborg Berge, Edna Hudson, Delbert Jones

## Parish Education

Wallace Nelson, Jemina Mork, Ingeborg Berge

## Vision

Allen Allery, Collin Rud

## WMF

Maxine Widner, Hank Rohde, Jim Koolmo, Mildred Tvedt, Richard Collins, Tom Wicks, Loretta Smith, Harriet Lerud

## World Missions

Anthony Briedenback, Gladys Aaberg, Brian Miller

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Sept. 30, 2007

FUND	TOTAL (Subsidy)	REC'D IN SEPT.	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$361,225	\$28,939	\$286,795	79
Youth Ministries	73,114	2,695	49,837	68
Evangelism	108,236	15,722	86,267	80
Parish Education	107,052	16,172	67,051	63
Seminary	216,097	17,148	156,549	72
Bible School	343,545	30,338	262,728	76
Home Missions	316,413	17,903	225,519	71
World Missions	287,808	20,438	175,738	61
Personal Support	407,198	35,365	362,228	89
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$2,220,688</b>	<b>\$184,720</b>	<b>\$1,672,711</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>TOTALS 2006</b>	<b>\$1,994,798</b>	<b>\$139,604</b>	<b>\$1,501,656</b>	<b>75</b>

Goal 75%

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

## Pastor Bruce Peterson, Minneapolis, remembered

Pastor Bruce Peterson, 77, of Minneapolis, died Sept. 30. Born May 19, 1930, in Minneapolis, he was the son of Ted and Jennie Peterson. He graduated from Roosevelt High School, Minneapolis. He joined the U.S. Navy, serving for two years. He went to Africa, where he served with a geological team for two years. He worked for Rosemount Engineering, Diversico and Webb Publishing. After retiring, he attended AFLTS and was ordained in 1996. He served the North Dakota congregations of Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran, Buxton, and Valley

Free Lutheran, Portland, for six years. He and his wife returned to Minneapolis, where he served as a visitation pastor of Living Word Lutheran, Eagan.

Surviving are his wife, Phyllis; three daughters, Pam (Patrick) Bayait, Patty (Brian) Arensen, and Lisa (Ross) Spriggs; 9 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

The memorial service was Oct. 4 at Living Word Lutheran Church, Eagan, Minn., with Pastor Tim Skramstad officiating and Pastor Dale Finstrom bringing the message. Burial was at Fort Snelling, Minneapolis.

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Copies September 2007 issue: 4034

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/s/ Ellis L. Bloomfield, Printer

# No matter WHAT

**W**hen I was in India I met a gentleman who had recently moved into a new house. He, his wife and two kids were pleased to be in a house with two rooms; they had previously lived in a house with only one room. The new house had a side room that was used for cooking and cleaning. The other room was the living room, dining room and, at night, they put cots down and it became the bedroom for the four of them. He appreciated the location closer to church, which meant he didn't have as far to ride his bike.



Pastor Craig Johnson

He didn't have as much as many of us here in the U.S. do, but he was thankful.

He was more thankful than some people I recently sat by on an airline flight. This couple didn't seem to like much of anything that was happening. They grumbled about the condition of the seats, the space available,

the temperature in the cabin, the flight attendants, and each other. I can imagine the complaining that would come if they were asked to live in a two-room house with two small children.

Some people are thankful no matter what their circumstances. Others are never thankful.

The Bible says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV). It doesn't say give thanks for all circumstances. We don't necessarily give thanks for the illness that comes, but we give thanks for friends who show love and compassion during the difficult times.

We don't give thanks that some people rebel against the Lord and wander far from the path He has for them. We do give thanks that God pursues the wanderers, calls them back and is able to rescue them.

We can always find something to be thankful for, or something to complain about. What makes the difference is what we're looking for, and what we think we deserve.

If we think we deserve to be waited on, then we're probably going to complain about the store clerk or the food server no matter how good a job they do. If we think we're

worthy of praise and attention, then our family and friends will always disappoint us.

On the other hand, if we see that "we were by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), deserving punishment from God and not blessing, then we'll be thankful. Even if we suffer physically for a time, we give thanks, for in Christ we have the hope of eternal life. Even if friends and family let us down we give thanks that God is always faithful. Even if the world doesn't give us much praise we give thanks, for God has called us to be His children. Even if

We can always find something to be thankful for, or something to complain about. What makes the difference is what we're looking for, and what we think we deserve.

our needs don't seem to be a high priority to others, we give thanks, for Jesus loves us so much He gave His life for us.

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:17-18). The prophet Habakkuk was confused by his circumstances. He didn't know exactly what was going to come, but he knew the nature of God, so he rejoiced and gave thanks.

When we recognize that we deserve wrath but have received grace, and when we get a glimpse of the greatness of God's grace, then we'll be thankful. My friend in India knew how it had been and how it could be. The result was that he was thankful for what he had.

We can't fully comprehend how terrible it would be without Christ. We don't fully appreciate how wonderful it is with Christ. Recognize how it was and how it would be, and then give thanks for how it is because of Jesus.



*building the base*

BY LARRY WALKER

# order & freedom

A recurring joke in the comic strip “Calvin and Hobbes” (which I miss) was a game called “Calvinball,” played by the title characters. Calvinball seemed to combine elements of every game the players knew. Contests always ended with a fight over the rules, each player insisting he had a special rule of his own that took priority over the rule the other player had just made up. The joke was that there were no rules, and no referees, so there was no way to know who won. It was a lot of frantic, passionate activity for no purpose at all.

Roman Catholics often accuse Protestants of playing a sort of “Calvin-and-Lutherball” game. “You don’t have a central authority to tell you what’s true or false,” they say. “Without a referee to keep you in line, you won’t be able to help straying out of bounds, into false teaching.”

And sadly, that seems to be coming true in many places. Several Protestant denominations do seem to be playing “Calvinball” now, judging truth or falsehood by what they feel and nothing else.

But it’s not really true that Protestants have no referee or set of rules. Have you noticed that most statues of Martin Luther show him holding tight to a Bible? Luther found assurance of salvation in the words of Scripture, and he was convinced that all we need for life and salvation has been provided in that Book. He’d have had no

time for people who say, “Well, I know the Bible says X is bad, but my heart tells me it’s good, and God wants me to follow my heart.”

Because a personal experience of salvation in Christ is so important, some people come to think that personal experience is the *only* important thing. It’s as if someone nearly dies of thirst, then is saved by getting to water. In his delight at the wonderful work that water has done in his life, he gives up food completely and starves to death.

We need both the experience of salvation and the truth taught in the words of Scripture. The two things are one, because God gives us salvation through the power of His Word.

Proverbs 29:18 is traditionally translated, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” But the English Standard Version is closer to the original Hebrew: “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint.” In other words, it’s God’s revealed Word that keeps us all from going off the rails. When human authorities try to do it, they become oppressive. When we become laws unto ourselves, we turn into animals.

Only through the Word of God can we have both order and freedom.

*Walker is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.*