

April 2012

LS *Online*

Lutheran Sentinel Online

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod



He is Risen!

Mark 16:6

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

Welcome to *Lutheran Sentinel Online*. Through this electronic-only version, we encourage current readers of the *Sentinel* to forward the link to others. As we seek to “engage others with Jesus,” our hope is to draw more people’s attention to our synod’s Gospel-oriented periodical and to increase traffic to our webpage, where they may be directed to one of our churches in a certain locality. In our efforts to reach the unchurched, and/or anyone searching for a confessional church home, we want to have individual articles from our online edition available for quick dissemination, as well as making them mobile-friendly.

Our Committee for Communication is currently working with a company named BolderImage in developing a new web system for our church body. The plan is to have the new site up and running before the convention this June. A hands-on demonstration will occur at that time.

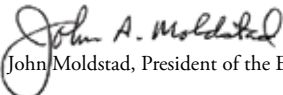
Ever since our synod was founded in 1918, we have had a publication serving as a faithful tool for Law/Gospel instruction and reflection, also providing information on activities throughout the synod. When the original group of 13 pastors and their congregations decided to reorganize in 1917 after witnessing an unfortunate doctrinal shift in their former church body, the upstart church paper became “the chief synodical activity.” For many years, both a Norwegian version (*Tidende*) and an English version (*Lutheran Sentinel*) were offered. The year 1953 was the last year of publication for the *Tidende*, known for its more sermonic style with lengthier articles on doctrine.

In 1982, our *Sentinel* was given a new look, going from a 5½ x 8½-inch page layout to an 8½ x 11-inch page. The *Lutheran Sentinel* continues to be the official publication of our synod, striving for a balance of articles that are confessional, devotional and informational in nature. We express here our sincere thanks for the continuing faithful service of our editor, the Rev. Theodore Gullixson of Grace Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin.

Beginning this summer, the *Lutheran Sentinel* will be increased from 16 to 20 pages. The periodical will now be bi-monthly, that is, published every other month. Special collections of articles will constitute our *Lutheran Sentinel Online*. We are making these available here during the months when the magazine is not printed.

The source of truth for our own lives and for the lives of all we are privileged to assist is the verbally inerrant and inspired Word of God. May God bless us in furthering his Word so that more may come to saving faith and grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life through His name” (John 20:31).


John Moldstad, President of the ELS

The Sins of the World Are Forgiven in Christ!

What did Jesus accomplish by His life, death and resurrection? Did He accomplish a potential forgiveness that is real only when we believe it? Is our faith like some kind of magical genie that wishes the forgiveness of sins into existence? If the forgiveness of sins is not already present, what is faith supposed to believe?

No, our faith does not bring the forgiveness of sins into existence. On the contrary, the forgiveness of sins brings our faith into existence. Our Catechism has a name for it: the Means of Grace. St. Paul writes: “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?... Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:14, 17).

In human relationships, one person will sin against another person. Sometimes the person sinned against forgives the other person. Whether that person believes it or accepts it has nothing to do with the fact that he is forgiven. The person who sinned had no part in the other person forgiving him. The forgiveness came from the heart of the person sinned against.

We have sinned against God. The whole human race has sinned against God’s Law. God says, “I forgive you; I forgive the whole human race, because of what My crucified and risen Son did for you.” This is the Easter message. This is the Gospel pure and simple. Just as in human relationships when one person forgives another, God says to the whole human race, “I forgive you.” You may not believe it, but our unbelief does not change what God has determined in His heart to do, based on the death of Jesus.

Now, God’s forgiveness of all people does not mean that the whole human race is saved and will be in heaven. Only those will be saved who personally trust in God’s forgiveness, a trust given them by the Holy Spirit. Those who reject the forgiveness Jesus has won for them will have to pay for their own sins in the torments of hell for all eternity, for they “deny the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

Only one person was not forgiven by God—that was Jesus. On the cross, God showed Him no mercy, no forgiveness. For though Jesus was essentially innocent, yet He became guilty—guilty of the world’s sins placed on Him by God. As the Apostle Paul says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). And St. Peter writes: “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

The Easter message is plain and simple: We sinned against God and He says to us and to all people, “I forgive you for the sake of Christ.” Jesus died and rose again to win our forgiveness. May God move us to repent of our sins and to believe on Jesus. Forgiveness is yours through faith in Jesus!

Ronald Pederson is pastor of First Lutheran Church in Suttons Bay, Michigan.





Death is **FINISHED!**

Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

WHEW! –finished cleaning those storm windows for another year. *FINALLY! –finished* weeding that garden. . . at least for a few weeks. *AT LAST! –finished* with all of my school assignments. . . or at least until next fall. *WHAT A RELIEF! –finished* with all the middle-of-the-night feedings—until the next child.

No matter how task-oriented we are, there is just nothing quite like being finished. However, most tasks we know of in this life are rarely ever finished forever. For us, that “finished” label almost always requires some sort of asterisk. Storm windows get dirty again. Weeds grow back thicker than the first time. Graduation turns school assignments into real home work like “honey-do” lists, piles of laundry that seem never to end, or job-tasks that never let up. The end of your child’s middle-of-the-night feedings turn into worrying about your children’s whereabouts in the middle of the night. Realities like this make a person wonder what “finished” really means.

During the season of Lent, we consider very carefully the never-finished problem of our sins. This is a burden that is with us from our conception (Psalm 51:5). Knowing God’s Word is true, we know that sin continually affects our hearts and minds all our lives (Genesis 6:5). We may think that our day-to-day tasks are draining, until we consider this never-ceasing burden of sin. Lent can become very depressing as we peer directly into the consequence of all this sin, *our sin*—“the wages (payment) for sin is **death**” (Romans 6:23).

But staring at sin all throughout Lent, sin that leads us to its final consequence, death, serves to point us to the one thing that we can and must know is finished—death itself.

While sin and its earthly results continue, sin’s eternal consequence has been done away with. Jesus’ purpose in entering this world was to take on sin’s eternal consequence for us. That is why He was named *Jesus*, because He would “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Our sins show us death, Jesus’ death, as He “gave His life as a ransom (payment) for many” (Matthew 20:28). Jesus came to this earth to die. But when His task was complete, it was not done for a short time, for a year, for ten or two thousand years, it was done for all time, as Scripture states that Jesus sacrificed for our sins “once for all when He offered up Himself” (Hebrews 7:27). His death was the death of death. That is why Jesus said, without asterisk, “**It is finished!**” (John 19:30).

All our work and efforts produce still more unfinished business. Not so with Jesus’ effort. His purpose was taking on sin’s lasting consequence—**death**—and He has; death is finished. God’s gift to you is eternal life in Christ Jesus your living Lord (Romans 6:23b).

Kyle Madson is co-pastor at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan.



Celebrating Holy Week

King Solomon wrote some of the most famous words in the Bible in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes:

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
A time to be born, a time to die,
A time to plant, a time to pluck up what is planted;
A time to kill, a time to heal;
A time to break down, a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance...
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.**

We have largely forgotten this wisdom. We would like to turn all times into times to laugh and times to dance. The Christians, however, throughout the ages, have learned Solomon's wisdom and set aside times to break down, times to weep, times to mourn and times to keep silence. The season of Lent is one of those times.

In Lent, we are especially reminded of our past. We were once lost: strangers to God and His promises, aliens to His people. We did not know God, His good will, or His grace. We were in darkness, without certainty and without hope. We were doomed by our sins to eternal death.

I know. This is not a very pleasant thought.

However, the Bible tells us this and God's Word is the truth. So in Lent, the joys of Sunday worship are subdued.

The church is decked in purple—the color of royalty, but also of suffering. The hymns are often sung in a minor key. Where we usually sing “Glory to God in the Highest,” we keep silent or sing a different hymn.

Instead of singing “Alleluia” three times, we sing the following once: “Christ has humbled Himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Yet, hidden in those tones of sadness is God's good news. Christ did this. Christ did this for you. Just as Isaiah said long before, “All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

The joy of Lent is the message that though we were lost, we are lost no longer. Because “the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” everyone is called to believe in Christ; and in believing, have life in His name; and eventually to celebrate the fullness of Easter joy; and finally, to know the joys of heaven.

King David understood this truth when he wrote, “For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Aaron Hamilton is pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in West Jordan, Utah.

The Divine Necessity that Jesus Be God and Man

Our human nature was profoundly blessed by Christ's human nature. We see this not only in the Savior's active fulfilling of God's Law by facing down temptation (see, for example, the precious article in this series), but also in these wonderfully comforting verses from the book of Hebrews:

He did not take to himself the nature of angels; but He assumed to Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things it was fitting that He be made like His brothers, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in all things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to minister to them who are tempted (Hebrews 2:16–18).

We do not have a high priest who cannot be touched by the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15–16).

These verses comfort us with some great truths about our Savior:

First, we are taught here that we are joined to the divine through the nature we hold in common with Christ. It is important to realize and believe that this truth is made possible on account of Christ's incarnation. Though sin has not entered His flesh, His human nature is not different from ours as though He were wearing some different, strange flesh that is foreign to our own. Christ's flesh is the same as our flesh in its essential quality. Since Jesus is true man, He has the appearance of a real man, which we will see one day with our own eyes at the resurrection.

The relationship that the divine Christ established with His human nature at His incarnation has been compared to the relationship existing between heat and iron: heat penetrates the iron just as the divine nature penetrates and occupies the human nature. The qualities of neither nature are compromised nor changed.

Therefore, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and very God, has joined Himself closely to the human nature, and since He shared this same human nature with us by faith, we are also joined to His divine nature. Hilary, one of our Church Fathers, said it well: "Through the assumption of the body we

might be in the Son of God in the same way that the branch is in the vine..." (Quoted in Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, J. Preus, 1971; p. 151).

Second, a heavenly blessing is revealed in these verses from Hebrews, where we find a definition of worship: "Let us approach with faith unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16). One of the Psalms declares that God's children will worship Him because, "He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper" (Psalm 72:12).

When we worship God, it is important that we connect Christ's sympathetic response to our need with the fact of His own suffering and death. Jesus knows about our situation from His own human experience on earth, as well as through His divine omniscience. The Lord experienced all the trials, burdens, temptations, tears and suffering in this world according to both natures. When we approach Christ Jesus in worship, we believe that the God-Man will hear us, will care about us and will help us.

Finally, these verses from Hebrews comfort us in the important matter of our prayer life because of our Savior's divine and human nature. We can take courage especially in the words where Jesus invites us through the holy writer to "come boldly to the throne of grace." The believer is encouraged to focus attention on Christ Himself, not on our faith. We can come boldly because we direct our prayers to our Helper, who cares for us.

The example of the disciples in the boat during a storm on the Sea of Galilee reminds us that their feelings may well have been at the bottom of the lake, but they directed their faith and prayers to the Savior who was with them in the same boat, "Lord, save us, lest we perish." We do well to distinguish between our faith in God's promises and our feelings, even when we have joyous feelings resulting from all that Jesus Christ has done for us! Christ and Him crucified, not just faith itself, is the object of our faith and the source of our salvation.

James Olsen is an ELS pastor emeritus living in Ontario, Wisconsin.

ESTHER—GOD’S RESCUING AGENT

Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. (Esther 9:20–22).

If one were to summarize the Book of Esther in ten words or less, one might write: *A girl becomes a queen and saves her beloved people.* The epilogue is even easier to summarize, using six words: *Let us be thankful and celebrate!* The celebration of Purim was established to commemorate this event.

In the Book of Esther, we find a witness of how God intervenes on behalf of His people through an unlikely means—a young orphan girl named Hadassah. Hadassah was among the maidens from which a queen was to be chosen for King Xerxes of the Medo-Persian Empire. Of all the maidens in the land, Hadassah (Esther) was chosen.

Not long after she was made queen, an enemy of the Jews rose to power in the empire. Haman the Agagite diabolically obtained authority from the king to kill all the Jews, to wipe their race from the face of the earth. To pick the day to carry out his plot, Haman cast lots, or *pur* (from which the word Purim is derived), and the lot fell on the 13th day of the month of Adar (March 8th this year).

Queen Esther became aware of the plot, when Mordecai, her beloved cousin and adoptive father, was found sitting in sackcloth and ashes before the palace. When Esther asked why he mourned, he not only told her of the plot but also warned Esther that she would die along with her countrymen if Haman’s plan was carried out. Thus, when the time for action came, Esther exposed the diabolical plot of Haman to the King. By God’s grace, the plan to destroy the Jews was stopped and turned on the enemies of the Jews. Instead of the Jews being annihilated, many of their enemies perished. As a result, the Jews had rest from their enemies.

Interestingly enough, the name “Esther” means “hidden.” The Hebrew traditional title for this book is “*Megillat Hester*,” literally, “revelation of [that which is] hidden.” This traditional title clearly delineates the fact that God works through many things, including ordinary people, to carry out His gracious will. As He does, God is often hidden from our eyes. This profound understanding of how God works is seen in the tradition of wearing masks or costumes in the celebration of Purim. Through the “mask” of an individual, the person of Esther, God’s protecting hand was revealed and God’s people saved.

God cares for us today in this way

More often than not, God is hidden from our eyes as He works through His “masks.” He provides food for us through the farmers and grocers. He cares for our sicknesses through doctors, medical technicians and medicines. He nurtures us through our parents or adoptive/foster parents, who provide for all our earthly needs. He protects us through policemen, who watch out for our safety, and He protects our land through our military. In truth, the Lord provides all these things for us, although it is hidden from our eyes.

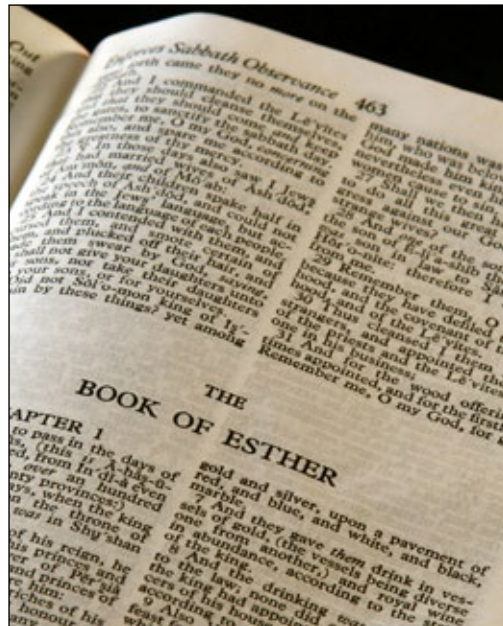
How are we to respond to this knowledge? Purim is often celebrated by the exchange of gifts (see Esther 9:22). As God provides for us in “hidden” ways, we are led to acknowledge His gifts and give Him thanks. The greatest of these gifts is the sending of His Son into the world to live a holy life in our place and to die bearing the just punishment for our sins. For this reason, we too confess, “And he [Jesus] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Our living for Jesus includes our earthly stewardship of time and talent as we perform willing service to others. As God’s instruments, we use what gifts He has given us—the Gospel, to reach others

for Christ, reflecting His love in all we do. Through our generosity in support of our church and its missions, Christ is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of those who hear it. Once again, in this hidden way, God is working through us and our stewardship of the time, talents and treasures to reach others for Christ.

A part of Esther’s stewardship was to recognize her time and position, and when she did, she acted decisively to save her people. May we also act decisively and boldly in accord with the gifts given to us so that others might be saved through faith in Jesus.

Daniel Basel is the ELS Giving Counselor and lives in Mankato, Minnesota.



CAN YOU IMAGINE EASTER WITHOUT EGGS? AND WITHOUT THE CROSS AND THE EMPTY TOMB?

The price of hen eggs is skyrocketing, the media in the Czech Republic report. While in the United States the people are debating fuel prices, the Czechs observe with displeasure how the cost of their favorite food item has gone from 2.5 Czech crowns (about 12 cents) in January up to almost 6 crowns (30 cents) in March. The reason for this more than double increase is a change that came into effect with the New Year

in one of the European Union regulations concerning the minimum size of hens' cages, requiring the farmers in Europe to adjust the birds' house dimensions. Fifteen EU states didn't comply with the new agricultural directive, so the importation of eggs has dropped significantly, causing a shortage of eggs in the market. Experts predict that the prices will grow even further with

the Easter festival approaching. White shell eggs are lacking in our market, as they are more fragile. Therefore, they are usually imported from other countries, many of which are now banned from exporting eggs until their farmers fix the hens' habitations.

No doubt eggs are important for our nutrition. They are important for our celebration of Easter, too! Easter eggs, either plain or hand-painted and precisely decorated, have become a symbol of the new life that was bought for us and brought to us by the death and resurrection of God's own Son, Jesus. However, as important as symbols are, they are not the thing itself. Having eggs around brings no one closer to the for-

given life that our Lord has won for us on Easter. Only the Gospel can do that. Wouldn't you then be willing to let go of all the Easter eggs there are, if it meant that people would listen more to the story behind the Easter festival and its meaning for their lives? After all, the price that was paid on the cross, once for all, was the highest anyone could ever pay, and it brings us benefits far beyond any food or market commodity ever could.



We Lutheran Christians in the egg-deprived country know that, and we want the Spirit-deprived fellows around us to know that as well. With your help and under His guidance, we can truly make a difference. May you also have a Christ-centered and Christ-glorifying Easter!

Petr Krakora, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Plzen, Czech Republic.

Live Long — Go To Church

A look into a file turned up an article from the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* dated May 19, 1999, “If Longevity is Your Goal, Go to Church!”

Statistics were shared in the article that had been compiled from the May issue of *Demography* magazine. Here’s a sampling:

- 20 yr. olds who go to church once a week live another 62 years; average age, 82.
- 20 yr. olds who never attend religious services will die at an average age of 75.
- Among blacks, those who attend services more than once a week live on an average 14 year longer than those who never go to church.
- Those who attend church regularly are apt to smoke and drink less than those who never go, no matter the incomes, lifestyles, and behavior.

Bernard Spilka, a retired professor of psychology at the University of Denver, was surprised. He tried to rationalize the facts by saying, “Negative emotions can affect one’s immune system...(so) Churchgoers may have strong immune systems.” He did conclude that churchgoers must find, “...meaning in their lives, a better sense of control, can relate to other people—which all have potential health benefits.”

Christians go to church because it’s part of God’s will for us that we gather together to hear the Word, to

partake of the Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion), to praise and to pray together (Hebrews 10:25). Christians go to Church because what they get out of it is not a stronger physical immune systems or extensions of the dates that will appear on our headstones, but to receive **eternal life** by grace, through the Gospel of Jesus’ holy life credited to us, horrible death which paid off our punishment debt, and happy resurrection. Jesus has “...*the Words of eternal life!*”

*David Russow is pastor of Redeeming Grace
Lutheran Church, Rogers, Minnesota.*

Pastor, I Have a Question...

QUESTION: Luke 24:18 mentions the name Cleopas, and John 19:25 mentions Mary the wife of Clopas. Could Cleopas and Clopas be the same person? Even if they aren't, wouldn't it be more likely that a man and his wife walked home together and ate supper together at their home (with Jesus this time) than that two men lived together, as is always pictured?

"Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, 'Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?'" (Luke 24:18).

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25).

ANSWER: Jesus appeared to His followers at least five times according to the Gospel accounts. Sometime in the middle of the day, He appeared to those we call the Emmaus disciples. The incident is recorded in St. Luke 24:13-35. St. Luke identifies one of those disciples by name, Cleopas. The other disciple is not identified.

The two were traveling to their home in Emmaus. When Jesus joined them, they had been discussing all that had taken place that weekend. They were troubled and disappointed. They told Jesus, whom they did not recognize, that they had hoped Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. However, they did not understand the mission God had given to the Messiah. Like so many other Israelites, they had hoped that the Messiah would liberate them from the political tyranny of Rome.

As they walked, Jesus taught them the real mission of the Messiah. God sent His Son into this world to live, suffer and die in order to rescue sinners from the tyranny of Satan and the death and hell they deserve. On Good Friday, Jesus paid our debt by His death. Early on Easter morning, Jesus rose from death for our justification (Romans 4:25), that is, God declared the world righteous. His resurrection proved that Jesus was much more than merely a liberator from Roman persecution. It proved He is the very Son of God. By faith in Him, we enjoy God's grace, love and forgiveness. In the risen Christ, we have the sure and certain promise of life after death. By faith, we are God's children, which means that we shall live forever with our living Lord Jesus.

After some research, this writer has learned the following:

1. Cleopas may or may not be the same fellow St. John called Clopas, the husband of Mary. Eusebius, in the fourth century A.D., identified Clopas as the brother of St. Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus. Other traditions identify him as the man who married the widowed Mary. We cannot prove either one from the Scripture.

We cannot prove one way or another from the Bible that Cleopas is Clopas. It is possible.

2. Some scholars have identified the other disciple as being Cleopas' wife. Lutheran commentaries that this writer trusts do not consider this to be possible.
3. In addition, the two from Emmaus tell Jesus, "Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us" (Luke 24:22). This seems to indicate that neither one of the Emmaus disciples is a female.
4. It is safest to say that there is no Biblical evidence to identify or not to identify Cleopas with Clopas, or to determine whether or not the other disciple was Cleopas' wife.

The account of the road to Emmaus is dear to this writer. He attended Sunday School and worship in Emmaus Lutheran in North Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was also confirmed there. Gustave Doré's painting, "Jesus and the Disciples Going to Emmaus," brings great comfort to his heart.

*Abide with Me! Fast falls the Eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, Oh, abide with me!*

NOTE from the editor: The Holy Spirit inspired the holy writers to set down the important facts of any incident, but not all of them. We should not be surprised that two men left Jerusalem for Emmaus as they discussed the events of the most important weekend in history. We are not told whether the men had wives or if one of the wives fixed the meal that Jesus was invited to eat with them. These disciples of Jesus demonstrated the virtue of Christian hospitality that God had commanded the Israelites to show. Neither should we conclude that the "two men lived together, as is always pictured," since Israelite houses would have rooms for a guest to sleep in.

Charles Keeler is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

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Building a Life Worth Living

Introduction

I will assume that most readers of the *Lutheran Sentinel* have been or will be confirmed into the Christian faith. The age of confirmation, albeit an arbitrary one, marks an important time in the life of each young Christian. Those of you looking forward to confirmation probably think that catechism classes and memory work will never end. Those of you looking back at confirmation may not remember much of what you studied.

I attended the confirmation classes taught by my father at Western Koshkonong Lutheran School in rural Wisconsin. The students who went to Christian Day School had two one-hour classes per week. The members of our class that attended public school met on Saturday mornings. I remember feeling sorry for those kids who had to spend two solid hours every Saturday morning studying their Catechism lessons.

Regardless of when classes were held, we all studied the same material, primarily Luther's *Small Catechism*—the Six Chief Parts including questions and answers, proof passages from the Bible, prayers, hymns and other material. I recall practicing memory work at home on Monday and Wednesday nights in order to avoid getting in trouble with my teacher/father the following mornings. Nothing was worse than being kept inside at morning recess to recite memory work.

I am going to focus on a short section of scripture to form the basis of a series of articles for this year's column:

The heading before 2 Peter 1: 3-8 in the NIV is **Confirming One's Calling and Election**. The verses read as follows:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make

every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In essence, the following articles will help confirm your confirmation:

Building Trust

Building Virtue

Building Knowledge

Building Self-control

Building Perseverance

Building Godliness

Building Love

St. Peter goes on to say, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election" (2 Peter 1:10). That is what we will try to do!

Daniel Madson is a former schoolteacher and now a member of Abiding Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin.

What Does It Mean to be a Lutheran Youth...

...when it comes to trusting in God's providence?

The most consistent complaint that I hear in my vocation of counseling adolescents and teenagers is that they feel frustrated because they feel they are always being controlled. Those youth report that parents are always so worried about them and things would be just fine if their parents stopped worrying and gave them more freedom. This rebellion from parental authority is a classic (but sometimes overstated) sign of the pattern where youth are beginning to develop their own unique identity. So how is this conflict regarding control and authority in the home with parents similar to the relationship that we have with God during our youth years?

Perhaps you feel some of the same “controlled” feelings when you go to church, talk to your pastor, or when you feel forced to attend church youth group events. Or maybe you feel that if you were in charge and had complete control of all of your life events, you would be able to create a perfect life for your-

self. However, we know from Scripture and our day-to-day life events that ultimately God is in control of our lives: “God is with you in everything you do” (Genesis 21:22). This divine control or authority is known as His providence and, as sinful human beings, we are constantly fighting against—or rebelling against—God’s perfect providence.

If God is in complete control and He knows your future, does that mean that you should stop worrying about your life? Since God knows what will happen to all of us, should you stop applying to so many colleges or planning for tuition expenses and scholarships? Does God have a specific person for you to marry? The short answer to many of those tough questions is that God’s providence still gives us opportunity to exercise free will

in earthly things. God uses us and our free will decisions to guide and protect us with His perfect plan.

One more tough question that you might be asking with regards to God’s providence is this: If God is perfect and has so much control and authority in our lives, why do evil things happen at all? This is where it is important to remember that the evil in the world is not caused by God’s will, but by our own sinful lives. In God’s original plan, there was no evil, no pain, and there would not have been fighting with parents or drama with

kids at school. Nonetheless, God even uses our pain, suffering and conflict for good: “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Hebrews 12:6).

Whenever you feel constrained and controlled by your parents’ rules or “nagging,” remember that God has a similar pattern of structuring your life by using His providence to guide and instruct you. Remember that it

is the sinful nature within each and every one of us that fights and rebels against the order and structure that we need. Lastly, take comfort in the truth that God’s providence is, and always will be, perfect. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18).



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OUR FAMILY OF GOD

As I write this column, I am watching my son play basketball. This sport requires team effort. To win the game, the players have to work together on offense and defense. Some players are better at basketball than others, but the effort of the whole team leads to a winning season.

Similarly, the family unit is like a sports team. Father, mother and children need to work together in order to accomplish anything. Not much would get done in the limited time there is after school if only one person does the dishes while everyone else is playing computer games or watching television. Cleaning house would take a long time if one part of the family was messing up rooms while another family member tried to make everything neat. Teamwork means agreeing on goals and working together to meet them.

God has established the family unit as a means to build each other up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. God intended that the family be on defense against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. Children need to know the difference between good and evil, truth and error, so that they do not fall into temptation. The family is also to be on offense so that they build each other up in the faith, pray for each other, become wise in God's Word, and walk together on the path of salvation.

St. Paul states that believers are on God's team (1 Corinthians 12:12), namely, that we are members of His household (Ephesians 2:19) and children of God (Galatians 3:26).

If the family is a gift from God and He blesses those who live in the Word and prayer, we should not be surprised that the devil will also be on the offensive to tear down the family, to raise up dissension, to promote independence instead of cooperation, and to foster a spirit of division.

Satan has convinced some that a family can be any group of people living together who can raise children. Many tempt God's wrath by refusing to get married. Others work to destroy God's order by establishing "families" of the same sex, others by raising children in a

communal school without parents at all. The devil has convinced people that they are wiser than God and that society or individuals can establish the rules of life. Such people may convince themselves that their arrangement is much better than the family unit God established, but they are on the wrong team.



Guarding the family unit as part of God's will is just as important as promoting the sanctity of life in the womb, for both are gifts from God. The Christian family is God's established means to protect children from harm, to teach them His Word and to nurture them in the true faith.

As with sports, the work of the Christian family requires a team effort between parents, relatives, school and church. What a blessing it is when children grow up, continue in the faith, and establish their own families which walk together with Jesus on their way to eternal life.

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