

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



*Forget not
all His*
Benefits

Psalm 103:1-5



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FAITH ALONE

BY PASTOR PETER FRANZ

If there is one passage of Scripture that we need to understand, it would be Romans 3:21-31. Dr. Leon Morris (1914-2006), a missionary, theologian and author, described this portion of Scripture as “possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.” Martin Luther called this passage “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.”

Reading this passage, you might notice that it is filled with dense theological words, which might cause you to wonder who could possibly understand the meaning of all of these words. But if you read these verses carefully, you will notice that the main thrust of this passage is salvation by faith alone. In just 11 verses Paul uses the word “faith” eight times.

In these verses we learn that salvation by faith is essential because God’s law cannot save us. In the first part of Romans 3 Paul crushes us with the law of God. And he tells us that the purpose of the law is “that every mouth may be closed” (v. 19). In other words, we stand guilty as charged before God with no excuse for our sin. This doesn’t apply to just a few of us. All of us are guilty because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23).

Some people have a problem with saying all people are guilty of sin because they don’t think they are that bad. But the best of us and the worst of us all fall short and will never be saved by the law. Theologian Bishop Handley Moule (1841-1920) wrote, “The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of God’s glory, but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of the Alps; but you are as little able to

touch the stars as they.”

Then Paul writes that salvation by faith is available because God’s Son died for us. The teaching of salvation by faith presents a question that Paul addresses in Romans 3. Is it possible for a just God to justify sinners? Paul answers this question with a resounding, “yes!” God is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (v. 26) because of the cross.

We are justified through the cross because our ransom was paid at the cross. This is what Paul means in v. 24, where he used the word “redemption.” But at the same time God is just through the cross because God’s wrath was satisfied at the cross. This is what Paul means in v. 25, where he uses the word “propitiation.”

So the cross is absolutely essential to our salvation. There was no other way that a holy God could save sinners. He had to do something about our sin because we couldn’t.

Finally, Paul writes that salvation by faith is wonderful because God’s grace transforms us. If you are wondering what would move God to save us from our sins, Paul tells us. He says that we are “justified as a gift by His grace” (v. 24). The word “gift” is translated in John 15:25 as “without a cause.” In other words, there is nothing in us that caused God to save us. It is all in Him.

When you understand that salvation is all of grace and received by faith it changes you. And one of the ways it changes you (v. 27) is that you boast in Jesus instead of boasting in yourself.

Franz, who is the vice president of the AFLC, serves Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

Gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy.
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.

—Henry Ward Beecher

The more I come to recognize my story's place in God's grander Story, my once-bewildered questions are turning to psalms of thanksgiving at the wonder that I have been included in what He is doing.

—Gloria Gaither

I think that is a better thing than thanksgiving: thanks-living. How is this to be done? By a general cheerfulness of manner, by an obedience to the command of Him by whose mercy we live, by a perpetual, constant delighting of ourselves in the Lord, and by a submission of our desires to His will.

—Charles Spurgeon

When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

—G. K. Chesterton

Who forgives all your iniquity ...

Psalm 103:3



The Psalmist reminds us that it is good to remember all that God has done for us. One of the most amazing benefits is that God is actually willing to forgive us from our sins.

Unfortunately, not everybody knows this amazing truth. I have counseled with people who just cannot believe that God would be willing to forgive them. They lived with a dread that their sins had made them forever unacceptable to God. Yes, sins are indeed horrible, but God's grace is greater.

God wants you to know His forgiveness and experience its reality. Let's explore three important truths about God's forgiveness.

First, His forgiveness is absolutely necessary. Every human who has ever lived has broken God's perfect will. They have sinned and incurred guilt. Forgiveness is absolutely necessary because our God is absolutely just. He will not overlook or ignore an infraction against His holiness. Every sin must be paid for. Every offense of God must be punished. We see this truth on display in the Old Testament sacrifices. Every sin required a blood sacrifice. Year after year the High Priest would present a sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of the Hebrew people. Justice required a payment of blood. Only then could the sins of the people be forgiven.

This truth holds for you and me, as well. Your sins must be paid for with a blood sacrifice. Your only choice is whose blood will be shed. God cannot go against His own nature and merely ignore your sins. But He can apply a greater sacrifice to pay the debt you incurred.

Second, His forgiveness is freely received by faith. God has gloriously provided a way for our sin to be forgiven without compromising

His perfect justice. Ephesians 1:7 states, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." God chose to pay our sin debt for us by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The perfect God became the perfect sacrifice to pay our debt perfectly and completely. We experience this substituted payment by God's grace when our faith is placed in Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-9 adds, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Something



Forgiveness

By Pastor Joel Kangas

we couldn't earn and could never accomplish on our own is offered freely to us. The requirement is to receive what was offered to us. What a miracle.

Trying to earn God's forgiveness is an insult to God. Doing so minimizes the immensity of our debt and greatly exaggerates the value of our measly good efforts. At the same time, thinking that we could never be forgiven minimizes the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice and work of atonement.

Isaiah 1:18 helps us get our perspective right as it says, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." Sin and its effects are real, but forgiveness can erase them completely.

Last, God's forgiveness can be experienced daily, for eternity.

I encourage you to read again the Scriptures

that reveal the scope of God's forgiveness.

Colossians 1:13-14 declares that "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Forgiven people dwell in God's Kingdom forever.

Paul reminds us in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Forgiven people are brand new creations.

And in his letter to the Roman church, Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Forgiven people are no longer under condemnation.

When your sins are eternally forgiven you can then live each day enjoying Christ's presence and overflowing with gratitude toward God. Consider 1 John 1:7, which describes a life that is walked out each day in the light, enjoying fellowship

with other forgiven people and rejoicing in being cleansed from our sin by Jesus' blood.

Sometimes we can forget what Christ has done for us. Scripture points out how important it is to remind ourselves of those works on our behalf. The good news is that our God is a forgiving God. Let's walk that truth out each day as we overflow with gratitude to Him and His forgiveness.

Kangas serves Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn.

... *Who heals all your diseases* ...

Psalm 103:3

In thanksgiving, I “bless the Lord” for bringing my bride back and completely healing her. Yet, I still remember the day she died as if it was yesterday. The experience of death leaves you marked, and for us who have been marked, Psalm 103 is a powerful encouragement. Through it God encourages us to give thanks and praise when it is so unnatural.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (vs. 1).

The musician Jeremy Erickson once preached from this text. He explained this passage as a pep talk the Psalmist gave himself. The fact that the psalmist needed this pep talk tells us that something bad was going on. His soul was not in a natural place of worship.

I came to such a place when my bride, Paula, and I immediately went from the joy of a newborn baby, to her receiving emergency surgery. The surgery was an attempt to stop extreme blood loss that should have quickly taken her life. After waiting for what seemed like ages for news, a doctor came and explained that even if she did make it

through surgery, the massive loss of blood could mean fatal damage to her brain and heart. He was honest and told me that things were not going well. He did not think she would make it. I was in that place like the psalmist, a place far from natural worship and praise.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits” (vs. 2).

How can we bless the Lord, which is to give praise of thanks to our God, in such times? For me, there was no pep talk, only weeping and brokenness. That’s natural, isn’t it? It is only by God’s supernatural work in us that we can give ourselves such a pep talk. If I had turned to praise, I wouldn’t have needed to look far to remember “His benefits.” The blessing of new life was right in front of me. I only had to “forget not” the greatest benefit of all, the Lord’s pardoning of all my sins. This is the ultimate comfort in all of life’s hardships, and to it, the psalmist next turns his attention.

“Who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your disease” (vs. 3).

God heals. I didn’t doubt this. I knew He could heal Paula even after she survived surgery and was unconscious in ICU room 6. Then, from another part of the hospital, I heard the loudspeaker announce, “Code blue, code blue, ICU room 6.” I rushed to see her receiving CPR. Eventually, God healed again and brought her heart rate back, only to have her code blue again a few minutes later.

While the second round of CPR took place, I thought to myself, “I should know what to do, I’m a pastor. I should know what to say to a guy who is in a place like I am right now.” I thought, “Should I go in and claim that she is healed in the name of Jesus. I know He can do it!” Even our

Psalmist says He “heals all your diseases.” Well, I knew better. My mind turned to law and gospel. The law says we physically die because we have all sinned. My bride deserved physical death because of the fall, because of her sin. Yet, God’s ability to heal is gospel. During the second round of CPR, while in tears on the floor of ICU, I came to trust and accept God’s right as our Lord and King to apply either the law or the gospel.

Job’s words came to mind next, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). It was finally at this time when I began to give myself a pep talk. I prayed Job’s words over and over. Like the psalmist my soul was in a place far from natural worship and praise, yet it turned to “bless the Lord.”

How did Job and our psalmist both bless the Lord when it was completely unnatural to do so? It was by God’s work in them that they had the ability to “forget none of His benefits” even in their most difficult times, resulting in thanks and praise.

Paula’s heart did revive after the second round of CPR. God did heal her. Bless the Lord! Weeks later she almost died again, and He healed her again. Our story is a testimony that God can and does completely heal, even returning someone back from the dead. Yet, even if He does not heal when we want, when praise and thanks are the furthest from being natural, through the power of His Word and His work in you, give yourselves a pep talk with Psalm 103: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name ...”

Kneeland serves Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a large quantity of dried, brown leaves. The leaves are of various shapes and sizes, some showing detailed vein patterns. A semi-transparent circular graphic is centered over the hand and leaves. Inside this circle, there is a small white icon of a flower or umbrella-like shape at the top, followed by the word "Healing" in a large, white, serif font. Below the title, the author's name "By Pastor Jesse Kneeland" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown.

Healing

By Pastor Jesse Kneeland



Redemption

By Julie Twedt

The first thing that pops into my mind when I think of a physical pit is the story of Joseph. He was thrown into a pit by his hateful, jealous brothers. He wasn't able to climb out by himself, and when he was offered a helping hand out, the glimmer of hope was quickly dashed. The light he saw at the end of the tunnel led straight into slavery. Fast forwarding through his story, we are reminded again and again that the Lord never left him. Every single turn of events was clearly orchestrated by God. Speaking to his brothers many years later, Joseph said in Genesis 50:20a, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God

meant it for good." I find such comfort in that verse. No matter how this sinful world will offend, God can most certainly use it for good. Not only was Joseph shown compassion, but so were his evil brothers, whom Joseph had forgiven. No situation or wrong doing that could throw us into a pit goes unnoticed by our loving Father.

God sees you. He also sees the pit you are in. Maybe you've dug yourself a hole, or maybe circumstances beyond your control have left you wondering how you ended up in such a deep, dark place. During our lifetime on earth, we will each experience the consequences of the



*Who redeems your life from the pit;
Who crowns you with lovingkindness
and compassion;*

Psalm 103:4



Lord's love and compassion when you were going through a difficult time. Maybe He sent a friend or even a complete stranger to encourage you and help meet emotional or physical needs. I was traveling with my infant daughter years ago when our car broke down along an interstate highway, miles away from anywhere. A stranger to me, but the sister of one of our fellow church members back home, just happened to be driving by and offered to bring us where we needed to go. Bless the Lord, O my soul! Maybe He sent His Spirit to comfort or guide when hard decisions needed to be made. I was struggling with how to discuss a troubling issue with one of my children, and a Christian radio broadcast just happened to be covering the very topic that day to guide me. Bless the Lord, O my soul! He gives peace that passes all human understanding in the midst of life's storms. I spent seven weeks in the hospital beside my dying mother and God granted us both the peace only He can give. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

How can we ever thank God for all He has done for us? Telling others of the different ways the Lord has blessed you is a way of returning the blessing to the Lord. When you notice what He has done for you, tell somebody, and then tell another person. Tell your friends. Tell your children. Tell your grandma. Tell your co-worker. Love your friends. Love your children. Love your grandma. Love your co-worker.

"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Psalm 107:1-2a).

Not only does God have power over the

darkest pit of despair here on earth, but even greater, He has victory over the eternal pit of darkness, death, and destruction. Through Jesus Christ, our lives have been redeemed from the pit.

The father of lies, Satan, would like to make us think that our happiness, comfort and joy on earth are the be all and end all. He wants us to be short-sighted and not even see past day today's annoyances. If we get worked up over little things and hold onto grudges, we won't be praising God for His goodness and compassion, which are all around us. Don't take the bait. Resist the negativity and cling to the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that point others to the Lord. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

*I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before His face I see.
But I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day.*

("I Know Whom I Have Believed,"
#525 Ambassador Hymnal)

*Twedt is a member of Valley Free Lutheran,
Portland, N.D.*

sinful state we're in. Sin is the universal thread that has been woven throughout history. Unfair treatment, sickness, pain, grief, and unfulfilled dreams can knock us down, but the Lord sees and fully understands our needs. He lavishes His lovingkindness and compassion on us at every turn, but do we notice?

Think about any time you have experienced and seen the



Satisfaction

By Christina Osthus

Who satisfies you with good ...

❧ Psalm 103:5 ❧

The moment I start to ponder satisfaction, I realize that I am utterly satisfied. The moment I start to ponder love, I realize I am utterly beloved. The moment I start to ponder grace and mercy, I realize how gracious and merciful God is to me. Psalm 13:6 says, “I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.” I choose to be satisfied in Him.

For the last eight years, I have lived alone in a small town as a single school teacher, with a brief reprieve when my sister lived with me for two years. But does it follow that my life is unsatisfying, unfulfilling, or lacking contentedness? No. First of all, because the Lord says satisfaction comes from Him, and that His sovereignty determines my living situation more than any human decision. I have cried when reading the verse, “He sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:6), and I have taken the promise, “He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children” (Psalm 113:9) for my own.

This year, I decided it was time to do something new, for more reasons than I can count. A dear Christian friend of mine

invited me to live with her for the year, as I could no longer live in my teacher housing. I announced my resignation this past January, and then in March I became a part-time mom to one of my youth group girls. I would never have expected that, but I can clearly see God’s hand and how He has brought ministry into my home in a more real way than I imagined. Filled with my roommate and my “daughter,” prayer partners, church friends, and youth group kids, our home is a place of joy, peace, and security. My circumstances have proven that true satisfaction comes from Him in my own life, and the Scriptures tell us the same thing.

Jesus is sufficient. In Mark chapters 6-8, Jesus feeds thousands of people using whatever is available. He feeds an entire crowd listening to Him on two separate occasions. Immediately after the second time, Jesus warns His disciples privately to beware the “leaven” of the Pharisees. Of course in the context they think about food, and are embarrassed that they only have one loaf with them. Instead of explaining the metaphor of the leaven, He shakes His head and rebukes them for still not understanding that He will always be enough for them. They still don’t understand that He will never leave them in want, despite the fact that they are just coming to the realization that He indeed is the Messiah.

In John 6, after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus uses the metaphor that He is the bread of life. Both the metaphor and the reality are terribly disturbing to many of His followers. Some of them leave at this point, but the twelve are coming to understand how vital He is. In the words of Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). We are not sure how thorough of a command the

disciples had of the Scriptures, but very possibly Peter and the others were hearkening back to an Old Testament passage speaking of satisfaction in God, which helped them to understand His words. Isaiah 55:2 says, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” The disciples had no idea at that point how deeply He was changing their lives and the world, but they were coming to realize that if He was not enough, they would never be satisfied.

Paul writes to Timothy, “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (I Timothy 6:6). I think contentment is a perfect synonym for satisfaction. I don’t remember my life without Jesus, but it is hard for me to imagine being satisfied by anyone but Him. My soul swells when I read Hwin from *The Horse and His Boy* saying to Aslan, “I would rather be eaten by you than fed by anyone else.” Of course, Aslan isn’t interested in eating the gentle mare either literally or metaphorically. Though we are a part of the whole in the body of Christ, for some reason impossible for us to understand, our Lord wants to feed us and satisfy our souls with good things. If, like Solomon, we are seeking for God’s wisdom and righteousness, He will give us more than we need, as Matthew 5:6 promises: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”

Osthus is a 2006 graduate of AFLBS, currently living in Eagle Butte, S.D.

*Who satisfies you with good so that
your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalm 103:5



The year was 1999 and the magic age for retirement was 65. That was only a year away for us. So, we purchased a retirement home and planned on living out our golden years relaxing, reading, gardening, traveling, and an occasional morning trip to the bakery for a good cup of coffee and a delicious caramel roll. However, these self-centered plans were interrupted. God had other ideas in mind causing these “golden years” to be far more golden than we could ever have imagined. God has taken us to 10 different parishes in the past 14 years to serve as interim shepherds. Our famous words at the end of each interim assignment have been, “Well, this is our last one; we’re getting too old for this.” Which brings us to Psalm 103:5 where the Psalmist pens these words, “Who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

Let’s take a look at the eagle and attempt to draw a comparison between the elderly and the eagle. An eagle has a giant wingspan which averages 7.5 feet. This wingspan enables it to fly high and soar as no other bird. They expend very little energy as they don’t have to flap their wings as much as other birds. This is a reminder to us that God lifts us up and brings calm in the storms of life, enabling us to soar either above or below the clouds. The eagle has vision four times greater than we human beings and can see clearly for as far as 50 miles. So when God wants to reveal something to us, He enlarges our vision to see His revelation, which we cannot see in our flesh. An eagle has a lifespan of around 30 years. The

majority of people have a lifespan much longer than 65 years—so there’s plenty of time for more service after retirement.

Consider Larry Walters of Los Angeles. From a very young age, Larry had a dream of flying. He joined the U.S. Air Force with the hopes of becoming a pilot, but his poor eyesight disqualified him. After he was discharged from the military, he often sat in his backyard watching jets fly overhead. As he watched these jets from his comfortable lawn chair, he hatched a scheme that would in a small way satisfy his dream of flying. In 1982, he went to a nearby Army-Navy surplus store and purchased 45 weather balloons. He tied a rope from his lawn chair to his jeep, tied the balloons to his lawn chair, filled them with helium, made up some sandwiches, picked up his pellet gun, and settled into his chair. As his friends untied the rope from his jeep he was excited to think about the possibility of soaring about 30 feet up. To his utter amazement, he went up past 30 feet, past 1,000 feet, and leveled off at 16,000 feet above sea level. At that height, he felt he couldn’t risk engaging his pellet gun, shooting any of the balloons, lest he unbalance the load and really find himself in trouble. So he stayed there drifting in the cold, and as one can imagine, was very frightened. Eventually he got the nerve to shoot a few balloons and slowly he descended, crossing the primary approach to the Los Angeles International Airport, closing down air travel for much of an afternoon. Eventually he landed and was immediately arrested by the Los Angeles Police Department. A reporter stepped in and

asked him three questions.

Were you afraid? His answer, “Yes.”

Would you do it again? His answer, “No.”

Why did you do it? His answer, “A man can’t just sit around.”

So as that magic age of 65 has come and gone some 17



Renewal



By Pastor David Skordahl

years ago for my wife and myself, God has not intended us to just sit around, but to soar as the eagle, flying to heights that we could never have imagined. He enables us, encourages us, and strengthens us to serve whenever and wherever He calls us. Just a few of the benefits of not just sitting around in our later years have included the churches we have served, the wonderful people we have met, the joy of proclaiming the wonderful message of God's redeeming grace,

the loving people starving to be loved, and the gift of giving hope to those who have little. One does not need to be a pastor to be involved in ministering to people. There are fields of ministry for us in our golden years no matter what our God-given gifts may be. The Church needs us, our communities need us, and the world needs us. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are "saved by grace," but also that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which

God created beforehand that we should walk in them." In God's economy, these works were never intended to end at the golden age of 65. No matter what age we are, let us enjoy the journey.

Skordahl is a member of Living Hope Church in Rogers, Minn.

This Far &



By Pastor Josh and Amy Skogerboe

On Mother's Day 2017, a car left the road outside of our home. Both my wife, Amy, and I were deep into our afternoon naps, she in our upstairs bedroom, and I in our guest room downstairs. Our three youngest, Levi and Josh (both 13) and Ezra (age 8), huddled around the TV in our family room downstairs. It was a few minutes after 4 p.m. Quiet.

Then the car careened into our yard, continued to accelerate, and exploded through the wall and the TV in our family room, right on top of our sons. Like a missile. Like an explosion. Loud.

Miraculously, no one was hurt—neither the boys nor the tiny momma who was driving the car. The Lord's angels were at work, and all we lost was stuff. We are so grateful to God.

In the week following the incident, Amy took time to write out some of her thoughts. Here are some excerpts from those poignant posts.

JOSHUA (13)—If you've looked at the pics you will note pretty quickly how alarmingly close to a chair the front of the car landed. Josh was in that chair.

A MIRACLE: Josh stood from that chair at the exact instant the car was going to come through the wall—he saw it out of the corner of his eye. Already in motion, Joshie went instantly into flight mode, and propelled himself around the chair and out of the room even as the bookshelf next to him came crashing down and debris was flying. He was manic in terror, but his speed down the hall to where Dad Josh was sleeping was seconds, and his repetitive screaming of exactly what was happening was actually very beneficial, especially for those of us who were waking up to it. We calculate it was about 15 seconds before Dad Josh was actually out in the living room because of Joshie's clarity and speed. His body and emotions took all evening to process the fear, but by the next morning, due to your prayer coverage and God's presence, Joshie's mind had quite literally moved on. Minor cuts and a chunk of wall to the knee. And no desire to talk about it. That's our boy.

EZRA (8)—Precious Z Babes (Ezra) thought a tornado had hit. Levi watched Z stare in horror and then vault over the arm of the couch and run. As Dad Josh came toward him he was yelling, "IS THIS REAL? I don't think this is real! Is this really HAPPENING?" Z was hitting his chest in confusion trying to wake himself up. Plaster dust and wall chunks in his hair, blood on his hands and arms from cuts, but no pain, and sweet confusion that somehow shields a young mind from some of the harsher realities in those initial moments. Little dude's got some big angels, and he now knows it more than ever.



No Further



LEVI (13)—Levi recalls an utter silence descending on the room like he had never experienced. A complete stillness and no noise. He thought he was dreaming—he could feel the silence. Immediately following was the loudest, worst noise he's ever heard.

The room was smoky and filled with dust from the plaster—so dream like. He wasn't sure he'd survived. He said later, "Mom, I wasn't afraid to die. I just didn't want it to happen that way for Z. I wanted to be okay for Z." He assessed that he wasn't in pain, that Joshie was safe and running for Dad, and he was all about Z. He knew something hit his face and as he sat up blood was running, but no pain. A good cut to the lip but completely superficial.

We have zero doubt that Levi's moment of stillness was angels descending into that room. It was holy ground, and every inch of that impact and every speck of glass and beam of wood that went flying was orchestrated by a Holy God and His army. That car was held and our sons were shielded. And whatever massive angel held that car declared, "This far and NO FURTHER."

Uff, tears. Waves of mixed emotions, yes? What has the enemy thrown at you and your loved ones, my friend? Can you feel the angels descending into the center of your pain, panic, doubt, and fear? Spreading their wings to shield you? Declaring to the enemy by the power and authorization of our Sovereign God and Father, "This far and no further." We are His, friends. In His presence, we live on holy ground.

"Tell everyone who is discouraged, Be strong and don't be afraid! God is coming to your rescue ..." (Isaiah 35:4)

What the devil meant to harm us has made us stronger. Our family is closer, our love is deeper. We are overwhelmed with awe at His power and gratitude for His Fatherly protection. *Solo Deo Gloria.*

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

*The Skogerboes live in Montgomery, Ill., where Pastor Skogerboe serves St. Olaf Free Lutheran Church. A complete, unedited post of Amy's thoughts can be found at jskogerboe.com
>> http://bit.ly/no_further*



All praise to Thee, Eternal God

T

he first Christmas hymn of the Lutheran Reformation was “All Praise to

Thee, Eternal God.” The Roman Catholic Church permitted the Germans to sing the first stanza in German in their Christmas mass.

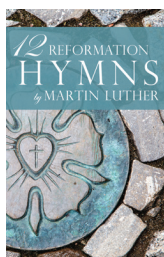
Martin Luther added the additional stanzas to complete this Lutheran chorale. It was distributed on single sheets called “broadsheets” in time for Christmas in 1523. The ancient melody for this hymn goes back to the 1300s. J. S. Bach used this hymn in his Choralkantate for Christmas Day. He also used the German sixth stanza in his famous “Christmas Oratorio.”

~Pastor Gordon Waterman
Crown of Life Lutheran
Tomball, Texas

1. All praise to Thee, eternal God,
Who, clothed in garb of flesh and blood,
Dost take a manger for Thy throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.
Hallelujah!
2. Once did the skies before you bow;
A virgin's arms contain you now
While angels, who in you rejoice,
Now listen for your infant voice.
Hallelujah!
3. A little Child, Thou art our Guest
That weary ones in Thee may rest;
Forlorn and lowly is Thy birth

That we may rise to heav'n from earth.
Hallelujah!

4. Thou comest in the darksome night
To make us children of the light,
To make us in the realms divine
Like Thine own angels, round Thee shine.
Hallelujah!
5. All this for us Thy love hath done;
By this to Thee our love is won;
For this our joyful songs we raise
And shout our thanks in ceaseless praise.
Hallelujah!
Amen.



These hymns are featured in a new booklet from Ambassador Publications, *12 Reformation Hymns by Martin Luther*. Featuring a hymn of Luther for each month of the year, the booklet is available for \$2/each. For more information, visit ambassadorpublications.org.

MARVELOUS

BY PASTOR JASON HOLT

W

hat will you list in appreciation this Thanksgiving?

This

season is full of opportunities to give gratitude to the Lord for all that He has done. In my extended family, we often have some tangible expression of thanks before we sit down to the big holiday meal.

One year my father invited everyone, from youngest to oldest, to list one item of thanks. “It could be anything,” he kindly explained. As one after another voiced their object of gratitude, our patriarch’s face grew wide both with a smile and a thought.

“We have had many terrific items,” my dad summarized at the end. “And yet, we forgot a big one.”

Before I recall my father’s comment, it would be helpful to consider the Parable of the Talents. Told in Matthew 21 and Luke 20, the story Jesus tells pictures a master sending without fanfare his own son to some wicked tenants. The parallels are clear. Our Heavenly Father is the master of the vineyard. He is the One who owns everything. The religious leaders are the tenants. They, like all people, are guilty of thoughtless disobedience toward God. The master’s son is the very Son of God. The Lord Jesus is taken, thrown out of the vineyard, and killed.



God’s Word consistently points out how Jesus would be treated well in advance of His arrival. The Gospel accounts in this passage include the Son of Man quoting Psalm 118, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

Marvelous. It is a word that indicates something that is worth heralding, is truly wonderful, and has a rich essence.

Do you remember the tenants’ evil plan? “This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.” They attempted to take what they could not earn by killing the son. The parable points to the depravity of humankind, but it also introduces a marvelous irony. Although the tenants would be judged for their plot, the master

would graciously give the vineyard to others. The ones who tried to take the inheritance from the son would receive none. The inheritance purchased by the Son’s life would be freely given to all who would receive Him.

“We have had many terrific items,” my dad summarized at the end of our conversation around the table. “And yet, we forgot a big one ... salvation.” This Thanksgiving is an opportunity again for young and old alike to give appreciation to the Savior King for His marvelous salvation.

Holt, a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn., is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor David Franz has accepted a call to serve at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Brainerd, Minn., beginning Dec. 1. Franz has served Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, and St. Paul's Lutheran, Jewell, Iowa.

Pastor Wayne Hjermstad has announced plans to retire on Jan. 1, 2018. He currently serves Grace Free Lutheran, Bagley, Minn. Along with his wife, Solveig, they plan to move to Elk River, Minn.

Members of **St. John's Lutheran**, Newark, Ohio, celebrated the congregation's 200th anniversary on Aug. 26 with a picnic celebration for the congregation and community. More than 300 people took part in the event, which included special music, historical displays, the opening of a time capsule, and outdoor activities for all ages.

Pastor Paul Kinney, a 2017 graduate of AFLTS, was installed Sept. 17 at Zion Lutheran, Silverhill, Ala., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, president of the AFLC, officiating. In a related note, members of the congregation have teamed up with Thrivent to give food to Prodissee Pantry to feed the hungry. Based in nearby Spanish Fort, Ala., Prodissee Pantry is a faith-based, nonprofit community ministry which gave food to more than 17,600 families last year.

Pastor Nathan Olson was installed Sept. 24 at Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Members of **Our Redeemer Lutheran**, Kirkland, Wash., celebrated the congregation's 50th anniversary with a special service on Sept. 30, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen speaking on planting seeds. The congregation is served by Pastor Ken Moland.

Members of **Good Shepherd Lutheran**, Pleasanton, Texas, celebrated the congregation's 30th anniversary on Oct. 8.

Pastor Jesse Kneeland was installed Oct. 22 at Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Members of **Zion Free Lutheran**, Valley City, N.D., held a surprise party on Sept. 24 for Pastor Bob Rieth to mark 50 years since his ordination.

Pastor Lynn Qualm has resigned from serving United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

NOVEMBER 9

"And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope'" (Romans 15:12).

H

ave you read the last two chapters of Romans recently? It is quite true that we often look into the Book of Romans for much information, inspiration, and doctrine, but we seldom get so far as to read the last two chapters. In our text today Paul is praising God for grace. He had received grace to pass from darkness to the light of the glorious knowledge of Jesus Christ. He had received grace to be given a call to witness for Christ and to serve Him. He had been given grace to be called as a minister of Christ and to the Gentiles. By God's grace Paul had myriads of brethren and friends in Christ in many lands, speaking various languages, and belonging to many nations. For a list of some of those many friends in Rome we may turn to chapter sixteen.

What has God's grace brought to you? Certainly it is offering you forgiveness, salvation, and new life in Christ. Have you accepted this grace given to you? Take time today, as Paul did, to stop a bit and summarize all the things that God has brought into your life. Paul did this, and became the more joyful and victorious as he witnessed to the light of the Holy Spirit.

We can be grateful for this Root out of Jesse, given to Gentiles; for we were of these. In Him can the Gentiles trust today.

Pastor John and Ruby Abel were the first AFLC world missionaries, serving in Brazil.

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



ON HIM WE SET OUR HOPE

BY JOYCE ERICKSON

Nearly ten years ago, a friend gave me a 2008 Joni Eareckson Tada planner with the theme of hope. It couldn't have been a timelier gift. You see, with six children at the time (seven by the end of that year), I often went to bed at night with feelings of disappointment and hopelessness because of the things left undone or the realization that I had operated yet another day in survival mode and wanted desperately to be well beyond that.

That year I really latched onto the meaning of a hope beyond myself and my circumstances and found myself clinging tightly to Scriptures centered around hope. One in particular spoke to me. Isaiah 49:23b (NIV) states, "Then you

will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in Me will not be disappointed." I began to realize that when I was experiencing disappointment it was because I had misplaced my hope. My hopes for a well-kept, well-run household were often disappointed. My hopes for an easier life were not being fulfilled. But my hope in God would not be disappointed.

As I began to read and study the Scriptures, my knowledge of God and faith in Him was steadily growing, and continues today. My hope in God has become increasingly confident and sure because I know from His Word that He is always faithful and never-failing.

Let me show you what I mean. One day I read Romans 4:17-21, a recounting of Abraham, who "in hope believed against hope." Abraham believed God's promise that he would become the father of many nations despite the fact that he and Sarah were past their childbearing years (Sarah had been barren prior to that, as well). Abraham believed the promise because he was "fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised" (v. 21). Why was Abraham fully convinced? And why have I become fully

convinced? Because of a little description of God in verse 17: "God ... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." If God can bring life from deadness and bring things into existence that do not exist, He can do anything that He has promised to do.

These truths about God fill me with confident hope. When I am burdened by circumstances that seem hopeless, I put my trust in God's promises and then rest and wait in hope because He is able, He is faithful, and He will never fail.

I hope you can join me as we study about: Hope: Your Future Expectation; Without Hope: Hopelessly Lost; Our Only Hope: Jesus Christ; A Living Hope: An Eternal Perspective; Rock Solid Hope: God Cannot Fail; When Hope Wavers: Hope Through Trials; Daily Hope: Daily Living in the Word; Sold-Out Hope: Total Surrender to Jesus; Hope Through Prayer: Finding God Faithful; and Hope Realized: When Faith Becomes Sight.

Erickson, Roseau, Minn., authored the 2018 WMF Bible study, which focuses on II Corinthians 2:10.

Reformation Hymn Festival at AFLC Schools

A Reformation Hymn Festival will be held at 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 10, in the AFLC Schools' chapel. The hymn festival will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. This event will include congregational singing and a choral presentation featuring a chamber orchestra and festival choir, including AFLBS students, alumni, and friends. For information, visit aflbs.org/hymnfest.



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Visit:

aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador/subscribe

Group (\$19) and bulk (\$17) rates are still available, though not online.



Grace Free Lutheran moves into sanctuary

Members and friends of Grace Free Lutheran Church of Maple Grove, Minn., held their first services in their new sanctuary on Oct. 8. The newly renovated library has become the congregation's place of worship. Two walls were taken down to allow enough space for the congregation to worship. And extensive renovations were made to include a sound system and altar area.

The congregation moved to the Maple Grove site along with its school,

Heritage Christian Academy, in 2003. It had been meeting in the AFLC Schools chapel. Since that time, the congregation has been meeting in the gymnasium, which required set up and take down of seating, stage and sound equipment each Sunday. Members of Grace are very excited to have this place of worship, especially the five teams that set up the gymnasium for worship the past 14 years. The new sanctuary space will be dedicated to the glory of God on Nov. 12.

SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Irene Larson (4), Ruth Claus, Gary Modean (3), Doris Anderson (2), Helen Hanson, John Larson (2)

AFLTS

Anita Chase, Helen Hanson, Morris Moan, Doris Anderson, O. Richard Lee (2)

Ambassador Inst.

Janice Schmitke, Myron Smedshammer, Palmer and Amy Haugen

General Fund

Helen Hanson

Home Missions

Helen Hanson, Elna Haagenon

HIS Fund

Helen Hanson

Parish Education

Myron Smedshammer, Palmer and Amy Haugen

WMF

Carol Dietsche (2)

World Missions

Jeanell Anderson

... in honor of

Ambassador Inst.

Jeanette Smedshammer

Parish Education

Jeanette Smedshammer

WMF

Gladys Schauland

Centenarian who models Christian life celebrated

Members of Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran in Ishpeming, Mich., celebrated Gladys Schauland's 100th birthday with a luncheon hosted by her family after morning worship on Sept. 3. Gladys has been a faithful member of Hope for more than 45 years, serving in WMF, teaching Sunday school, participating in quilting and choir groups, and helping with any need that would arise, especially making fantastic meals for the work crews of



various church projects.

Gladys is a mentor and role model of the Christian faith for the younger women in the congregation, as well as being the most gracious

hostess, inviting many to her home to enjoy Christian fellowship along with a delicious meal. Along with her husband, Rick, who died in May 2015, Gladys has been instrumental at Hope in sharing the love of Jesus Christ for the furtherance of His Kingdom.



Pastor Lloyd Weiland

Pastor Lloyd L. Weiland, 82, of Johnston, Iowa, died July 26.

Born June 15, 1935, in Iowa City, Iowa, he was adopted by Carl and Serena Weiland of Galva, Iowa. He attended Concordia College in St. Paul, Minn., where he met the love of his life, Myrna Spaude. They were married July 31, 1960. Following graduation from Concordia Seminary College in St. Louis, he began his ministry serving many Midwestern parishes and chaplaincies. He was a member of the AFLC clergy roster.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, Todd Weiland, Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Troy Weiland, Des Moines; one daughter, Beth Quam, Hubbard, Iowa, and three grandchildren. The service was held July 28 at Westover Chapel, Des Moines.



D

asani and Ngobi, two teenage boys in our village, decided to steal a 100 kilogram sack

of rice. They had been part of a work crew that had harvested the rice, and when they saw an opportunity, they ran off with the sack. After selling it, they went to Jinja with pockets full of money and enjoyed the high life for a few days. They had been helped on their way by an older teenager who had access to a motorcycle and who had given them a place to stay for the night. On their third night in town, their host did not return and the boys became afraid that he was planning to harm them. They stole two chickens to pay for their transportation and traveled back home that night.

These are two of the boys who have become friends of our children since our move to Nabukosi village nearly a year ago. Besides fishing and swimming together, their favorite activity has been playing soccer in the evenings after school and chores. We were able to clear out brush beside our banana plantation for a small soccer field. When

THE BOYS OF NABUKOSI

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

we invited the kids to join us for Bible study before soccer, Dasani and Ngobi were the first to respond. They have been eagerly attentive to each of the Gospel stories we have been able to share with them in their native Lusoga language. They have also been inviting their friends to come and hear.

One August day, I found myself frustrated in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. I had been working on our paper work at the Immigration Department and had hit another road block. The official I needed to see was out of office, and I had waited several hours for him, hoping that he would return. I started my journey back home through the traffic jam quite a bit later than I normally would have. As things turned out, the public transportation I had used dropped me off a short distance from home, so I was walking the back path of our property at dusk. As I was nearing our back gate, I saw a figure carrying a large piece of firewood. When I called out, the figure dropped the wood and began to run, only to suddenly stop and allow me to catch up to him. It was another of the soccer boys, Kabale, with Ngobi next to him. They were quite surprised to see me, as our normal habit is to be indoors by



sundown. I believe God was in the details of my delay getting home, so that I would come across these boys at that precise moment. I confronted them about stealing our firewood, and then, aware that there was an opportunity in front of me, was able to share about Christ and the forgiveness and grace He was offering to them. They listened attentively and then went on their way. Pray with us for these boys, that the truth of Christ would pierce their hearts, and that they would give their lives to Him.

Jore is an AFLC missionary serving in Uganda with his wife, Rhoda, and six children.

The 2018 schedule

Below is the 2018 schedule for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue, or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. Email us at ruthg@aflc.org or call (763) 545-5631.

| ISSUE DATE | DEADLINE | ISSUE THEME |
|------------|--------------|---------------|
| January | November 27 | Church Year |
| February | December 29 | Christian Ed. |
| March | January 29 | Lent/Easter |
| April | February 23 | AFLC Schools |
| May | March 12 | Evangelism |
| June | April 30 | Europe Tour |
| July | May 25 | Missions |
| August | June 25 | Conference |
| September | July 30 | Youth |
| October | August 27 | AFLC Heritage |
| November | September 28 | Thanksgiving |
| December | October 29 | Christmas |

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 12-15 in Dickinson, N.D., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 12. This issue will include the schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF Day schedule and registration. Other conference information will be printed as it is available, including youth and children's activities.

Statement of ownership

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 /s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor

Have a feature story idea? Let us know

The editors of *The Lutheran Ambassador* are asking our readers for help in sourcing feature stories for a new section of our publication. These stories could include unique congregational ministries either within the church body or tied to the local or worldwide ministries. We would like to focus on personal stories of God at work within our churches. We know that every congrega-

tion is filled with unique members who have stories of their own. If you have a testimony that you would like to share, let us know. Or if you know someone who does, we'd love to hear about it.

Contact us by email. Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson can be reached at ruthg@aflc.org. Pastor Robert Lee, editor, can be reached at rlee@aflc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-September 30, 2017

| FUND | REC'D IN SEPTEMBER | TOTAL REC'D TO DATE | PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| General Fund | \$26,246 | \$304,441 | \$308,237 |
| Evangelism | 8,268 | 102,728 | 94,004 |
| Youth Ministries | 6,681 | 79,719 | 77,285 |
| Parish Education | 7,882 | 137,895 | 112,004 |
| Seminary | 38,218 | 207,239 | 180,718 |
| Bible School | 31,897 | 409,615 | 384,372 |
| Home Missions | 24,483 | 396,058 | 347,881 |
| World Missions | 27,856 | 325,622 | 386,409 |
| Personal Support | 43,661 | 449,202 | 432,643 |
| TOTALS | \$215,193 | \$2,412,517 | \$2,323,555 |

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

DAILY BREAD

Give us this day our daily bread.” Countless times we have spoken these well-worn words as part of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples and committed to us in the Bible. There are slight differences in the two Gospel accounts (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4), but both include this petition.

What does “daily bread” mean? Some years ago a Bible teacher suggested that it meant we needed to bake fresh bread for every day. Sounds good, but this is surely not what the Lord meant, right? An internet search of the term is quite interesting, and one finds some quite creative uses. There’s a company that makes freeze-dried food, a bakery, a soup kitchen, a café, an organic farm, a whole foods cooperative, an employment center, a television series, a marketplace, the name of a song, and even a brand of beer. Perhaps many of our readers utilize a popular devotional booklet entitled *Our Daily Bread*, which refers to the believer’s daily nourishment from the Word, and this is probably the most common use of the term.

Dr. Martin Luther, our Reformation father, explains daily bread in a much wider sense. Let’s blow the dust from our catechisms and stir our memories by reading the meaning to the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, and thus be reminded of what we should mean when we pray.

What is meant by daily bread?

Everything that is required to satisfy our bodily needs; such as food and raiment (clothing), house and home, fields and flocks, money and goods; pious parents, children, and servants; godly and faithful rulers, good government; seasonable

weather, peace and health; order and honor; true friends, good neighbors, and the like.

Wow! When is the last time that we thought of most of the things listed in this explanation as part of our daily bread? A suggestion for all of us during the month of November is to consider this petition both a request and a call to thanksgiving. The following guide is mine, and you may adapt it to your circumstances.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

I thank you, Lord, for a more than adequate supply of good, nourishing food, as well as for all the produce from my garden. Help me not to take one meal for granted.

Thank you, Father, for the clothes in our closets, light ones for the summer months and heavy ones for winter. Help me to remember to be grateful when I get dressed in the morning.

You have provided, gracious Father, a spacious house to be my home, with furniture, appliances, air-conditioning, and a furnace. Thank you! Thank you for providing more than enough to meet our needs. Thank you, Lord, for my ministry income and for Social Security.

It’s good to remember our dads and moms when we pray, even if they are no longer with us. How good it was to have believing parents! Thank you, Father, for good memories of a legacy of faithfulness.

Thank you today for the children and grandchildren with whom you have blessed

me, Lord, and for the important place that they fill in our lives.

I am grateful for our government and for those in authority over us, especially those who are Christians. Remind me, please, to show proper respect even when I disagree with them. Thank you for the great privilege of voting.

There are so many things that I don’t understand, Father, and one of them is regarding the hurricanes and flooding that have been devastating for so many people and places during recent months. You have spared me and my family, and I thank you.

Lord, there are still wars and rumors of wars, just as we read in your Word, but I thank you for the peace that we know in

our land and in so many parts of the world

I am grateful, Father, for good health. Thank you for pills and physicians when we need them, for a good name and an orderly community in which to live.

You have blessed me with many friends over the years, and I

remember with gratitude childhood and school friendships that still remain. Thank you for the friends in congregations and on campus with whom I have been privileged to serve, and thank you, Father, for good neighbors.

Remind me, too, Lord, that “this day” encourages a daily attitude of gratitude, and to rest today and every day in the strength of your promises.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Amen. Yea, it shall be so.

A suggestion for all of us during the month of November is to consider this petition both a request and a call to thanksgiving.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

building the base

SACRIFICE

BY PASTOR JOHN BRENNAN

A

s I was growing up, late winter and early spring always found me pondering the question “what to give up for Lent?”

What was going to be my contribution toward the admission price of heaven? What would I sacrifice to make myself pleasing to God? Wasn't it enough that the entire Roman Catholic world was giving up meat on Fridays? Nope, we had to come up with something more.

But, did I really need any further sacrifice for eternal salvation? It seemed to me that eating tuna salad every Friday for seven weeks in a row ought to be plenty of sacrifice. It's nonsense to think that God would care what we ate on Fridays. It doesn't take a theological genius to realize that God has bigger fish to fry than what we eat during the Lenten season.

The clear and undeniable truth of God's perfect Word is that there is nothing we can add to the sacrifice that has already been made on our behalf (and it has absolutely nothing to do with our diet). We are sinners become saints by no doing of our own. Our redemption from sin was secured

by the blood sacrifice of One who was sinless. Hebrews 10:12 says, “When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.” Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross was the one and only all sufficient payment for our sin debt. Further sacrifice became unnecessary when Jesus declared, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

But in our worldly flesh we find the notion of someone else paying off our sin debt to be too good to be true—even unbelievable. And so we continue to attempt to add our own wretched sacrifices to what Jesus has done. We take pride in faithfully doing good things and in religiously avoiding bad things. We'd never admit it, but somewhere in the darker recesses of our old nature we give ourselves a pat on the back for being just a little better than the other guy, for sacrificing just a little more than all the rest. But what we do or don't do adds or subtracts nothing to Christ's work on the cross.

As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation begun by Martin Luther, we ought to give thanks for

the greatest of the Reformation's pillars—the acknowledgment that Christ alone redeems us. Christ's sacrificial sufficiency is the rock-solid base on which our eternities stand. We ought to be thankful for the reformers who rescued the church (at least in part) from the hands of those who considered the blood of Jesus to be almost good enough to save us. Scripture teaches one truth: God's Word, one sacrifice—Christ's—and one faith that saves.

Luther said, “Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to sing to Him, and say, ‘Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am Your sin. You have taken upon Yourself what is mine and given me what is Yours.’” All the giving has been done. All the sacrifice has been made. I believe that Luther would join me in saying: “Eat a bacon cheeseburger each and every Friday, and thank God for it!”

Brennan serves St. Peter Lutheran Church, Melvin, Ill.