



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Spreading Love Beyond Our Walls

pg. 4



LUST:

THE PRODUCT OF A DISORDERED HEART



The first three Sundays in Lent especially direct Christians to consider our formidable foe and his allies—the devil, the unbelieving world, and our sinful flesh. Consider this description of what we face:

“Consider, O devout soul, to what peril thou art constantly exposed from the devil... He is an enemy extremely ready in audacity, strong in resources, subtle in arts and devices, boundless in stratagem, unweariedly zealous in his assaults upon the soul... Whom will he not assail, since he dared to approach the Lord of Glory Himself with his cunning malignity... If he sought to sift the very apostles of Christ as wheat..., will [he] fail to test any Christian with temptation? He deceived Adam... who had a nature holy and innocent; whom can he not then deceive with natures fallen and sinful? He led astray Judas although in the school of the Savior; whom can he not then lead astray in the world, the school of error?... Consider... the wiles of this powerful adversary, and seek to overcome him only by the employment of spiritual weapons... Put on as a garment the perfect righteousness of Christ, and thou wilt be safe from the devil’s temptations. Hide thee in the cleft... of Christ’s wounds, whenever thou art terrified by the fiery darts of that malignant power.”¹

It is reported that one of the greatest areas of temptation for Christians today is the easy access to pornography we now have through the internet. This leads not only to breaking the 6th Commandment regarding lust, but also the 1st regarding idolatrous rebellion against God and His creation. It is ruining many marriages by replacing the proper sexual pleasure between husband and wife with a fanciful distortion of what God has created for us to enjoy.

Since this marital union serves to strengthen the “one flesh” bond, when it is forsaken and substituted with an imagined and momentary encounter with self, we find contempt, guilt, and shame follow at an exponential rate. Even the unmarried are affected by a porn-addicted thought process. “Like a drug that delivers a short high to its user that is followed by an emotional slump, it delivers a charge that does not last but requires ever-increasing indulgence to maintain its diminishing intensity and ward off the ever-increasing severity of its consequent low.”²

As a pastor for 40 years, I wish I had the Rev. Dr. Kleinig’s book to recommend to younger adults, both single and those engaged to be married. His theology of the body would be of great value to us all, especially chapters 5 and 6.

“Like all evil desires, it [lust] corrupts the whole person with its deceptive allurements that fail to deliver what they so luridly promise... Even though the object of lust is the body of another person, it is the product of a disordered heart with its pornographic imagination. Therefore, the heart needs to be reformed before there can be any change in sexual misconduct... public worship provides the best kind of sexual therapy for us as God’s children, since by our participation in it we gain a good conscience that prevents guilt from impairing the proper enjoyment... in marriage or destroying our contentment with our unmarried state.”³

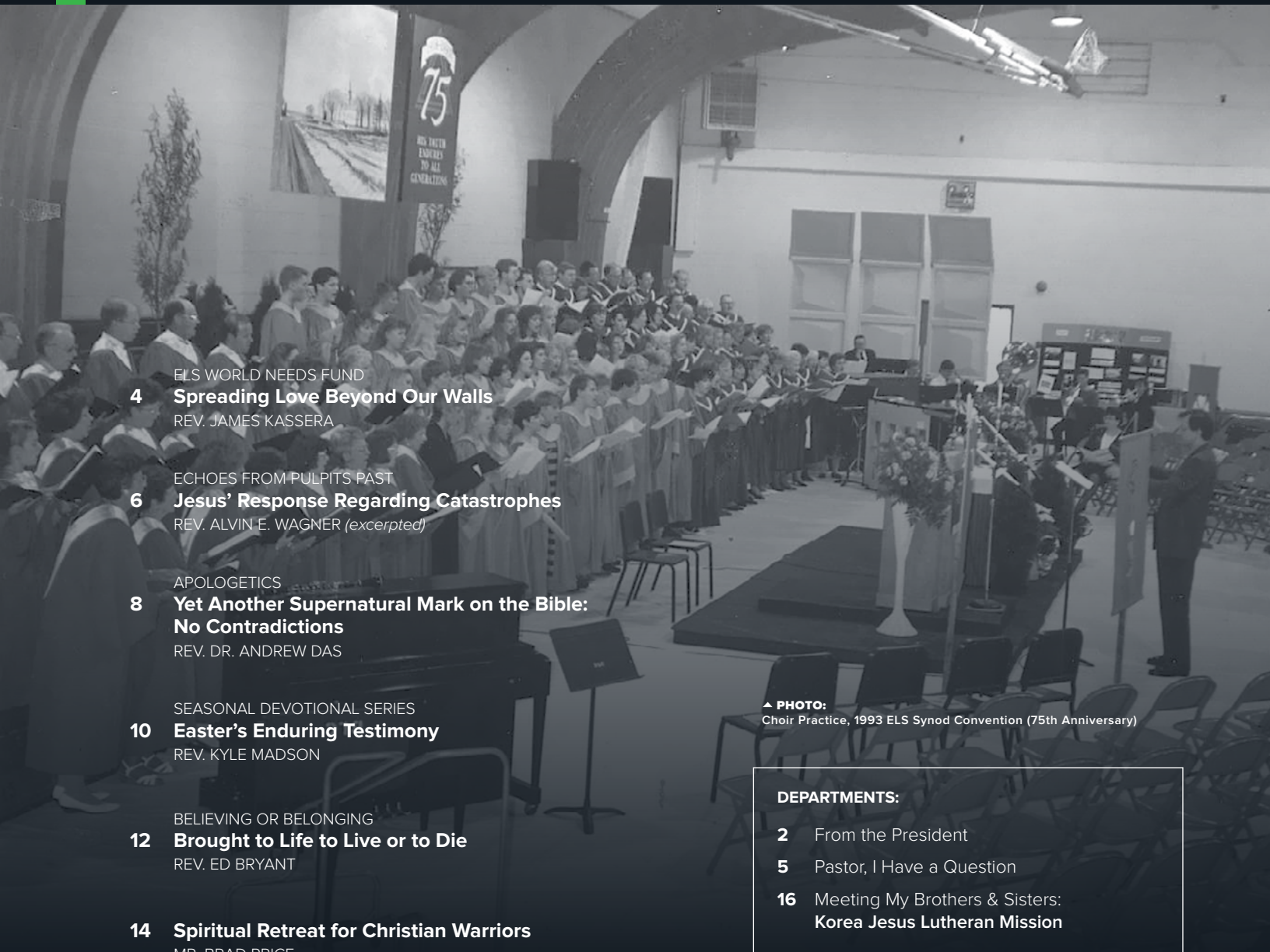
“O blessed Christ, do Thou fight for us and in us, that in Thee we may have the victory!”⁴

1. Sacred Meditations, by Johann Gerhard, Transl. C. W. Heisler, Repristination Press: Decatur, IL 1986, pp. 150-153.

2. Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body, by John W. Kleinig, Lexham Press: Bellingham, WA, 2011, p. 172.

3. Ibid, pp. 168-170.

4. Sacred Meditations, p. 155.



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Spreading Love Beyond Our Walls

by **REV. JAMES KASSERA**, Secretary
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Where would we be without the love and care of others? Without the love and care of our God, we would not have our Savior, Jesus, who has taken away our sins and given us the eternal inheritance of heaven. Without the love and care of the people God puts in our lives, we would be without many of the joys and kindnesses that brighten our lives.

As we approach Mother's Day, we thank God for giving us a shining example of love and care. Growing up, it became a running joke that all my friends had this amazing ability to visit just when my mother was pulling a fresh batch of goodies out of the oven. My mother always overbaked all her specialties because she loved being able to treat any friend that came through the door. Not only did she put effort into caring for my family, but she used her extra time and energy to make a difference in the lives of others. I'm sure you can relate. Mother's Day is a wonderful reminder that God is great, and He provides for His people in so many ways.

God can provide love and care through you as well! Our ELS always collects a Mother's Day Offering, which supports our ELS World Needs Fund.

With this fund, we have been able to show God's love and care by helping people overcome flooding in the jungle, offsetting the costs of medical emergencies in India, helping people pick up the pieces after a devastating hurricane, or just helping families get through a difficult time.

With our offerings, we can extend our love and care for others far beyond our own reach. You may use the special online link on this page, direct your offerings through your church, or you may send your gift directly to the Synod:

ELS World Needs Fund
Evangelical Lutheran Synod
6 Browns Court
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Mother's Day is a time to thank God for the love and care He provides through the moms in our lives. We also thank God and pray for the continued love and care He provides through the generous gifts from all of you. To God alone be all glory. Happy Mother's Day!

What is “the Rapture” ... and why don't we Lutherans teach it?

Answer:

With over 80 million book copies, plus five movies featuring big-name actors like Nicholas Cage, there is no question as to the ongoing popularity of the Left Behind novels written by the late Tim LaHaye and his co-author Jerry Jenkins. However, the chief premise of the story, the doctrine of the Rapture, raises lots of questions for Bible-believing Christians.

What is the Rapture?

The Rapture is a chief tenet of dispensationalism, a relatively new teaching in the church initially popularized in the 1830s by a man named John Nelson Darby. In the 1860s, Darby's teachings found their way to America, where they received support from evangelists like Dwight Moody. Throughout the 20th century, the influence of dispensationalism and the Rapture continued to grow. In more recent times, dispensationalist theology has entered American homes through the popular writings of authors like Hal Lindsey (The Late Great Planet Earth) and LaHaye's and Jenkins' Left Behind series.

Dispensationalists believe that Christ will return to earth prior to the final judgment and reign on earth for one thousand years (millennialism). Yet before Christ returns, the world will endure seven years of great tribulation. In order to spare believers from suffering the coming tribulation, dispensationalists teach that the believers will be suddenly and quietly “caught up”, i.e., raptured, from the earth to meet Jesus in the air. They cite 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as proof of this secret Rapture:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (NKJV, italics added)

Dispensationalists will also use Jesus' words from Luke 17:34-36 as further evidence for the Rapture:

“I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.”

In the dispensationalist way of thinking, those who are “taken” are the raptured believers, while those who are “left” are unbelievers who must endure the seven-year tribulation prior to Jesus' return and thousand-year reign.

Why don't we Lutherans teach the Rapture?

So, with all this apparent Scriptural support, why do Lutherans not teach the Rapture? Because not everything is as it appears. Let's take a closer look at 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Proponents of the Rapture argue that the believers will be taken up secretly, but what does the passage say? “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (italics added). Where is Christ's coming described as secret? According to St. Paul, Christ's second coming will be just the opposite, announced with shouts and trumpets! A look at the entire chapter tells us that the rapturing spoken of here is not some secret second coming, but the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

The wider context of Scripture also helps us rightly understand Jesus' words in Luke 17. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus describes the swift arrival of God's judgment when Noah built the ark and when Lot departed from Sodom. During those times, the people “ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built” (v. 28). They had no idea God's judgment was coming until it was too late. Jesus says, “Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:30). Jesus is not talking about some secret taking of the believers, but God's swift surprise judgment against unbelievers.

The wild and fanciful ideas surrounding and underpinning the Rapture may make for good fiction, but in the end, that's all they are: fiction. The sad reality is that faith in the Rapture relies on taking bits of God's Word and interpreting them out of context. Moreover, proponents of the Rapture overlook the simple truth that we are already living in the end times. Even now, Christ reigns over this world from His place of power at the Father's right hand, keeping us in His loving care. His glorious—and final—return can come at any moment. Rest assured; you won't miss it!



Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

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echoes

from **ELS PULPITS**
past

EXCERPTED FROM PRINT:
BEHOLD A GREATER THAN SOLOMON - 1989
(The Reverend Alvin E. Wagner)

Jesus' Response Regarding Catastrophes

Luke 13: 1-5

Edited: **REV. RON PEDERSON**, Ret.
Member of **MOUNT OLIVE LUTHERAN**, Mankato, Minn.

Text:

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

(Luke 13:1-5)

Two gruesome catastrophes had shocked the community of Jerusalem, where Jesus was preaching. No doubt Jesus knew of this; yet some of His listeners brought up the matter with the purpose of getting His reaction. Questions such as: “Why did these things happen? What was God’s purpose in permitting them? Were they judgments upon the victims for some gross criminality? How do you explain these catastrophes?” they undoubtedly asked.

He did not respond in an atheistic way, as though these catastrophes were purely accidental and that God had nothing to do with them. Had He answered in that way, He would have been contradicting Himself and the Scriptures. For just a short time before this, He had taught His disciples that nothing, not even the death of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29), occurs fortuitously and everything comes under the purview and providence of God.

No distant Lord, no mere observer of events is He. All natural phenomena as well as all human affairs are in the range of His cognizance and governance. In the hollow of His hand, He holds the fate of nations as well as individuals (Isaiah 40:12). Therefore, even catastrophes occasioned by man’s ineptitude are properly called “acts of God”.

Fatalism, you see, is decidedly anti-Christian. It foolishly ignores the relation between God and His believers, the privilege and power of prayer as well as their freedom in earthly things. True, the Bible states, “Man’s days are determined.... the number of his months decreed” (Job 14:5). But it also asserts that man’s life can be prolonged as in the case of King Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:5). Or shortened as David says of the wicked: “they will not live out half their lives” (Psalm 55:23). Though seemingly contradictory, both state the truth, the one as it is from the standpoint of God and eternity and the other from the viewpoint of man in the realm of time. Both views must be entertained lest we fall into the error of either atheism or fatalism.

Yet the error Jesus felt constrained to correct that day in Jerusalem was the judgmental stance people so often take regarding catastrophes, thinking they must be divine judgments on the victims for some special, gross sin of theirs.

“Do you think,” He said, “that those murdered Galileans and those crushed patients in Siloam were worse sinners than others?” And to correct that type of thinking, He proceeded to utter an emphatic, decisive, and repeated no: “No I tell you; no.”

Don’t think, however, that this captious, self-righteous, judgmental attitude has disappeared; it’s still around today. But to that kind of unfair thinking, what says our Jesus? “No, I tell you; no.” When we are spared, then, while others are taken, let us never, never think that it’s because we were better than they or they were worse sinners than we.

But most importantly, Jesus would have us regard them (catastrophes) as spurs to repentance, as you can see from His

concluding remark to the questioners: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Instead of dwelling on the fate of the Galileans slain by the swords of Pilate and the eighteen crushed to death by the falling tower of Siloam, He wanted them to be thinking of their own. These, like all catastrophes, are to affect you deeply, touch and move you to repent, because—“Unless you repent, you will all perish”.

For God, being gracious as well as just, wants no one to perish. The one thing He desires above all others is the eternal salvation of mankind. “*As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*” (Ezekiel 33:11). *Not willing is He that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). To that end, He sent His only begotten Son, the Christ, into the world to lay down His life for its redemption. For that reason, our Redeemer commissioned His Church “to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). And, to impress upon them the necessity of such repentance, the Lord did not remove from earth the sorrows and tragedies brought upon it by man’s fall into sin. Calamities continue, even to the end of time, as reinforcements of His purpose and message: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

This, to be sure, is not a popular interpretation of world catastrophes. Even within the churches, in spite of the Scriptural warning, “Judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17), the lukewarm and indifferent, the formalists and drifters, the dissemblers and errorists abound. The Lord chastens them, but they feel it not and coolly scorn His plea: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Yes, let every calamity, great or small, far or near, speak to us of the transiency of life, the nearness of death, the inevitableness of judgment and say, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Soul-saving? Life-giving is this message? Oh, yes! It holds out a glorious hope to all, even the worst of sinners. Stern and severe as its warning is, it has a loving assurance that all who do repent will not perish. They will be forgiven of all iniquities, absolved of all guilt, acquitted and accepted in the family of God—and all this freely by grace through Jesus Christ. For repentance in the Biblical sense, as Jesus used it, embraces not only a contrite conviction and confession of sin but also a believing acceptance of the forgiveness and the power He gives to turn from our evil ways and walk in the newness of life.

To Christ, then, let us cleave as our Lord Redeemer and use life’s sorrows and catastrophes as spurs to contrition and repentance till He comes. Amen.



Yet another supernatural mark on the Bible:

No Contradictions

What makes the Bible different from any other literature, ancient or modern, that we should trust its message? Why should we believe what the Bible says? Perhaps you've noticed some apparent contradictions within its pages. Unfortunately, apparent contradictions in the Bible have caused many people to abandon their belief in the biblical message. We need to take a closer look at supposed contradictions in the Bible to find out whether the Bible can really be trusted.

While I was doing doctoral work at Duke, N. T. Wright, the popular Anglican bishop and former Oxford professor, was visiting and lecturing on his new book that Christ's resurrection is a fact of history. My mentor at the time, now a professor at Yale, was lurking in the aisles, listening skeptically. During the Q&A, he asked how Wright could honestly claim a physical resurrection of Jesus in view of all the contradictions in the Gospel accounts. He rattled off a long list. The machine-gun pacing clearly rattled Wright, who never really addressed the series of proposed contradictions.

At the top of my mentor's list was perhaps one of the greatest contradictions of all, the dating of Christ's crucifixion. This famous contradiction offers us a chance to test whether the Scriptures bear a supernatural mark. To set the stage for this apparent contradiction, Matthew, Mark, and Luke—called the "Synoptic" Gospels—leave readers with the sense that Jesus was crucified on the day after the Passover lambs were slaughtered, Nisan 15 on their calendar, a Friday. According to Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7, Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper the night before his death (on Thursday) as a Passover meal after the Passover lambs had been slaughtered.

John's Gospel agrees that Jesus was crucified on a Friday, but he gives the impression that Jesus as the Passover Lamb was

crucified on the same day the Passover lambs were slaughtered, i.e., Nisan 14. If that's the case, then John's Last Supper the night before would not be a Passover meal, and that would contradict the other three gospels. In other words, John's association of Jesus's crucifixion—and not the Last Supper—with the Passover resulted in a different date for the crucifixion.

People draw on three lines of evidence to support the view that John has changed the date of Christ's crucifixion. We will look at each in turn, but we will also see if each can bear the weight needed for there to be a contradiction. We want to be critical with the critical arguments. After all, turnabout is fair play.

First, many critical scholars claim that John 13:1 says the Last Supper took place before the Passover Feast, and thus for John it was not a Passover meal as in the Synoptics. John and the Synoptics would therefore be contradicting each other. Before we get too convinced that there is a contradiction, we should take a closer look! As you read John 13:1-4, look carefully. These verses never say that the Last Supper took place before the Passover Feast, only that Jesus had known that the hour for His departure would come and that He had loved the disciples. When 13:2 turns immediately to the "supper," the most natural conclusion is that it must be the Passover meal since John had just mentioned the Passover in 13:1. One would conclude from John 13:1-4, in agreement with Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that Jesus's Last Supper was a Passover meal. The first rationale for a contradiction collapses.

Second, John 18:28 says that when the religious leaders brought Jesus to Pilate, they refused to enter Pilate's hall so that they would not be defiled and unable to eat the Passover. As the argument goes, this must have been Nisan 14 with the Feast of Passover to take place later that evening. That would presumably

allow John to place Jesus's death on the day the Passover lambs were sacrificed. In other words, the Passover meal would take place after Jesus's death and not the night before as in the other gospels—a contradiction.

Taking a closer look, however, notice especially how John did not say that they would be prevented from eating the Passover that evening. In any case, uncleanness before an evening Passover meal would easily be resolved by washing in water (Leviticus 15:5, 7, 11; Numbers 19:22). That fact suggests, instead, that the meal at issue is a daytime meal while the uncleanness remained in effect and had not yet been washed away. What is often overlooked is that "Passover" could also refer to the daytime meals that took place during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, i.e., meals that took place after the Passover meal, proper. The most important of these was on the first full day of the Passover week (Numbers 28:18-19, the hagigah)—which would take place on Friday after the Thursday evening Passover meal. Notice also in this regard that John never actually claims that Jesus was crucified on the same day the Passover lambs were killed. Another basis for the contradiction in dates dissolves.

Third, in John 19:14, Pilate condemns Jesus on "the preparation day for the Passover," which sounds like the day just before the first Passover evening meal. Again, Jesus would be crucified before the Passover meal, a contradiction with the other gospels. There is, however, a more likely possibility that will clear up the problem. One could translate John's language as "the day of preparation," which would refer to a week's usual day of preparation, the Friday before the Sabbath. In other words, John would be referring to "the day of preparation of the Passover (week)." If that's the case, Pilate would be condemning Jesus not on the Passover itself, but on the Friday of that

Passover week celebration, in agreement with the other gospels. The apparent contradiction again vanishes.

John offers additional chronological indications that agree with the Synoptics. Jesus tells Judas to do quickly in 13:29 what he plans (the betrayal). The other disciples misunderstand, thinking that Jesus is asking Judas to give something to the poor, precisely what takes place on the first night of the Passover week! Beggars would stand by the gates and receive alms on the night of the Passover meal.

The reader should not miss the significance of all this. One of the premiere contradictions in the Bible is, upon closer investigation, not contradictory at all! When critics repeatedly mention the problem of the date of the crucifixion in John, it is easy to be conditioned into assuming that there must be biblical contradictions. At the end of the day, it is incumbent upon the believer to be critical with the criticisms and to engage afresh the biblical text for what it says and does not say.

Over the years as a biblical scholar, I have encountered many issues and possible contradictions. Rarely, however, does one encounter a possibly genuine contradiction, a proposition posed in one place with its exact opposite apparently in another. When a difficult problem like this emerges, my experience is that over time, an explanation suggests itself. That pattern of eventually finding resolutions to difficulties has served to increase my confidence in the biblical text. The Bible bears a unique, supernatural mark that attests itself over other literary materials that are of a purely human origin. We are justified in placing our confidence in its message, a message of a Savior who died for the sins of the world that we might have the confidence of our eternal destiny!

- Presenting evidence for the truth of Christianity
- Critiquing worldviews that oppose Christianity
- Fortifying believers with a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture
- Engaging unbelievers in conversations leading toward the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness in Christ

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"Q&A Leading to Christ" Flyers

els.org/apologetics/qalc

"Can the Biblical Account of Creation be Harmonized with Evolution?"

"Did God Put My Gender into My Genes?"

Further Reading

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"A Culture of Deception? Equipping Christians with Truth & Love in Tumultuous Times"

Fifth Annual Apologetics and Worldviews Conference

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*The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in him, but the one who does not believe has made God out to be a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God gave about his Son. THIS IS THE TESTIMONY: **God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.***

I John 5:10-11

Easter's Enduring Testimony

by REV. KYLE MADSON, Editor
THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL

NORSELAND LUTHERAN, St. Peter, Minn.
NORWEGIAN GROVE LUTHERAN, Gaylord, Minn.



A COURTROOM TESTIMONY

How many of you have ever had to testify in a court of law? That number might be fairly small here. I suspect the number is significantly larger for those who have been called to jury duty—to sit on a panel of peers to hear the testimonies of witnesses. Some of them were material witnesses—those whose proximity to the alleged crime or to those involved in it makes their report “material”... of the essence. Other testimony may have been given from expert witnesses—those whose proficiency in a forensic science or the human psyche make their opinion of the situation valuable to the jury considering the case at hand.

Let's consider it in terms of a murder trial. In that instance, the goal of all the courtroom testimony will be one of two things: 1) Either to create doubt about the guilt of the accused (that would be the defense) OR 2) to remove all doubt about the guilt of the accused (that would generally be the prosecution).

Our courtroom standard (because accusation is easy) is quite rigid for conviction. You've heard it before: testimony that convicts is testimony and evidence that convinces the jury “beyond a reasonable doubt”. The affirming testimony carries the onus. Its job is to dispel all doubt.

GOD'S COURTROOM TESTIMONY

Easter—the Resurrection of Jesus to life from the dead—this was just such a testimony. Jesus' resurrection and subsequent appearances (like the Easter evening appearance to his disciples and one week later to Thomas, too) were like God the Father putting Himself on the stand and testifying—“The crucified One is the Alive One.” “He is My own Son—The Christ!” “This is God's testimony—that which He gave about His Son.” The angels announced it on the Bethlehem plains the morning of Jesus' birth. God the Father proclaimed it at Jesus' Baptism AND on the Mount of Transfiguration. The miracles of Jesus were all supporting evidence of this very truth—That Jesus is God's promised Son AND Life is IN JESUS HIS SON!

The disciples had every advantage known to mankind in this “courtroom,” so to speak. They had front-row seats to most of Jesus' miracles. They were ear witnesses to His preaching and teaching. Three of them looked on and listened as Jesus was transfigured before them on the mountain. And yet... they are still desperately needy for this continuing testimony.

“Peace be with you.” After this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the LORD (John 20:19-20).

The disciples needed repeated testimony from God. Do you recall how caringly the angel at the tomb called for this enduring Easter testimony to the disciples from the women?

Go, tell the disciples, and Peter, that Jesus is alive from the dead. Tell them that Jesus IS God's Son—the Christ.

THE DEVIL: THE SOWER OF DOUBT

Remember, doubt is easy to sow, especially in flesh like yours and mine—like the disciples. The Devil has never really known or needed any other treachery than SOWING DOUBT. “Did God really say...” NOW sounds like:

- **Does God really say** that your sins or the sins of your children are so wicked and deadly that **ONLY** His Son's blood sacrificed in your behalf can right you?
- **Does God really say** that gift of His Son is enough to redeem lifetime felons, to buy back from sin abortion doctors or terrorists who bomb Christian churches on Easter? Does God really say the life and death of His Son are so ripe with salvation that **EVEN YOUR SINS** are sufficiently paid for?

The Devil sows doubt. He uses the world and your flesh to cooperate in his doubt-sowing testimony.

THE SPIRIT CONTINUES TESTIFYING

And so, the God who gave testimony in the resurrection of His Son, who gave testimony to his doubt-filled disciples, that God even now testifies to dispel and dismantle your doubts and mine. God “the Spirit is the one who testifies” now. God the Father testified immediately with the visible body of Jesus before His bodily ascension into Heaven. But God has not left His Church—He has not left you—without such compassionate and faith-preserving testimony:

“In fact,” writes St. John, *“there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are one”* (they are “in concert” with one another).

It's our sinful nature to become preoccupied with what we do not have: Jesus' walking and talking and “miracling” before our eyes. The Devil sows doubt in us that without such “personal experiences”, faith is foolish... that faith is “blind”—that it's for the gullible.

But faith is not at all without sufficient testimony—without substance to ground it. In fact, the testimony is plentiful. God the Spirit, The Comforter, comes to you—Christ's Church—now and testifies with Spirit, with water, and with blood.

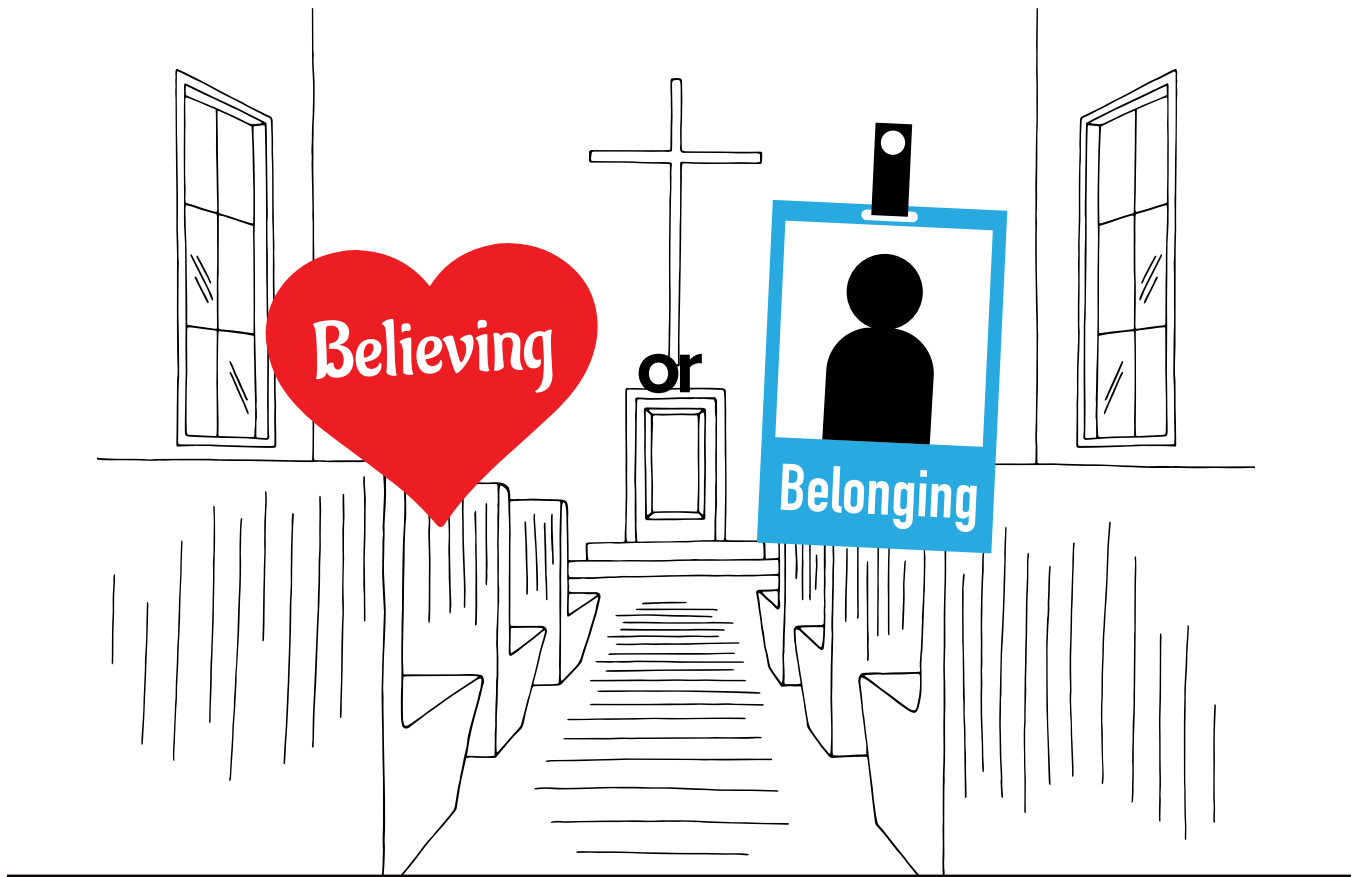
When Jesus gave the flesh of His hands to His disciples to see and to touch, when He offered His fleshy side for Thomas to plunge his hand into, Jesus didn't give them some new, better testimony. For their weakness and unbelief of His existing testimony, He gave them tangible testimony to echo what His verbal testimony had always been: **I am God's own Son the Savior—for you.**

Dear fellow weak ones, dear fellow doubters, Jesus gives us no less. The water of your Baptism, the blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, they testify in concert with the Spirit (Jesus' word of Truth). The tangible things don't say anything the Testimony of crucified and risen Jesus hasn't already spoken. Only they say it for you and for me, in all of our weakness. These testimonies care for us in all of our feebleness and in all of our doubts. The Water together with God's own Word testify that you are indeed God's own redeemed one. The Bread and Wine together with Jesus' words of promise—they testify. They preach to you that what Jesus paid for on the cross is indeed the ransom price for your soul and for mine. They testify that your conscience is cleansed by the blood of God's Son—The Christ!

God testified while His Son walked and talked on this earth. He testified as He gave him into death on the cross and raised Him from it. And for your benefit and mine, God the Spirit still testifies. Easter is an enduring Testimony. The Spirit brings this enduring testimony to dispel our doubts and unbelief. And this is that testimony!

***“God has given us eternal life.
And this life is in his Son.”***

As ones who are **born of God**, our ears are given us to hear and keep hearing this testimony.



Brought to Life to Live or to Die

**Born into the Christian Church, Nourished by the Means of Grace
The Role of Churches in our Eternal Lives**

by **REV. ED BRYANT**, Contributing Writer
FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, Medford, Ore.
OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH, Grants Pass, Ore.

BROUGHT TO LIFE

Jesus amazed Nicodemus when He told Nicodemus how we must enter the kingdom of God. Are you surprised? Have you thought about it? Here goes...

Jesus tells us that we enter the kingdom of God like we enter our families: we are born into it. Nobody chooses their parents; nobody applies for membership in their families. In the terms of John 1, we were born “of blood, of the desire of the flesh, and of a husband’s will.”¹ We are born into our families through the procreative act, our parents participating with God in the creation of new life—our life.

1. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12–13, ESV).

Now for the Kingdom of God: Jesus laid it out for Nicodemus. *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” And Nicodemus thought this was absurd. *Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”* (John 3:3–4, ESV). But Jesus explained further, *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6, ESV). You get your physical life from the flesh of your parents, but your spiritual life comes to you from the Holy Spirit. This is the same truth with which John opened His gospel: *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

(John 1:12–14, ESV)

You joined the Christian church like you joined the human race – you were born into it.

Get it?

Just as you became a member of the human race through your birth, as a gift, without any work on your part, so you became a child of God, a member of the kingdom of God, a member of Christ’s church through another birth, another beginning of life, the life that is saving faith.

LIVING THAT LIFE

So what does this have to do with church membership in our local church or in our daily lives? Think of it this way:

We become members of the Holy Christian Church through justification. We are brought to faith in Christ by which we are given the righteousness of Christ and declared innocent (justified) before God.

Remember this: The “Holy Christian Church” is the whole body of all believers in Christ, all who have spiritual life in Christ.

But membership in the local congregation is a function of sanctification, the Christian life. *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come* (2 Corinthians 5:16–17, ESV).

As a new creation, as a person with a new and spiritual life, we truly love God and desire to serve Him. We therefore contend against the enemies that would end our life—the Devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. As part of this new life, we maintain it through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

2. S.C. Third Article

TO LIVE OR TO DIE

Throughout much of history, children often died early in life and the average lifespan was around thirty years. Life was a struggle

against death. So also in our spiritual life, we struggle against spiritual death. Just as children are born to live a full life or to die, so we who are born again live a full life—or, tragically, die. In Luke 8, Jesus gives us the Parable of

Church membership is when a believer, in obedience to Christ and His word:

- 1) regularly gathers with fellow believers (communion/community),***
- 2) to receive God’s gifts through word and sacrament,***
- 3) in confessional harmony with them,***
- 4) living a repentant, Christian life,***
- 5) served by a pastor,***
- 6) whom they recognize as a shepherd accountable for their soul.***

the Sower and tells us about that struggle. Many who hear the Word don’t believe, others die because the Word is not deep in their lives, and others die because the Word is displaced by the worries, riches, and pleasures of life. But some survive because they remain connected to the source of life, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. As Jesus put it, *“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience”* (Luke 8:15, ESV).

Our new life as Christians doesn’t save us, but in many ways, it is the struggle to hold the gospel “fast in an honest and good heart” to live faithfully our whole life. As Jesus told the church in Smyrna—and us— *“...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10, ESV).

So don’t think of “church membership” as simply “joining” a church, but as one part of the Christian life, the sanctified life through which the Holy Spirit “keeps us with Jesus Christ in the One True Faith”² unto everlasting life, and by which we encourage one another in the faith. In the struggle for life against death, we value our fellowship with other Christians even more than the food, clothing, and shelter by which we preserve the life of our bodies.



Spiritual Retreat for Christian Warriors

by **BRAD PRICE**, President & CEO

LUTHERAN MILITARY SUPPORT GROUP (LMSG)

Member of **ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH (WELS)**, New Ulm, Minn.

A deployed warrior in line at the camp chow hall overhears two security contractors reminiscing about three of their buddies who died in an ambush days earlier. The warrior knows how they feel. A week prior, the warrior lost a teammate on the same route, and that afternoon would be traveling down that route again. The warrior recalls their recent unit memorial service, the battlefield cross, and the absence of their friend's reply during roll call. The warrior feels empty.

Our warriors return home different after a deployment to a combat zone. They leave a piece of themselves behind in the country in which they served. According to a recent Veterans Affairs (VA) study, an average of 17 veterans commit suicide each day. Depending on the service era, between 10 and 29% of veterans will experience PTSD at some point in their lives. One-fifth of veterans dealing with PTSD are also struggling with a substance abuse problem. It is possible that veterans can experience symptoms of trauma without recognizing it.

Such was the story for some of the men who attended the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG) Spiritual Retreat for Christian Warriors at Camp Phillip in Wautoma, Wisconsin, last October. One attendee commented, "I for once in over 12 years have felt actually, for real, forgiveness. I have been carrying around guilt, shame, and unforgiveness for so long that I couldn't take it anymore. It was either drink myself to death or feel Jesus letting me know deep in my soul that I am truly forgiven!"

LMSG's Spiritual Retreats are grounded in Lutheran doctrine and include workshops that address topics such as the warrior

profession, moral injury, and guilt and forgiveness. Devotions and worship services are held throughout the retreat to provide the salve that only the Gospel can provide. A Lutheran mental health counselor familiar with military culture presents information related to physical changes to a warrior's brain when trauma has occurred. Workshops are rounded out by a fellow Lutheran Warrior who, by sharing their personal story of the challenges they have endured after returning home from combat a changed person, can provide encouragement to those in attendance.

LMSG will be hosting two Spiritual Retreats in 2023 with the theme "Journey from War to Peace". Each retreat will focus on serving ELS/WELS combat veterans, both male and female. New this year is a retreat for couples who have been impacted by combat deployments.

- **Spiritual Retreat for Christian Warriors,**
June 1-4, 2023, at Ft. Worden, Washington
- **Spiritual Retreat for Christian Warriors and Their Spouses,**
October 26-29, 2023, at Camp Shiloh, Texas

Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG) is a para-synodical organization that provides Christ-centered support to ELS and WELS service members, veterans, and their families.

More information on this year's Spiritual Retreats can be found at: www.lutheranmilitary.org or contact us at: info@lutheranmilitary.org.



“We are Fearfully and
Wonderfully Made”

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106th Convention
of the **Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

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REFORMATION LECTURES

October 26–27, 2023



“Lutheran Ethics”

Lutheran Bioethics

Dr. Scott Stiegemeier,
Concordia University Irvine, Irvine, CA

Lutheran Social Ethics

Dr. Angus Menuge,
Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, WI

Lutheran Ecoethics

Dr. Doyle Holbird,
Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, MN

BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE | **S. C. YLVIKAKER FINE ARTS CENTER**
MANKATO, MN | OCTOBER 26, 10:30 A.M.

MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:



Korea Jesus Lutheran Mission

by **REV. THOMAS HEYN**, Administrator
ELS BOARD FOR WORLD OUTREACH

Korea Jesus Lutheran Mission is based in the city of Seoul, South Korea, a city with more than 10 million inhabitants. This church body traces its beginning to Rev. Young Ha Kim's outreach efforts in 2006. He had come to the ELS to learn Lutheran theology and its focus on the two Bible teachings of Law and Gospel. Desiring to share these Bible teachings with his countrymen, he returned to South Korea to begin mission work. The initial outreach began with a program of preparing Korean students for enrollment in U.S. Lutheran high schools and grade schools by holding preparatory classes in English at Canaan Lutheran Academy, a school connected with Canaan Lutheran Church, the church Rev. Kim founded. It was eventually renamed Seoul Lutheran Church. This congregation is currently served by pastors Samuel Choi and David Choi, both of whom studied at our Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Seoul Lutheran Church currently has about 40 to 50 members attending worship. Hope Lutheran Church in the city of

Anyang is served by Rev. J.W. Kim, a former member of Seoul Lutheran Church and now an ordained pastor serving the congregation. Hope Lutheran Church has about 10 members attending weekly worship. The Covid pandemic had a severe impact upon these congregations, such that attendance and offerings are down by as much as 30% from pre-Covid levels. Please pray for the members and pastors of these congregations.

Although Korea may be almost 30% Christian, many of the churches are Pentecostal and/or prosperity gospel churches. Our Lutheran churches in Korea work hard to share the good news of Jesus and share the true and correct teachings of the Bible. They continue to look for ways to begin conversations with their fellow Koreans, a difficult task in this very fast-paced metropolis. May God bless their efforts as they direct people to the truth of the Scriptures.