

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

November 27, 2001

LORD OF THE HARVEST



WE GIVE THEE THANKS

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November 27, 2001
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AN ENCOURAGING WORD

Blessings from the basics

In the third article of the Apostle's Creed we confess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit ...," then in the explanation, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit ..." As Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure, He spoke to them of the ministry of the Holy Spirit: "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine and shall disclose it to you" (John 16:14). He called the Holy Spirit "the Comforter."

One of the struggles a sinner under conviction experiences is believing that a holy God could truly love him and desire to bless him. When the awful truth, "there is none righteous, no, not one," (Romans 3:10) becomes a heart experience for any of us, it seems that God must surely seek to separate Himself from us as far as possible. When I have come to see that my prayers, my efforts to believe, my sacrifices — all of which I have tried to hold up to God as reasons for Him to hear and help me — are actually counted against me because they are but a veiled rejection of Christ, I am undone. When so gripped by the awful totality of my sin, it is good to remember "the Comforter."

God does not wound but what He heals. The Holy Spirit constantly seeks to bring us to such self-abandonment that we gladly take to ourselves the riches of grace in Christ. Yet, we often frustrate His work by our attempts at being less of a sinner than we are.

A few years back, the Sunday text lent itself to speak of the matter of giving our heart to Jesus. Often, when someone is said to have "given their heart to Jesus," the idea creeps in that they have done Jesus a service, an honor, by giving Him their heart. For explanation we consider II Corinthians 5:21: "He (the Father) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin,

to be sin on our behalf, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Here, things are placed in their proper perspective. I have only an evil heart, a heart of sin. It was necessary for Jesus to become sin on my behalf, in order to save me from the condemnation I deserve because of my sinful heart. If I don't get rid of my sin, I will suffer eternal hell as a consequence. But Jesus is so good, so gracious and so mightily my ally that, if I bring Him the awful sin of my heart, He takes it all away and gives me His righteousness in its place.

Once, a young man heard this and left the service at the end of the sermon. When people had shaken hands and left, he returned and explained that he had been an alcoholic for years and had always thought that he had to bring something good to God to be accepted by Him. He had been so overcome by the beauty of the gospel that he had to be alone with God, so he'd gone out to his car and prayed "for the first time in years." All the while sin and guilt dogged his heels, the Comforter sought him, in order to take of Christ's righteousness and make it his own.

This He does with each of us. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to make us receptive and then bring to us the treasures of God's grace, in Christ.

As we confess our faith in the Holy Spirit, we need to be reminded of our own helplessness and of this gracious ministry of the Comforter.



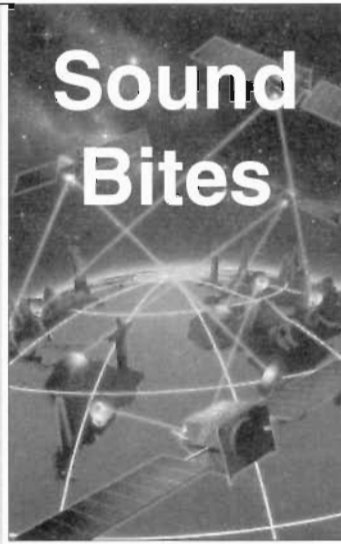
— **Pastor Dale
A. Mellgren**
**Mt. Carmel and
Trinity Lutheran
McIntosh, Minn.**

Sound Bites

Christians are forced to their knees when

1 they see their poverty. But on their knees they learn to thank God for the riches they have in Him.

— *H.E. Wisloff*



2 A great future transforms a dreary present ...

God is committed to restoring His people from captivity to great joy. And as long as God is God, this hope remains solid and real.

— *Raymond Ortlund, Jr.*

The worst moment for the atheist is when he is
4 **really thankful and has no one to thank.**

— *G.K. Chesterton*

3 Jesus spoke often of His coming again. It is clear that Jesus rejoices at the thought of the day of His return. When He speaks to the disciples about this day, He does so in order to comfort them and to make them glad.

— *O. Hallesby*

5 I have decided that gratitude is about the best measure of spirituality. It is not possible to have truly heard God's Word proclaiming that we are new creations, or to have communed with God as beloved sons and daughters, and not be overwhelmed with gratitude.

— *M. Craig Barnes*



On the day of my son Dane's 9th birthday party, we awoke to dark, overcast skies. The weather prediction of sunshine had changed to rain showers, with possible lightning. Knowing our plan for a day at the lake with swimming and tubing was not feasible, I scrambled for an alternative and settled on an indoor games complex in town. My mother popped over from their home across the driveway, commiserated with me about the weather, and mentioned that later she and Dad hoped to pick blackberries down the road if the rain held off.

My two sons and I jumped in the van and drove off to pick up the other boys for the party. Trying to keep track of nine young boys at the large games complex wore me out. Frazzled and hitting the late afternoon rush hour traffic, I was not surprised to see parents milling around the boys' pick-up spot. I was surprised, however, when I recognized other friends from church there. Getting out of the

car, I was greeted with these words, "Your parents have been involved in an accident. Your dad is being flown to Harborview (the trauma hospital in Seattle). Brooks (my husband) is on his way to meet you here so you can drive down together. We will take care of the boys."

No one mentioned Mom, so my initial thought was that she had not been as seriously hurt as Dad, and she must be at our local hospital in Everett. Just then, Brooks called on his cell phone, saying he would arrive soon. My first question was, "Where is Mom?"

A brief silence followed, then, with a catch in his voice, he said, "She's gone."

"Gone?"

"She was killed immediately in the accident."

I couldn't breathe for a moment as a stab of pain hit me. Mom ... gone! Dad ... critically injured!

Racing down the freeway, I felt numb, yet fought to follow the conversation in the car

Life without

Thankfulness can help us endure tough times

with details of the accident. My brother and two sisters met us at the hospital, where we learned Dad's prognosis for survival was poor. Throughout the night we kept vigil, talking and praying with friends and pastors. The next morning, we made the decision to remove all life-sustaining equipment. Standing around Dad's bedside, we each said goodbye in our way, not knowing if he could hear or understand. As we sang his favorite hymns and Portuguese gospel choruses, tears ran down Dad's face and he passed away.

In the days and weeks that followed, a myriad of thoughts and feelings played through my mind. The **sense of pain and loss** was overwhelming. C.S. Lewis said, "Pain is God's megaphone to a deaf world." I took some comfort in knowing many non-believing friends and neighbors had come to the memorial service, many cards and letters arrived from all over the country and parts of the world, commenting on the impact my parents and their faith had on their lives. The **sense of randomness** bothered me. Why did Mom and Dad have to be in their car, pulling out onto a quiet country road, right when the young man, having drunk four to six beers, barreled down that road in his big pickup truck? The **sense of lack of justice** in the judicial system as the young man was exonerated without receiving even a ticket for lack of insurance, not to mention driving under the influence of alcohol. Lastly, the **sense of uncertainty** and fear of the future because life was no longer predictable — it could change in an instant.

Thanksgiving approached as the first major holiday after their death. How could I be thankful as I looked back over the past months? Others who've experienced loss through divorce, illness, business setbacks, job layoffs, or even the recent terrorist attacks of September 11 have asked this same question.

I realized I could be thankful for God's almost tangible presence in my life that helped me get through the dark days. The God of all comfort ... the one who walks alongside (II Corinthians 1:3-4); the God who goes before us and is with us (Deuteronomy 31:8); the God who is my refuge and

strength in times of trouble (Psalms 46:1).

I could be thankful for the sovereignty of God, knowing that He is in control, even when the circumstances do not make sense. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not evil, to give you a future and a hope." Job 42:2 says, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted." No experience in our lives is ever wasted as we walk with Him. His desire is that we trust Him (Proverbs 3:5), in spite of the circumstances (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

I could be thankful for a God, who through His son Jesus, is in a living relationship with me. This means I can be authentic and honest with Him as I pour out my sorrow, pain, fear, discouragement, and yes, even anger. The Psalms often became my voice of prayer.

I could be thankful for a God who promises to meet my needs daily. We so often want to think about and plan for tomorrow, but Jesus said, "Do not worry about tomorrow ... each day has enough trouble on its own" (Matthew 6:34); and, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). He has promised to give us what we need to get through each day (Philippians 4:19).

I could be thankful knowing that, somehow, God would use this loss and pain in my life for His purpose, "... who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (II Corinthians 1:4). "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The loss of my parents left a void that no one else could fill. Yet, as I focused on the things I could be thankful for, my eyes turned upward and outward, instead of downward and inward. I knew He could and would use their deaths for His glory. I also saw God's grace upon my parents in taking them home together. Their legacy of faith lives on in my siblings, our children, many others and me. Though still in process, my goal is to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (I Thessalonians 5:18).



fear

— *Gracia Gilbertson*
Elim Lutheran
Lake Stevens, Wash.



ATTITUDE *is our choice*

God has given each of us the same 24-hour day. Of all of the choices we make in our life, one of the most important is our choice of facing that day with gratitude to God, not self-centered grumbling. Our view of the life that God has given us is influenced by

Grumbly

Dear Lord,

I haven't much time to talk today. You see, I am having trouble getting everything done. It is such a busy time of the year. Of course, you know that, since we are getting ready to celebrate your birthday.

Anyway, I just need to tell you that I am having lots of problems. The Sunday school teacher called and wants me to make Jacob's costume, and I don't even know how to sew. And to make matters worse, he is having a fit about even being in the program. Lord, how do I deal with that?

One of the ladies at church called to ask me if I could bring baked goods for the church bake sale. I don't even have time to bake anything for ourselves. How am I going to get all of this done?

Lord, I need help in dealing with my boss. She doesn't understand what it is like to be a mom, a wife and an employee all at once. She is becoming quite demanding right now, as we are so busy at work. I need help dealing with her, but she makes me so angry.

And, now, the last thing, Lord. My husband is no help at all. He is always just doing his own thing. He doesn't seem to see all of these things that need to be done. He is a good provider, but sometimes he is just clueless.

There's the phone. It's probably my mother ... wonder what she needs. Oh, Lord, I just need your help! I am having so much trouble being patient with all of these people.

— ***Amen***

our dependence on Him for the provision of ALL of our needs. This includes the need for time to do the daily tasks that are presented to us. God will provide for that time, if we continue to look to Him with prayer and thanksgiving for all He has given us. May we be open to His calling, for it is in how we

deal with our days and how we make use of our time that we can be witnesses for Him.

“Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Ephesians 6:20).

An attitude of gratitude — do you have it?

Grateful

Dear Lord,

First I want to thank you for your sacrifice on the cross, that I might be saved. I need to remember that as I face today.

I am so grateful that You are there to listen to me. You see, I have been busy, but it is such a joy to do the things that need to be done to prepare for your birthday. I had been wondering about how to get the costumes done for the Christmas program for Jacob, and, Lord, you provided for me in such a special way without my even asking. I was visiting with my neighbor, and she said she would gladly sew it for me, if I would watch her baby for the afternoon. What a blessing.

To make it even better, she and I decided we would do our baking together on Saturday for the church bake sale. That way, we can have some fun and fellowship while we work. God, it is just wonderful how you provide the solutions when I am so busy and pressed for time.

It has been really busy at work, but I guess you know that. My boss has seemed like she was under a lot of pressure because of it, so I offered to pray with her about it. She seemed so grateful. Now, we are praying together daily before we begin our busy day. It surely helps both of us to face what comes. Lord, I am just so thankful that you helped us both to get through these trials.

Lord, I thank you so much for my wonderful husband. He is such a good provider and you have blessed us so much in our marriage. I pray that you will give him the strength and understanding to continue in his daily walk. I know you will provide him with time to spend with the kids and me.

Your Word says that “godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment” (I Timothy 6:6). I am so thankful for my family, my friends, and my job. You have given me a full and wonderful life, and the energy to deal with it.

Please continue to “open my eyes. I want to see Jesus.”

— **Thank you, Lord!**

— **Jeanette Larson**
Christ the King
Lutheran Church
Pipestone, Minn.

an international thanksgiving



Liene Liberte
Riga, Latvia

As a junior at AFLBS, Liene has only been in America for three months. But already, she is ready to thank God for an abundance of blessings in her life.

"He gave me (the) vision. He gave me (the) ticket. He gave me everything," said Liene of her plans to come to Bible school. "I can study (the) Bible. I can know about God. Of course, it's very hard to be away from (my) house, away from family. But God showed me He is everything I need."

In her home, Liene said her country does not celebrate Thanksgiving. Rather, this summer was the first time her country celebrated its independence from Russia, for which she is thankful.



Zakayo "Zach" Malekwa
Rift Valley, Tanzania

A senior seminarian, Zach left a burgeoning revival in the Rift Valley to join the FLS this fall.

"I am thankful to be in America. It's kind of a mental treatment to be here. Kind of like I'm resting and God is giving me a special education — like a sabbatical leave," said Zach. "(At home) I spend a lot of time in the bush, preaching and sleeping in the dust. Now I am here. You get all your wants here."

At home, Zach is lucky to spend three hours a week with his wife and two children.

"As a man of family, I feel kind of like I'm taking something from my wife. I have to sacrifice. My wife is very happy that I am here. I think we are getting the knowledge to transform our society."

As for Thanksgiving in America, Zach sees great opportunities.

"I think Thanksgiving could be emphasized on God liberating humanity."



Tomasz Chmiel
Czech Republic

A little more than two years ago, Tomasz came to the United States to attend Bible school. Now as a graduate and student in the Ministry Training Institute, he is able to see tremendous growth in his life.

"I can see how I've been blessed so much by God. Honestly, last year was the best year of my life," said Tomasz.

These days, he is thankful for so many things in his life and claims II Corinthians 5:7 as a key verse in his life.

"Being able to rely on God. Knowing that He will take care of all the needs I have. He really did what I needed — just in the friendships I made last year. Even getting a car so I could move from place to place. God blesses us with small things. Sometimes, I would distrust it and get frustrated, but God would bless me even more."

He will travel to Russia in January for his MTI internship.



James Musenze
Uganda



Anita Galveniece
Riga, Latvia



Michal Kubik
Martin, Slovakia



Zigmars "Ziggy" Evamois
Latvia

James Musenze, a junior seminarian, normally teaches social studies, English and divinity in his home in Uganda. This year, though, he journeyed to America to continue his own education.

"God has done so many things in my life," said James. "For example, He has opened my way to understand Him better."

And what is he thankful for?

"First of all, to have Him in my heart as my Savior. That is point number one. When you have Jesus in your heart, it means you have wisdom of understanding. God is also using me as a vessel to bring the Word to the people of Uganda. God wants to use me to bring the Good News to the poor souls of Uganda."

Michal Kubik, a senior at AFLBS, can't think of anything he isn't thankful for.

"I'm thankful for everything. It's like, everyday I can see that God cares about me and is blessing me. For food, for every morning, for every class, that I can be here, for my family."

Although it was hard to leave his family in Martin, Slovakia, last year, Michal believes his life is full of more blessings because of his time at Bible school.

"God is teaching me patience here. I'm looking for my way in the future. He's going to show me my way — what I'm to do in the future."

"I love turkey and pumpkin pie," said **Anita Galveniece**, a senior at AFLBS who spent her first Thanksgiving in America last year.

Without a plan for her future, Anita left her home in Riga, Latvia, at the urging of her mom.

"I think I was kind of tired of my old life and I felt I needed to change something, but I didn't know what it was," said Anita. "I said OK. It was more like an experiment to me."

The decision was a life-changing one.

"I was really thankful that God brought me here because now I see. Everything has changed. I've got a new life, a new friend. ... I'm so thankful for ... everything that I have. First, that He brought me here ... the big change in me. He's changing me everyday. I can't even feel it. I don't wake up one day and say, 'Whoa, I'm different.' But slowly."

Ziggy Evamois has had six years' worth of American Thanksgiving traditions. Having graduated from AFLBS in 2001, he is now one of 11 students in the MTI program and will travel to Tanzania in January.

"I think Thanksgiving is always a great day because it makes you think a little about things. ... You appreciate things — something you may not think about all the time, but you can be thankful for it."

Ziggy has plenty to be thankful for.

"I'm thankful for all kinds of things: keeping healthy, God answering all the prayers, for all the Christian people, for the chance that He's not giving up on me, giving me the desires of my heart. He's answering prayer everyday."

"Mostly, I'm thankful for God giving me peace and a happy spirit."

Already, but not yet

**How can we be victors
when we still struggle with sin?**

“Are we there yet?” cannot be answered both “yes” and “no” when asked from the back seat as the car heads down the road. You are either there or you aren’t.

It is a somewhat different story, however, as we consider our traveling along in life as members of the kingdom of God. When we are in Christ we have arrived. We are children of God. We are complete in Him. His kingdom is within us (Luke 17:21).

And yet we pray, “Your kingdom come ...” (Luke 11:2). We struggle along as inhabitants of a fallen world. We wrestle with sin. “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19, NIV). The Lord is with us, and yet we long for His return. We are people on a journey; people who have arrived, but are still traveling.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of recon-

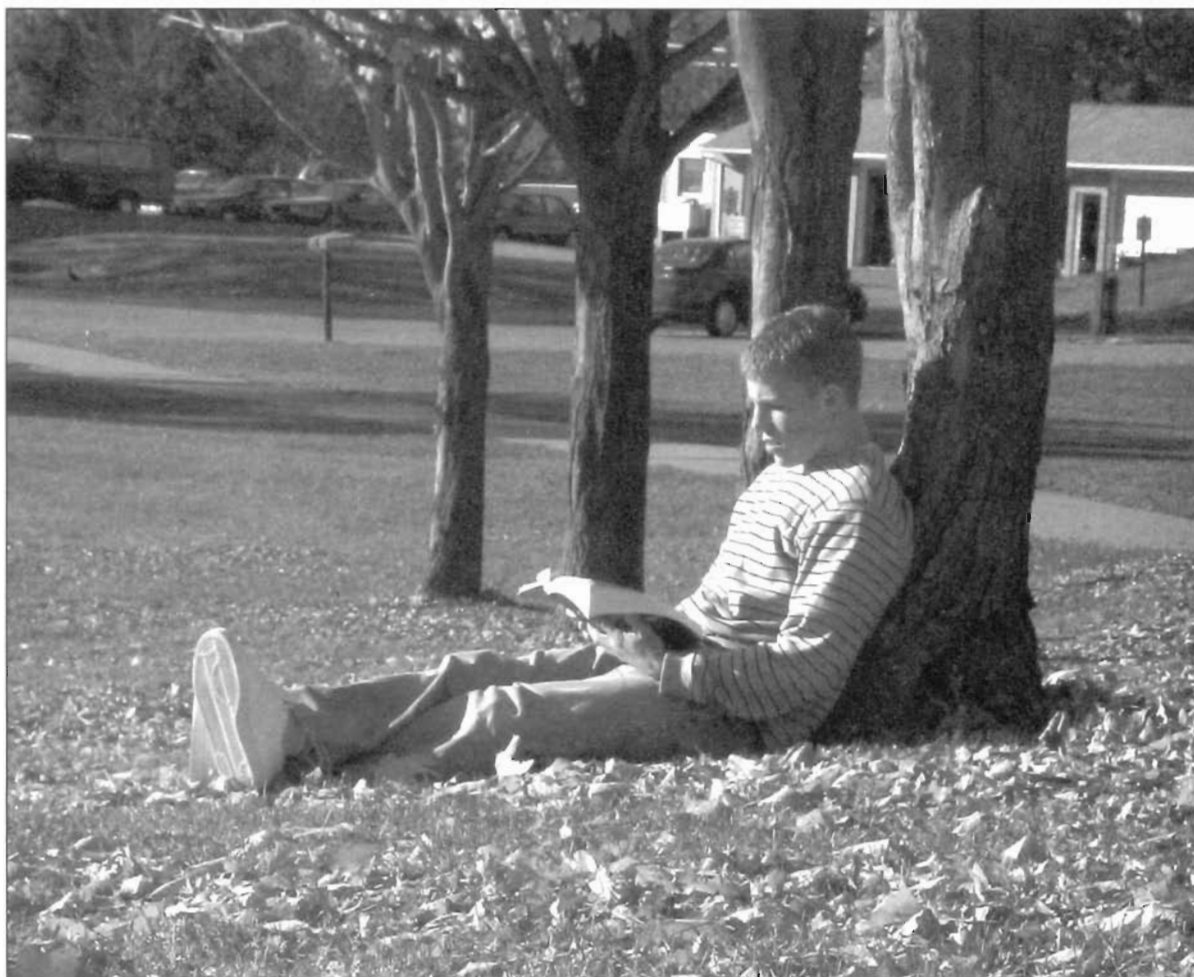
ciliation” (II Corinthians 5:17, 18). We are not becoming new creations. It’s a completed work. We are not getting reconciled to God. It has happened when we are in Christ. “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ... there is no longer any sacrifice for sin” (Hebrews 10:10, 18).

The penalty for sin has been paid. “It is finished,” Jesus triumphantly declared from the cross (John 19:30). We do not have to attempt to come up with a sacrifice that we hope will be acceptable to God. We do not have to try to earn God’s favor. We are not required to do a bunch of good works hoping they’ll make up for the bad things we have done.

Yet, what we see is a struggle with sin. We are all continually falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). How can we say we are children of God, acceptable to the holy Lord of all, possessing the righteousness of Christ?

We make such a bold declaration because of faith in the promises of God. “The righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. ... We live by faith, not by sight” (II Corinthians 4:18, 5:7). What fills the sight of our physical eyes is sinfulness and all the problems it causes. But when we look at life through eyes of faith, something else comes into our field of vision. We see what the Lord has done. We see how



our standing has been changed by faith in Christ. And we see what He has promised to do.

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). We know what we are by faith. That has already happened. But we haven't yet seen the full picture. So we wait and we long for Christ's return.

It would be a sad child who, as every Christmas approached, wondered if he would be permitted to join in on the family festivities. Imagine a child living with constant doubt, uncertain if she is still loved, questioning whether she is still considered a member of the family, wondering if any of the gifts under the tree have her name on it.

I'm thankful I never had doubts like that. I knew I'd be welcome at the family gathering, and I was

certain I would receive gifts. I just didn't know exactly what they would be.

**We are people
on a journey;
people who
have arrived,
but are still
traveling.**

forward by faith to what is still to come.

It is a similar situation for those of us who by faith are in the family of God. Because of Jesus and the cross and the resurrection, because of the promises of His Word, we know we are loved members of the family. We know we are welcome. We have already received wonderful gifts from the Father, and we know more is to come. What all of them will exactly be like, we aren't certain. But we know our good God has great gifts awaiting His children, so we wait. We rejoice in what we already are and already have, and we look

— **Pastor Craig Johnson**
Bethany Free Lutheran
Astoria, Ore.



Be on the alert then,
for you do not know
the day nor the hour ...

(Matthew 5:13, NASV)

How then should we live?



In light of all the events that have transpired in our beloved nation since Sept. 11 and in light of the Advent season now upon us, many are asking the question, "How should we then live?" In an attempt to shed some light on this question, I offer the following thoughts.

Practice restraint: Some would-be prophets today are interpreting recent events as the actual end of the world. One of them seen much on television said, "You can hear the four horsemen riding to

Armageddon." Another said after the devastation of the World Trade Center, "Alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come."

While they might be right, the events suffered by our country may, on the other hand, be shadows or types of the end that is not yet. Recent history underscores the fact that a little restraint may be in order. In 1844, for example, William Miller predicted that the end would come on March 21 of that year.

That day proved to be something they called the Great Disappointment. Thinking he miscalculated, he predicted Oct. 22, 1844. Again, nothing happened. Then there was William Seymour, who predicted the end to come immediately following 1906. Hal Lindsay thought 1988. Harold Campin thought 1994. The Scripture definitely puts some perspective on things, that we do not know the exact time of Jesus' return or the end of the world. Therefore, practicing a little restraint seems to be in order.

Be prepared: Unstable days and the fact that Advent is upon us both teach us to be prepared for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The common lectionary in use in many of our churches during Advent points to the work of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, who prepared His way. Words John would use are recorded in Mark 1:3, "a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." Here, John was calling all people to prepare their hearts. Mountains needed to be made low and valleys needed to be filled in so that a highway for the Lord could be readied. We could say that sin needs to be brought low through repentance and faith in Jesus in order to fill in the low places of our hearts for His return.

I am reminded of two instances in Scripture in regards to repentance and faith. One is found in Luke 13:4-5. There, Jesus told of 18 people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them. "Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem," He asked. "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you, too, will all perish." The terrible tragedy of the destruction of the Trade Center towers can likewise call us to repentance lest we, too, perish.

I am also reminded of the parable of the 10 virgins found in Matthew 25:1-13. Five virgins were wise and five were foolish. The wise virgins took oil in jars along with their lamps; the foolish ones did not. As the bridegroom was a long time in coming, they all became drowsy and fell asleep, but suddenly the bridegroom came. The wise virgins who had oil along for their lamps went in with Him to the wedding banquet and the door was shut. The foolish virgins who were not ready and had to go and buy oil then came and wanted to the door opened for them, but the bridegroom said, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." Here, Jesus is calling us to have the oil of faith within us at all times so we are ready when

He comes. Both passages call us to preparation. Unless we repent and have faith, we are not ready for Jesus to return.

Pray: One of the good things that has happened as a result of the terror that has shocked our nation is the quickening in our spirits to pray. During Advent time, we also are called to watch and pray for the Lord's coming is at hand. I am so happy that in troubled times we have the avenue of prayer. Our God is our Rock, our Fortress, our Stronghold and Deliverer. We can come to Him and cast all of our anxiety upon Him, for He cares for us. There is fear in uncertain times, but one thing we as Christians can hang onto is that we are in the best place we can be when we are in the center of God's will. There-

Unstable days and the fact that Advent is upon us both teach us to be prepared for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

fore, we don't need to be like the waves tossed here and there in the raging sea, going around as if we had nowhere to turn. Rather, we can pray to the omnipotent One, the omnipresent One, the omniscient One, who, in His fatherly kindness, holds those who are His in the palm of His hand, where no power on earth can touch or remove. Might we turn to our loving Father in His Son's name and pray.

Serve the Lord: This may be the time when our lights for Jesus Christ can shine the brightest ever. We have a story

to tell to the nations, one that can turn their hearts to the right. Martin Luther is thought to have said, "If I knew Jesus was returning tomorrow, I would go out and plant a tree." In other words, the Lord was going to find him busy at work in the Lord's vineyard if He suddenly appeared. And, truly, that needs to be our resolve. More than ever today, I believe we need to have a twofold way of serving the Lord: holding forth the truth in love. Sometimes we may hold the truth arrogantly and lack love, other times we can be so loving that we do not uphold the truth rightly. Somehow, by God's grace, we need to do both. We need to hold to the truth in God's inerrant Word when there is much apostasy, and, yet, do all things in love so that all people will see Jesus living in us and desire Him to be their own.

As we practice restraint, are prepared, pray and serve Him, may the Lord grant us His peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

— **Pastor Joe Schultz**
Grace Lutheran Church
Buckley, Wash.



UNCERTAIN

But there is certainty in Jesus.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go,” (Joshua 1:9). This verse in the worst of times can give us the greatest hope. I have found myself discouraged and ready to give up many times in my life. Those are the times when I feel I am at the end of my rope. I have nothing left to give. I have no strength, no motivation; all that is left for me to do is to give up. I feel like a failure.

Failure is an interesting thing. Often we look at failure as defeat, rather than opportunity. God wishes to use our failures to teach us something greater. I once read, “In the arena of failure, the most destructive thing we can do is nothing.” When things are uncertain, it is too easy to do nothing. I believe that in those times is when the disease of self is most at work. Our selfish ways tell us to feel sorry for ourselves and to throw ourselves a pity-party. We go into hiding. God told us in Joshua that He is always with us, even in those times of sorrow. He tells us to take courage and to remember He is wherever we might go. It is often easy to forget about God and move on without Him.

I have done that numerous times. It usually will lead me to a time of breakdown. At the lowest point, I then turn to God. Now, if I had turned to God in the beginning, think of the sorrow God could have saved me from. When uncertainty comes your way, whom do you go to first, God or yourself?

As a youth director, I see the ups and downs of a student's life. One of the biggest things that stu-

dents deal with is the so-called “spiritual highs” in life. These usually happen right after a FLY convention, fall retreat, work camp or some weekend or week getaway. When they get home, the high goes away and life returns to “normal.” After the last Colorado FLY convention, 22 of us sat in a hotel room at the Denver International Airport. We talked about this spiritual high. I discovered that many of the students were fearful of losing that high once they got home. What I discovered is that their spiritual high was due to the convention. Yes, the FLY Convention is a powerful week, and many lives have been changed there. However, if you were to ask those people whose lives were changed, and changed for a permanent spiritual renewal, they would tell you it was Jesus, not a convention, that changed their lives.

I see how easy it is for students to put hope and trust in things like conventions. I often see students put their hope and trust in their youth director. I tell my students to never listen to me but to God's voice and His Word. Now, sometimes God chooses to speak through me. The result of not putting our trust in God, and listening to His voice, when He tells us that He is with us at all times, is that we will live in uncertainty.

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29). As I have grown older, I have come to appreciate my family more and more each day. I am a lot closer to them and trust and value them above anything else. They are extremely

TIMES

You can have it, too.

important to me. We read in Hebrews that God has given us a family, His Kingdom. If you believe and trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord, then you are a part of this great family. When uncertainty comes my way, usually my first reaction is to go to the Lord. Most times, He leads me to my mom. I know that I can always trust her to give me the best advice she can. Families can be the most supportive group we have. They might not know us the best, but they are always behind us.

When uncertainty comes our way, God's family is always there to comfort us, and to lead us to God who gives hope. God is a consuming fire. He wants to consume your life so much, that you can't help but always go to Him. When uncertainty comes your way, God wants to consume you and let you know that He is with you always. He will provide the Christian fellowship He knows you need. The body of Christ will be the body of Christ. Whether you are at a FLY convention, pastors conference, couples retreat, family camp or maybe even church on a Sunday morning, God wants you to know He is there. Ask yourself if you are putting your trust in Him, or something that does not give you the hope that He can.

— *Daniel Keinanen*
Youth director
Ruthfred Lutheran Church
Bethel Park, Pa.



The rest of the story

The weariness of unpacking began to slip away as I spotted the beautiful church steeple in the distance. The majestic mountains on the eastern horizon, the nearby fields and cattle pens were the scenery of this place I now called home. It seemed the perfect setting to express my thanks for His wonderful bounty.

It was Thanksgiving Eve and though my husband had been serving his congregation for several weeks, it was my first time to attend a worship service. I had heard of their Norwegian heritage. I knew the familiar names — such as Miller, Troyer and Yoder — would be replaced with Olson, Svenson and Tutvedt. Instead of sharing a recipe for apple dumplings, I would now spend a day making lefsa. So my heart rejoiced to hear the familiar hymn, “O God our help in ages past,” and to hear the reading of His unchanging Word.

Yet, I knew what Isaiah meant in chapter 61 when he talked of the “heavenness of spirit.” It was more than that unsettled feeling after moving many miles. It was more than the weariness of packing and unpacking. I realized as the congregation sang “Great is thy faithfulness” that I, in fact, had been doubting God’s faithfulness to me as His child. Psalm 91:4 says that His faithfulness is our shield. Without this shield, I was vulnerable to my fear.

I had many questions about the days ahead. My life had taken a twist and a turn I wasn’t expecting. I had

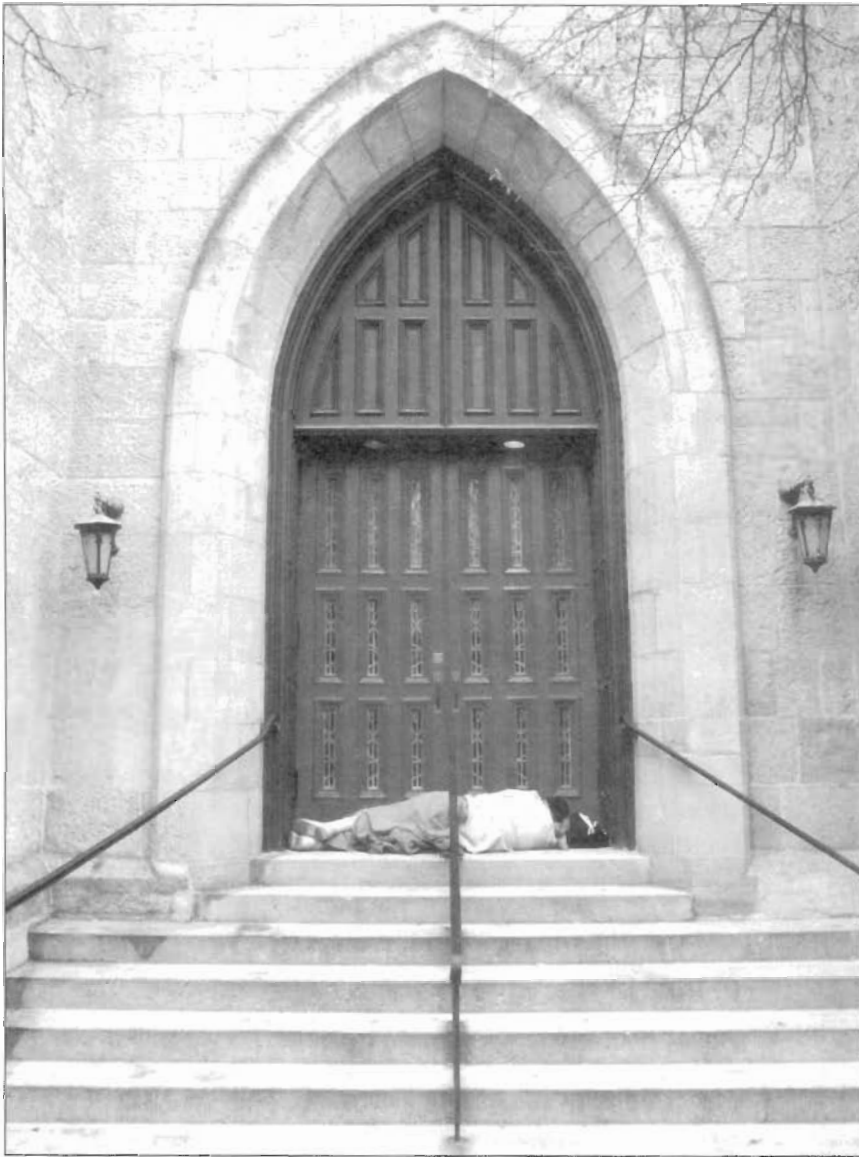
been willing to follow what I was certain was God’s leading. Now I was hoping He would reveal His purpose. I was praying He would announce like Paul Harvey, “And now you know the rest of the story.” But God owed me no explanation. He is, after all, God. I don’t share a co-chairman position with God. “Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor?” (Isaiah 40:13).

Was I trusting God and His plan or simply biding my time until understanding would dawn? But if that understanding does not come in this lifetime, could I continue to trust?

My eyes were drawn to the front of the sanctuary. There hung the timeless picture of Christ knocking at the door. There my doubts evaporated. I was confident of God’s love for me. I knew that the love that had sent Christ to the cross was the same love leading me on this path. So my praise that Thanksgiving would not be for His gentle leading, because seldom do I understand where we are going, nor would it be for His guiding hand, because my feet still tend to stumble from time to time. But my praise would be for His unfailing love, because then I can trust His leading and hold tight to His hand. “Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift” (II Corinthians 9:15).

— *Marla Bartholomew*
Stillwater Free Lutheran
Kalispell, Mont.





— *Liga Plaveniece*
MTI student
Riga, Latvia

Bringing Jesus to the city

MTI students take part in urban ministry class

Twenty-first Century cities come with their challenges. The cities have become a big boiling pot of all kinds of different ethnicities, cultures and beliefs. In spite of that, God calls His people to shine His love there as well.

In order to fulfill the Great Commission by bringing the gospel to the city, a part of AFLBS' Ministry Training Institute is a Monday night Urban Ministry class taught in downtown Minneapolis.

On those nights, the 11 MTI students have grown in understanding of how diverse the city can be and how big of a cross-cultural mission

field the city is. Just walking around downtown, you can hear people speaking Spanish, Somali or Arabic, because, as immigrants, they do not know more than a couple of words in English.

More than that, they have their own stores, banks, restaurants and laundry mats. There, you can find atheists, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians, as well as witches. Sometimes, not only do you have to know the specific culture of an ethnic people group that live in your city, but you also have to learn a language so that you are able to communicate the gospel.

The class lets students study the

city by immersing themselves in it. A visit to a Hispanic, Somali and Mexican store, taking the "risk" of eating their food, and a night walk around the Phillips neighborhood are only a few of the things the MTI students have done to see the real face of the city.

All it takes is to walk around downtown Minneapolis and you can realize that you do not have to go anywhere abroad to be a cross-cultural missionary. This truly is a great preparation and eye-opening experience before the students go to the mission fields in January.



Church God's way

Asking God to do a repeat performance of the church in Acts

— **Bob Halvorson**
Emmaus Lutheran
Bloomington, Minn.

One of my favorite portions of scripture describing church life is found in Acts chapter two. Allow me to share a few verses from this chapter. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the

apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together ... praising

God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Imagine with me for a moment what it must have been like to be a part of that early church. The church is the bride of Christ and with that in mind, I would like to use the acronym "WIFE" to paint a picture of what we might have seen happening in that early church.

Encore (an'kor') n. call for a repetition or further performance by an artist; extra performance.

Take a step back in time with me and walk through the door of their assembly. I would imagine ...

Worship — Worshippers freely and fervently ascribing worth & praise to God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Instruction — Students of the Word, listening intently to God's message and putting it into action in their lives.

Fellowship — Believers placing the needs of others above their own. Seeking to honor God in all of their relationships.

Evangelism — Forgiven people developing genuine relationships with those outside the family of God and expressing God's grace to them both verbally and with their lives.

As we left the assembly, I would imagine both of us looking at each other with a sense of awe — realizing we just experienced church the way God had designed it.

Can this type of church still exist today? Absolutely. The closer all of our churches become to that first church in Acts, the greater the impact we will have on our communities.

It is my prayer that God would do an "encore" presentation of this church in Acts all across our nation.

Bob Halvorson is currently working with a group of believers to establish a church in the northwest suburbs of Minneapolis, Minn. For more information about this new church plant, contact Bob at (763) 441-0460.

AFLBS given AAL scholarships

Aid Association for Lutherans recently announced a grant of \$6,000 to AFLBS for the AAL Lutheran Campus Scholarship Program.

The scholarships will be given to qualifying students at AFLBS to pay for tuition.

Home Missions announces pastors retreat for 2002

A Home Missions pastors retreat has been set for Jan. 14-15, 2002, at the ARC, Osceola, Wis.

For more information, contact the Home Missions Department at (763) 545-5631.

Churches given \$40,000 from LB

The AFLC Commission on Evangelism received a \$40,000 grant from the Lutheran Brotherhood Foundation.

The grant was allocated to 23 AFLC congregations through the foundation's Church Extension program. The funds will be used to assist congregations in undertaking special evangelism programs.

Home Missions sponsors evangelism event in Mesa

AFLC Home Missions is sponsoring an evangelism outreach and training event from Jan. 5 to 9, 2002, at Calvary Free Lutheran Church, Mesa, Ariz.

The seminar, titled "Sharing the Son in the Sun Valley," is open to any AFLC lay people or pastors.

For more information, or to register for housing and meals, contact Pastor Gerald Gettis (480) 924-6954 at home, (480) 981-3993 at his office, or call the Home Missions Department at (763) 545-5631.

Gloria Dei members walk marathon for the hungry

On Oct. 20, a group of 23 individuals from Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo., conducted a unique fund-raiser to support a local food pantry. The event was titled the Gloria Dei Marathon Relay Walk for Hunger.

The group took turns walking segments of a nearby recreation trail. Each segment ranged in length from one to four miles, and the walkers passed a baton in true relay form.

They finished the 26.2-mile course in just over nine hours and four minutes.

The walk gave the church members many chances to tell others about Gloria Dei Lutheran Church and how they were serving others in their community through efforts to raise money for the food pantry.

The participants in the marathon relay solicited pledges, and the group raised \$1,146. The Gloria Dei Aid Association for Lutherans Branch donated an additional \$800 for the effort, raising the total donation to \$1,946 for the food pantry.

Gloria Dei also conducts monthly food and toiletry drives to support the pantry.



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church members John Allen, Janet Allen and Dave Berg passed the baton to raise money for a local food pantry.

Pastor Brad Hoefs, Omaha, Neb., was accepted onto to clergy roster Oct. 29 by the AFLC Coordinating Committee. Hoefs had been on the fellowship roster for more than two years. He serves Community of Grace Church, Omaha, which recently voted to sell their church building and relocate.

Pastor Richard Frederick was installed on Nov. 18 at St. James Lutheran Church, Garden City, Kan., by Pastor Robert Lee, president of the AFLC. The church recently joined the AFLC. Frederick moved from Bryant, Ark., where he served on the staff of a non-AFLC church.

Pastor Walter Johnson, Shakopee, Minn., is serving as interim pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Zumbrota, Minn.

Pastor Bill Goodman, Bemidji, Minn., is serving as

interim pastor at Hope Lutheran Church, Northome, Minn.

Pastor Richard Gunderson, Cambridge, Minn., is serving as interim pastor at Solid Rock Free Lutheran Church, Anoka, Minn.

Pastor Richard Ewing, Monroe, Wis., is serving as an interim pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Mineral Point, Wis., along with his service at Cornerstone Lutheran Church, Argyle, Wis.

Pastor Jan Horne, DeKalb, Ill., is serving as interim pastor at Grace Free Lutheran, DeKalb, and Redeemer Free Lutheran, Ashton, Ill.

Pastor Dennis Gray, Newfolden, Minn., is now the director of Mercy and Truth Publishing, taking over for Pastor Gerald Mundfrom. Gray is available for presentations on depression

Monseth honored for 30 years of service

Dr. Francis Monseth, dean of AFLTS, will be honored at a recognition banquet for his 30 years as a faculty member at the seminary and Bible school.

The banquet will be from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 8 at the Plymouth Radisson Hotel. Social hour begins at 11 a.m. with the luncheon and program at noon.

The banquet will be held in conjunction with the AFLC schools Christmas concert. For more information on the banquet, contact Laurie Nash in the seminary office at (763) 544-9501.



Publisher offers book for free

Mercy and Truth Publishing is offering to give away a book by Pastor Gerald Mundfrom for the price of postage.

Titled *Depression and What to do About it*, the book can be had by sending \$4 for postage to Mercy and Truth Publishing, 19594 350th St. NW, Newfolden, MN 56738-9286.

AFLC MISSIONS



RIGHT: Children in the sixth level study in the new elementary school in Chirala, India. St. Paul's Lutheran Public School (**ABOVE**) is run as a ministry of the AFLC in India. It houses six classrooms and is open to the children in the area to attend.



WMF Memorials

Arnie Hanson, Tioga, N.D.
Daniel Stegman, Cavalier, N.D.
Robert Arnold, Faith, S.D.
Alma Anderson, Morris, Ill.
Lydia McCarlson, Bowdle, S.D.
Florence Ferguson, Tioga, N.D.
Virgil Hartsoch, Tioga, N.D.
Kenneth Jacobson, Tioga, N.D.
Phyllis Strand, Prior Lake, Minn.
Myrtle Saukerson, Chamberlain, S.D.

PIMO missions trips planned

Plans are being finalized for two Partners in Mission Outreach trips to Mexico this winter.

The first trip will be Jan. 4-18 to the Obregon/Agrarista area, where Pastor Gabriel and Virginia Mercado are working.

The second trip will be Feb. 8-22 to Jerez, where the Giles and Schierkolk families are working.

The trip is expected to cost \$550 a person, and a certified copy of a birth certificate is required.

For more information, contact Gene and Rose Finstrom at (701) 856-3368, Pastor George Knapp at (320) 231-3167, Pastor Steve Snipstead at (406) 752-2481, Clark Berg at (406) 755-4160, or Laverne Hagen at (218) 528-3523.

AFLC Memorial Gifts October

Department given to ...

In memory of ...

Home Missions

Ed Herrick

Helmer Olson

AFLBS

Alfred Voxland

In honor of ...

Lorraine Nyhus

Mrs. LuVern Jones

Vision 2004

Myrtle Saukerson

Ken Knudsvig

Kenneth Jacobson

Joan Jones

AFLTS

Milford Jensen

Pastor Elder Oscarson

Wallace Brown

Dick Kinder

Evangelism

Yvonne Green

World Missions

Florence Ferguson

Marie Mathison

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard

Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (10 months) – January 1 - October 31, 2001

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$267,241.00	\$25,541.16	\$225,160.35	84
Seminary	126,462.00	16,033.68	116,159.45	92
Bible School	162,545.00	17,023.73	178,203.19	110
Home Missions.	242,838.00	23,011.87	223,308.43	92
World Missions.	206,762.00	15,683.97	155,237.33	75
Capital Investment	9,490.00	1,948.43	6,438.73	68
Parish Education	78,302.00	8,117.70	64,898.44	83
Church Extension	26,119.00	943.12	17,208.30	66
Youth Ministries	26,119.00	2,717.77	26,392.51	55
TOTALS	\$1,168,134.00	\$111,021.43	\$1,013,006.73	87
TOTALS 2000	\$1,147,510.00	\$82,579.96	\$832,190.27	73
Goal 83%				

(2000 figures do not include Youth Ministries)

The Evangelism Department received \$13,476.29 in October.

Prepare by going to battle

Some people prepared for the supposed threat of widespread chaos on Jan. 1, 2000, by buying massive quantities of canned food, stocking up on other types of emergency supplies and finding a bunker in which they could hide and attempt to feel secure.

Some Christians prepare for the second coming of Jesus in a similar fashion. They may not go shopping at an Army supply store. Their cupboard may not be overflowing with canned goods. They may not retreat to a literal bunker, but they are in a sense attempting to go into hiding, trying to hold on and keep safe until Jesus comes back.

In Matthew 24 Jesus speaks about the signs that will point to His return and the need to be ready. He illustrates His point with a parable in chapter 25 about five virgins who were prepared for the bridegroom's coming and another five who weren't. He then gives some teaching about practical, everyday living out what we believe. Jesus tells us what we are to do as we wait for Him to come again.

We are to use the talents and resources God has given us. Jesus tells of a man who gives his servants talents and then goes on a journey. Two of the servants put their talents to work. When the master returns he praises them: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21, 23, NIV).

Another servant, in fear, hides his talent and doesn't make use of it. When the master returns he speaks harshly to him and calls him a "wicked, lazy servant" (Matthew 25:26). The servant was probably scared of what might happen if he tried to put his talent to work. He wanted to avoid all risk. He thought the best thing to do was to hide and hang on and be very careful until the master returned.

The master wanted his servants to wait by working and making use of what they had been given. Examples of the kind of work Jesus wants us to do while we wait are given in the next teaching. The ones who are blessed by the King when He returns are those who feed the hungry, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the ones in need, look after the sick, visit the one in prison. They don't realize

they are serving the Lord, but the King will tell them, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Serving as Jesus wants us to can be risky and costly. It is tempting to run from it while we wait for His return. The world can seem like a big, scary Goliath. We get fearful of serving, engaging in battle, attempting to impact the world for Christ. "As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him" (I Samuel 17:48). That is the example we're to follow as we wait for the return of our Lord: running to the battle, eager to serve and spread the good news of Jesus.

During the beginning stages of the Civil War, General George McClellan was General-in-Chief of the U.S. Army. He organized and trained the troops well. He kept

the soldiers busy and taught them how to be and look like soldiers. But he became unpopular with President Lincoln because, as historian Bruce Catton writes, "McClellan had practically all of the virtues necessary in a war leader except one — he did not like to fight, which is a severe handicap for a general in a time of war. He could do anything but act."

At times Christians are like McClellan and his troops. We are organized and well trained. We keep busy and look spiritual, but we run from battle. We spend all our time in our little Christian

world. We have our own schools, our own stores, our own yellow pages, our own organizations. We have set up a subculture in which we can survive while staying far from the battle and having little contact with the lost, dying world around us. That is not how we are to prepare for the return of the Lord.

We have the truth, the good news of Christ, the power of God. We are to take the offensive, confidently running to the battle, engaging the culture and impacting lives for Jesus.

Training and preparation is needed before going to battle and effectively serving. But let us remember our goal is to serve and not just train and look good. We have a great message to share about how a person can be ready for what is to come, how the return of Christ can be good news when you're trusting in Him. During this time of waiting let us run to the battle, looking forward to opportunities to share and to serve.

— **Pastor Craig Johnson**

**We are to take the
offensive,
confidently running
to the battle,
engaging the culture
and impacting lives
for Jesus.**

Feeling the full weight

The only true way to feel the weight of an object is to attempt to lift it. This is as true with suitcases as it is with stones. Oddly enough, it is also true when it comes to temptation.

Those who yield to temptation early never feel the full weight of it. It is only the man or woman among us who willingly and stiffly resists the influences of his or her temptation who can begin to understand how weighty a matter temptation truly can be. It is the mature believer, then, who can describe in the most detail how raw the battle for sanctification really is.

There is, of course, only one who ever felt how difficult the full weight of temptation can be to bear — our Lord Jesus. He faced temptation in its every aspect and found out just how extreme its tug can be when it is resisted at great length and with great regularity. He faced it and conquered it altogether. The only way we can begin to see how difficult that battle was is to do all we can to follow Him in His resistance.

If you ask most people what temptation gives birth to they will answer, “Sin, of course.” I’ve got good news for you. Temptation can also give birth to grand victories, spiritual maturity and a life that brings glory to the Creator, who is more than just a cheerleader on our side. He is also a player on the active list.

Our battle against temptation is something we are not doomed to fight alone. We can turn to Jesus for encouragement and support. It’s very much like what the sportscasters say about a past champion who is about to win again, “He’s been in this position before.” Jesus has been there before. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things (as we are) yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Often it is our imagination that gets us into the most trouble in our struggle against the weight of temp-

tation. If we could control it, then the sinful appetites that our flesh has would be of little consequence. Our thinking is a powerful tool given to us by our Creator and twisted by our initial fall. It is up to us, with God’s help, to reorganize our thinking and imaginations so that they will aid us rather than destroy us in the face of our temptations. The only way this can be accomplished is by allowing our minds to be inundated by the Word of God. Knowing the Word well will not make temptations go away; rather, it is in knowing it and maturing in it that the real weight of temptation begins to be felt. But it is also in this where all the dividends are paid, as well.

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, (being) more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

— **Lay Pastor John Kent**
Rancho San Diego Lutheran
El Cajon, Calif.



OUR PRESIDENT WRITES

An Advent church

Rejoice! Jesus is coming again! Perhaps today!

Many years ago we welcomed a guest speaker at our annual pastors’ conference. His ministry with a large suburban congregation spanned more than two decades, and at least according to the measurements of nickels and noses he was very successful. It was interesting to hear that he attributed the spiritual and numerical growth of his congregation in part to a strong emphasis in preaching and teaching on the second coming of Jesus Christ.

What does Advent mean to you and your church? Perhaps some special midweek services are scheduled.

Perhaps a large advent wreath graces the chancel, with selected scripture readings chosen for the lighting of each candle, culminating in the lighting of the center candle on Christmas Eve.

But are you really an Advent church? Is the AFLC an Advent church?

Peter warns us in his second epistle that a sign of the last days is not only the fact that people will “walk after their own lusts,” but also that the second coming of Christ will be doubted and denied (3:3-4). This reminds us of the need to proclaim that God’s promise will be fulfilled in God’s own time, and we must not grow weary of waiting.

An Advent church is an active church; it understands that waiting is not resting, but a busy time of serving the Lord as we eagerly expect to see Him soon. Looking up means looking within as we wait, zealous to be living in peace with others, cleansed by His blood, without spot or blemish (3:14). The hope of seeing the Lord when He appears is a powerful motivation to a godly walk (1 John 3:2-3).

An Advent church is an evangelistic church, confessing in word and deed the need for the lost to be saved, that all might come to repentance before the day of grace is ended (3:9).

Advent for many is a time to prepare for the celebration of Christ’s birth. May it also be for us a reminder that the One who came is coming again, and a call to prepare to meet Him.

— **President Robert L. Lee**

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