



LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

2023 ELS SYNOD CONVENTION RECAP ISSUE:

2023 CONVENTION ESSAY *(EXTENDED ABSTRACT)*

We are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

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Military Monument Dedication

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Question ...

In the ELS Catechism & Explanation, in the chapter on the Third Commandment, one of the answers states, “In the New Testament God has done away with the laws concerning the Sabbath Day and all other Old Testament types and ceremonies, since they were fulfilled in Christ.” Does this mean that God no longer requires people to have a particular day set aside for worshipping Him?

Answer:

Concerns about the Sabbath—the Day of Rest—are not new among American Lutherans. Questions about the Third Commandment have “run like a red thread through much of the history of Lutherans in America.” In nineteenth-century America, the Reformed religious tradition taught that Christians were morally obligated to observe Sunday as a new American Sabbath. As a result, cities and counties passed ordinances to prohibit work on Sundays.

In those days, confessional Lutherans sought to uphold the truth in the face of legalism. Our forefathers pointed to passages such as Colossians 2:16-17, which taught, *Therefore, do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ* (EHV). Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, God has now set His people free from keeping the ceremonial laws which Moses had given the Israelites—laws intended to point people to the spiritual rest the Messiah would bring. We understand that keeping the day of rest holy has nothing to do with holding to a particular day and everything to do with availing ourselves of the spiritual rest we find in Christ through the Word of God and the Sacraments.

For this reason, the simple answer to the question is: “Yes.” God no longer requires people to have a particular day or time set aside for worshipping Him. God’s people are free to worship Him on any day. Sunday is not a new Sabbath Day. Rather, the church in its freedom has chosen Sunday as a day to gather together because of its connection to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Yet how does one apply that answer to his or her Christian life? In the twenty-first century, Lutherans face another extreme: as the nation has grown more secular, attendance at worship has become less regular. Fathers and mothers do not view attending the divine service with the same discipline and fervor as their parents once did. Schedules have become crowded with all kinds of sports and activities that

did not exist fifty years ago. In some cases, people have no time for rest at all, or at least their idea of “rest” does not include the Lord. People see Christ’s fulfillment of the Sabbath as a license to do whatever they want. As a result, many no longer receive or comprehend the kind of rest the Lord wants to share with us.

Faithful believers understand that this is not what God intended. Since Christ has fulfilled the work of salvation for us, the truth is that every day is our day of rest. God’s people are to hear His Word not just one day a week, but every day. And not just hear it, but to carry it with us in our hearts and on our lips. We are to hold the Word of God sacred and gladly hear and learn it—not just on Sunday mornings, but all the time! (See Martin Luther’s Large Catechism on the Third Commandment.)

For in the end, it is not our efforts that make the day of rest holy, but the Word of God. The Word of God is “the sanctuary above all sanctuaries,” as Luther says. It is the lamp to our feet that lights our path (Psalm 119:105). It is “the treasure which sanctifies everything,” even our entire lives. It makes us holy as it declares to us the wonders of what our Savior has done. It clothes us with the righteousness that our Savior won for us at the cross. It gives us the promised rest for our souls when we come to our Lord weary and burdened. This is why God’s people continue to gather around the Means of Grace until the day of our Lord’s coming, not out of a sense of obligation, but because of the blessings He has for us there.

? Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

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“Sanctify us by the truth, Your Word is truth.” We often hear our pastors speak this prayer of Jesus from John 17 after reading the text for the sermon. But this implies that the Gospel will be proclaimed in the sermon because without it, no sanctification can happen. Luther commented: “[W]herever the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit comes and the Word sanctifies the Church.”¹

In 2021, the synod directed the ELS Circuit Visitors to develop a definition of excellence in preaching and teaching. It was observed in the strategic planning (Tell of Jesus and His Love) that by and large, our ELS preachers have been trained well and, trusting the power of the Gospel, make sure they declare it every time they preach. But that this might be preserved among us, such a definition has been supplied.

This is not just intended for our preachers, but that the hearers also may be trained to listen to sermons in a salutary fashion. This may serve as a valuable study for Bible class over a few sessions and another tool in instructing our confirmands, youth and adult.

Definition of Excellence in Preaching and Teaching

Since the preaching and teaching of the Word of God saves the souls of those who hear by leading them to Christ, the faithful pastor strives for excellence in his preaching and teaching. Preaching and teaching are not identical. By nature, preaching is declaratory; teaching can be more interactive. Yet much of what makes for excellent preaching also applies to excellent teaching. In the church, excellent preaching and teaching:

1. Faithfully expound the Holy Scriptures;
2. Properly distinguish between the Law and the Gospel;
3. Apply the Law and the Gospel specifically to the lives of those who hear it;
4. Use logical organization to produce a clear, coherent, unified message; and
5. Employ appropriate rhetorical principles to engage hearers.

¹ Martin Luther on Holy Baptism: Sermons to the People (1525-39), ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, CPH 2018 p. 104

1 Excellent preaching and teaching faithfully expound the Holy Scriptures.

The pastor does not speak for himself, but in the stead of Christ (Luke 10:16). He therefore bases the sermon on a portion (text) or portions (a series of related texts) of the Holy Scriptures, studies them in their original languages, evaluates them in their immediate and broader contexts, and mines them for their major ideas and applications for the spiritual benefit of those who hear. If a particular text contains a *sedes doctrinae* (a major doctrinal proof passage) for a specific doctrine of Scripture, the preacher may highlight that doctrine in his sermon.

In the classroom, the pastor also prepares to teach faithfully by studying Scripture. Even in courses not directly related to a specific portion of Scripture (e.g., a course in Reformation history or a catechetical lesson), the instructor remains faithful to Scripture and teaches all things in the light of God's truth.

2 Excellent preaching and teaching properly distinguish between the Law and the Gospel.

Ministers both young and old can continually grow in the art of properly distinguishing Law and Gospel in both the pulpit and the classroom. The Law and the Gospel are to be declared in every sermon (Luke 24:46-47), drawn out of the Scripture on which the sermon is based. The preacher faithfully proclaims what God has commanded in the Law primarily to expose and condemn sin, but also to guide God's people in their daily life. Furthermore, preachers recognize the Law's limits: the Law neither saves nor has the power to change hearts. God has reserved that work for the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, while the pastor proclaims both the Law and the Gospel, the Gospel predominates. He proclaims Christ's active obedience and His passive obedience, boldly declaring the promises of Christ's resurrection: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The pastor directs people to Christ, who justifies and sanctifies them by the Spirit in the means of grace (Matthew 28:19-20).

3 Excellent preaching and teaching apply the Law and the Gospel specifically to the lives of those who hear it.

The pastor strives to apply the Law and the Gospel to each individual in a personal manner (including himself), driving each to repentance with the Law and then absolving each with the blood of Christ (Romans 3:23-26).

Faithful preaching and teaching also distinguish between justification and sanctification, recognizing that the Spirit accomplishes both through the proclamation of God's Word. In the realm of sanctification, the preacher seeks timely applications for the lives of the people he serves while directing hearers to Christ as the One who changes hearts and lives.

Pastors also regularly direct believers' minds and hearts to the Sacraments, recalling the blessings of baptism and pointing to the promised blessings received in the Lord's Supper.

In applying the truths of Law and Gospel, the pastor will employ relevant illustrations, examples, and metaphors of those truths from Scripture and everyday life.

4 Excellent preaching and teaching use logical organization to produce a clear, coherent, unified message.

In sermons, the pastor intends to drive home either a single clear point or perhaps two or three related points that are relevant to the lives of God's people. To that end, he will employ an easy-to-follow structure connecting every major thought to a central theme, oriented toward accomplishing a goal. Generally, the goal of any sermon or structured lesson will be to bestow on the hearers God's blessings in Christ so that they can return joyfully to their vocations assured of their salvation and that Christ is their Lord and companion in all aspects of life (Hebrews 13:5-6).

5 Excellent preaching and teaching employ appropriate rhetorical principles to engage hearers.

Since the sermon is a public address, preachers apply a ministerial use of *ethos* (properly representing one's self) and *pathos* (proper use of emotion) in their preaching, delivering the sermon with a sense of earnestness and urgency, yet with a loving demeanor. In this regard, the preacher will not neglect matters such as eye contact and achieving an appropriate tone, cadence, and volume in his preaching.

The Lord has blessed each pastor with differing gifts and abilities. Yet in the pursuit of excellence, no matter whether the pastor reads from his manuscript, speaks extemporaneously from an outline, or has his sermon completely memorized, he will strive to have his sermon in hand to the best of his ability.

Conclusion

Faithful preparation, logical organization, and proper division and application of the Law and the Gospel belong in both the pulpit and the classroom. In addition to deepening the students' understanding of Scripture, a pastor's teaching—just as his preaching—serves to save souls through bestowing Christ and His gifts.

The aforementioned definition of excellence in preaching and teaching is an ideal, something to which faithful pastors can aspire. Yet ideals are things of which we all fall short. However, faithful pastors understand and recognize that these are the primary areas where they can hone and improve their skills as preachers and teachers. When we fall short, we bring our shortcomings and failures to the cross of Christ, where our Savior absolves us with His own blood. His unceasing love moves us to continually grow in His Word and in our skills at proclaiming it.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod Circuit Visitor Conference 2022

Assigned by the ELS 5-Year Strategic Plan: "Tell of Jesus and His Love"



- Extended Abstract -
REV. A.J. HAMILTON

THE 2023 ANNUAL CONVENTION
of the **EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD**

June 18-22, 2023, **BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE**
Mankato, Minnesota

Dr. Luther's explanations of the articles of our creed, found in the *Small Catechism*, are deeply devotional and personal. **I believe!** That means that though I have not seen, I am certain. Not that I have chosen it, but the truth has been impressed on me, preached to me, and shown to me, and the truth has won me over: **that God has made me.** I am not a product of random chance or a happy accident. I am not an autonomous, utterly free agent. But when I was nothing, God designed and built and gave life to me as the object of His love. God made me, and all of us human beings, for Himself. The Psalmist proclaims it to us: *Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;* (Psalm 100:3 NKJ, emphasis added.) The Psalmist then says: *We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

In history, in the Bible, the distinctive, eternal, God-given spiritual and bodily life begins in our humanity—as the Image of God in His creation—begins with the words: *[The LORD God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature* (Genesis 2:7 ESV).

I am not only flesh, but spirit also, made to be eternal. I am not only a soul, but also flesh, made to subsist. I am made to see and hear, taste, touch, and smell; created to take it all in when God's bounties are set before me. Even in the original, innocent creation, we find a blessed dependency in the life of the body, primed to live by receiving everything from God as a gift. For us, in the beginning, God made day and night, breathable air, dry land and seas, vegetation and trees to bear fruit, and great lights to mark seasons and days and years and give light on the earth. God made it all with our human life in mind. I believe that God has made me and all creatures: all the fish and birds, beasts and creeping things. He has made all things, visible and invisible. All these owe their existence to Him.

Announcing the goodness He found in all the things He was making, God nevertheless determined: *It is not good for man to be alone.* The marriage of Adam and Eve in Eden is the beginning of marriage and family and all human connection. Home and governmental authority derive from it, and the church is found there.

By faith, David praised God in the Psalms:

You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Psalm 139:13-15 ESV

The real you, according to the Bible, is both body and spirit, dust of the earth and breath of life, joined together in one living being, given by God. In the secret place, God knit you together and gave you flesh and bone, tissues and organs and muscles and nerves and veins and vessels, all coming together to make you: a beautiful, purposeful creature.

This body matters to God. It is His creation. It is redeemed by Him, bought with His own blood. It is cleansed from sin and blame and set apart for Him by His Spirit. He will not forget it. He will keep watch over it. With His final, gracious intervention at the Last Day, He will remember it as He remembered Noah and his family in the ark. He will remember this body with great and gracious works. He will vindicate it once and for all²: *God the Father, who created this body; God the Son who redeemed this body; God the Holy Ghost who sanctified this body to be His Temple.*

Life is a gift. The body is a gift. Bodily life in connection with God and with His Church and with one another is a gift. Mark Mattes paraphrases the Catechism to this effect:

*"Latent within the word 'give'... is forensic justification. When Luther explains the First Article of the creed in the Small Catechism, he associates God's creative work with giving. 'I believe that God has **created** me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves.' And this work of creation is tied to that of redemption: 'All this is done out of pure, fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!' That is, our creation (out of nothing) is not based on our ability to achieve merit through good works; instead, it comes entirely as a gift. Nor is it based on our worthiness."³*

As it is with every gift according to sin, the body meets abuse. Sometimes we are reckless in pursuit of sinful pleasures. We treat the body carelessly. We sin against it with gluttony, selfish self-indulgence, or neglect. Then we curse it when it breaks down or disappoints us. On the other hand, sometimes something goes wrong and we lose our minds with fear. We perceive a danger of some kind, and all our courage fails us. We panic. Perhaps we hide. We are suddenly terrified of what might happen to this body. Would it not be something great to find a middle path?

¹ SC II.

² The last enemy to be destroyed is death (I Corinthians 15:26 ESV).

³ Mark Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017. p. 130.

⁴ Quoted in Mattes, p.31.

Martin Luther wrote in his *‘Disputation Concerning Man’*: “It is through scriptural revelation that we learn that ‘man is a creature of God consisting of body and a living soul, made in the beginning after the image of God, without sin, so that he should procreate and rule over the created things, and never die.’”⁴

God’s Word provides a narrative accounting for life in the body. God’s Word reveals the body’s **fearful** and **wonderful** creation. God’s Word accounts for our present state of moral degeneracy and bodily bondage to decay. God’s Word declares the reconciliation accomplished for us bodily, in Christ, through the cross. God’s Word promises true and everlasting restoration in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. God’s Word announces mercy extended to us in the Means of Grace.

John Kleinig, in his masterful work *Wonderfully Made*, asserts: “Most people see the spiritual as the opposite of the physical and material... in contrast, the biblical view is that what is spiritual has to do with the Holy Spirit.”⁵ So it follows: “paradoxically, my spiritual life, the life that is created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, is always lived in the body.”⁶

As a Shepherd watchfully keeping His sheep, the Lord Jesus said: “I have come into the world that they may have life and have it to the full.” In a voice we have come to know and recognize and love, He speaks to us: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,⁷ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26 ESV).

We come into the Presence of God sinful and unclean, defiled by our sins and by sins committed against us.

“But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.’ This is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body has water poured over it, though it cannot receive anything but water, and meanwhile the Word is spoken so that the soul may grasp it. Since the water and the Word together constitute one Baptism, body and soul shall be saved and live forever.”⁸

“God [also] gives us an **edible** word. In the sacrament of the altar, God joins his word to the elements of earthly bread and wine so that the sacred cup is a participation in the blood of Christ once shed for the forgiveness of sins, and the bread of the Lord’s Supper is a participation in the very body once laid low in death to forever remove the sins of all the world.”⁹

As Jesus deals with us like this in terms of forgiveness, life, and salvation, we learn from Him to treat the body with gratitude and with the awe it deserves because of its fearful and wonderful creation. We learn to treat the body with love and respect. We learn from Jesus to handle the body that way because He Himself handled it that way—even in its weaknesses and mortality, defilement and failings and shortcomings. He honored the body. He gave it a dignity borrowed from Himself. *The body is not for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And: You are not your own, you were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body. After all, it’s the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling of the Triune God.*

In all God’s precious thoughts (how vast are the sum of them!), He thought of you. His thoughts toward you are good and more than the sand. Christ imparts everlasting priceless value to you—not

just vague, idealized impersonal humanity, but you. You are one whom He has redeemed, *not with gold or silver, but with His Holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that you should be His own.*

We are naturally at a loss to express these things. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me (Psalm 139:6). As little children learn, we begin to learn the language of confession, prayer, and praise and thanksgiving as God gifts us with the words. He places His words in our hearts and in our minds. He places them on our tongues to use in conversation with each other, to confess them before the world, and to speak back to Him. In this way, we begin to reflect His glory as we were made to do. It is precisely in connection with our creation that the Psalmist says: *I will praise you* (Psalm 139:14).

*It is truly good, right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to God¹⁰ through Jesus Christ our Lord, also for our body and life, for our times and seasons, and for the days and years He gives us to mark¹¹ and enjoy. He also blesses us to share that joy with one another. It is written: *The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.* (Psalm 145:9). God impress it on our hearts for such a time as this.*

“Presently, we are confronted with so much physical, social, moral, and spiritual ugliness that it is easy for us to be enraged and deranged by it. As we consider how badly the body is used and abused, we can all too easily side with the cynics rather than the angels. But if we listen to what God has to say about it, we can see it as he sees it, both in its potential, eternal glory and in its actual, present misery...”¹²

John Kleinig would go on to persuade us:

Christian faith and Christian moral teaching are best communicated positively, by providing an attractive vision of what is right and good and true, a theological vision of the beauty of physical human life and of the world as God’s creation, an appealing vision of the beauty of marriage and sexual intercourse between husband and wife, a persuasive vision of the beauty of sexual chastity and marital faithfulness—and all of that personally by example, rather than by argument!”¹³

It is something distinctive, something great—to learn to handle the body with reverence rather than self-indulgence or carelessness... and even though we get damaged in the body, grow old and die, to handle the body with hope and not despair.

To that end, God bless you. Through your ears and eyes and senses, God bless you **bodily** to see and hear and receive His Word and His gifts from heaven like a shower of rain and snow falling to you. God’s **peace** extends to you, body and soul and all, in His Word, and His peace attends you as you go your way. His Word accomplishes its purpose to quicken you and bless your faith. Then it returns to Him again, ascending in praise: hymn and chant and high thanksgiving¹⁴ to the Lord our God.

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well*
(Psalm 139:14 ESV).

⁴ Quoted in Mattes, p.31.

⁵ John Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021, p.3-4.

⁶ Kleinig, p.3.

⁷ John 10:10, emphasis added. –to Bodily Life He adds new Spiritual Life and the Life everlasting.

⁸ LC IV 44-46, Tappert p. 442.

⁹ Harold L. Senkbell, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart*, Lexham Press, Copyright Harold L. Senkbell, 2019, p.14. Emphasis added.

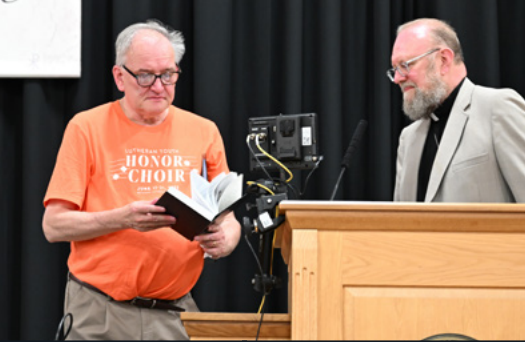
¹⁰ The Preface to the Service of Holy Communion, ELH p. 51, 73, 99.

¹¹ Cf. Genesis 1:14.

¹² Kleinig, p.16-17.

¹³ Kleinig, p.16-17.

¹⁴ ELH Hymn #181, stanza 7.





RESPONDING TO NEW TESTAMENT FORM CRITICISM



Sculpture of the **Apostle Luke**, **St. Isaac's Cathedral** in St. Petersburg, Russia.

by **REV. DR. A. ANDREW DAS**, Contributing Writer
ST. TIMOTHY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Lombard, Illinois

Imagine a student attending a college or university that is not biblically conservative (the vast majority of institutions of higher education). Were that student to take a course introducing the Bible or the New Testament, the student would typically be exposed to a discipline called “form criticism.” The gist is that there are certain tendencies in how parables, miracles, or the sayings of Jesus would be relayed in the oral traditions leading to the written gospels. The idea is that, if you know these rules, you could peel away the later additions to get at an earlier, more original version of that story, if not a version that might have come from Jesus.

A frequent analogy for the process is the “telephone” game. Imagine fifteen people in a row. The first one in line whispers a story to the second. The second person then shares that story from memory with the third, and so on, all the way to the fifteenth person. If you’ve played the game, the version the last person announces is quite different from the original version. The critic’s conclusion? As traditions about Jesus were passed along from one person to the next, they too would change.

A little turnabout is fair play. We should be critical of this critical theory. The telephone game is not a very good way of imagining how the traditions about Jesus were passed along. The first-century world was an oral culture, far better at remembering what was heard than we are. We moderns have become dependent on written text. Also, a typical telephone story does not have a “form” as does a parable or miracle or controversy narrative.

The gospel stories about Jesus were often quite memorable, and the disciples would have been very motivated to remember them. Jesus reminds his disciples in Luke 10:23b-24, “*Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see the things you see but didn’t see it; to hear the things you hear but didn’t hear them*” (CSB). The disciples and first Christians were relaying treasured memories about all that Jesus said and did!

Further, why would we exclude the possibility that Jesus’ disciples were keeping notes along the way about what they were witnessing? Luke tells us that many undertook “to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:1). Luke could draw on those records as he wrote his gospel.

Perhaps the most important objection to the form critic’s telephone game analogy: Why assume thirteen intermediaries between the first and the last? It is as if the original generation that had watched and heard Jesus in action had ascended into heaven with Him. No, many of the original eyewitnesses were still alive when the gospel authors penned their accounts. Some of the gospel authors were themselves eyewitnesses. The second person in that line of fifteen, if not the original witness, would relay the account far more accurately.

The New Testament repeatedly stresses how the authors were relying on eyewitnesses for what they were writing. Luke certainly did (Luke 1:2). John makes it a point to men-

tion his own witnessing of the events (John 21:24; cf. 19:35). He even repeated the point in 1 John 1:1-2: *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands ... and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you.* 1 Peter 5:1 is another instance of a New Testament author's mention of how he had witnessed what had happened (cf. Acts 10:39, 41). Judas' successor in Acts 1:21-22 had to have been "from among the men who accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. ... until the day he was taken up from us..."

Luke records several speeches in his Book of Acts. Already within decades after Jesus, His followers were providing the evidence for their faith, and that evidence stands against the form critic. Consider Peter's speeches in Acts 2, 3, 5, and 10 and Paul's in Acts 13. Both men were sensitive to the need to present evidence for the faith. They both begin by proclaiming not only Jesus' life and death, but also His resurrection (Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-15; 5:30-31; 10:36-42; 13:23-25). Jesus is risen! Next, they emphasize how they are witnesses to these things (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31). Then they typically explain how what was happening with Jesus was amazingly fulfilling what the Scriptures had foretold (Acts 2:25-28; 3:22-26; 10:43; 13:33-35). Only then does Peter or Paul call his hearers to repent (Acts 2:38-39; 3:17-20; 5:31; 10:42; 13:38-41).

Paul, at one point in his own writings, refers to over five hundred (!) eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:5-6), many of whom were still alive. Subtext: The readers were welcome to go ask them about their testimony to the risen Jesus. Isn't the same subtext behind every mention of eyewitness testimony in the New Testament documents?

Form critics even go so far as to claim that the first Christians made up stories about Jesus as part of their Spirit-inspired preaching. This is certainly not how the biblical authors describe the process. The Apostle Paul conveys Jesus' teaching against divorce and remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, and he is very careful to distinguish between what Jesus as Lord had said and what he himself was saying, albeit as the inspired apostle (1 Corinthians 7:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:40). In Acts, the prophets would speak "by the Spirit" (11:28) or attribute their words to the Spirit (21:11) rather than Jesus.

In other words, the New Testament authors were very careful to parse whether the words came from Jesus in His earthly ministry or from the Spirit or Jesus at a later point in time. To make this point in a different way: Even though the apostles would grapple with whether the gentiles needed to be circumcised in Acts 15, no one made up a Jesus saying for the sake of that discussion. The only reference to circumcision in the gospels (John 7:22) seems positive about it.

The New Testament authors were eyewitnesses or had consulted with those who were, and those eyewitnesses were still alive at the time the New Testament writings began to circulate. They could verify the gospel accounts. Jesus' followers treasured their memories of what He had said and done and did their very best to convey it as accurately as possible. They did not confuse what Jesus had said while on the earth with what the Spirit had later revealed. They were better at remembering His teachings and His life because they lived in a different culture than do we, an oral culture, and they wanted to make sure that the evidence for Jesus was just as clear to their hearers and readers. We are grateful for their faithful, careful witness to the precious, saving message of what Jesus did in His life and His death, and, as attested by so many, in His resurrection.

Rev. Dr. A. Andrew Das is the Niebuhr Distinguished Chair and Professor of Religious Studies at Elmhurst University, an internationally recognized biblical scholar and author or editor of over ten books.

- 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

ELS Apologetics Resources
els.org/apologetics

"Q&A Leading to Christ" Flyers
els.org/apologetics/qalc



Recommended Reading:

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Kregel, 1990).

Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).



Memorial to the Christian Warrior

Introductory Remarks

REV. GLENN OBENBERGER, PRESIDENT, ELS

Dedication of the ELS Military Monument
on the campus of Bethany Lutheran College

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

I believe some of you present were here on November 11th, 2019 (Veterans Day), when we broke ground for this monument. No one was looking for shade that day. It was sub-zero weather. So it's a beautiful day today as we gather here for this dedication rite.

I want to speak just a few words about some mischaracterizations about what we are doing with this ELS Military Monument:

- One mischaracterization was that this is a war memorial. It is not a war memorial. That is for governments to erect. War is a result of sin and not to be ever glorified by us. So it is not a war memorial.
- I heard that this is evidence of Christian nationalism among us. No, it is not. We do, as Christians, based on the Word of God, ... promote patriotism among us according to Scripture ... for whatever country in which a Christian finds himself. We do not enter the secular political discourse in the Church.
- I heard a critique of the statues of these warriors—that they should not be showing their weapons. Again, that is wrong. This is a vocation... the warrior... that is to stand up to and defeat evil on behalf of the citizens of the country. And we need warriors trained... yes, even to kill. There is no shame in this honorable work by governments which do not bear the sword in vain.

This monument is a unique opportunity for our synod and our college:

[W]e do appreciate all those who serve us in this capacity. We are concerned, certainly, about warriors who have especially gone to war... who have had to use their weapons... and had to kill. Christian veterans have to struggle with that because they think of the fifth commandment, "You shall not kill." But what that commandment is really saying is: "You shall not murder." There are vocations where, again, in the face of evil, "kill" is an activity that has to happen. We don't like it, but we live in a fallen world and we need that protection.

One of the other unique things that I think we can recognize here is that here on this Christian college campus, we have this monument; again, for our students to recognize that this is a God-pleasing vocation. Whereas most institutions of higher learning look down upon the warrior, we understand that as Christians, we can even serve in this role in a God-pleasing manner. And we want our brothers and sisters who have served our country in the past and those who serve at present, to know that we recognize their service as a noble work in the sight of God.

So with this monument, we recognize as the Church of our Lord Jesus that through those who have and will continue to serve as warriors, we as Christians may live peaceful and quiet lives, allowing the Gospel to have free course among us and to be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people.

Thank you for attending this rite of dedication as we establish this place for those noble purposes to the glory of God in Jesus' name.

Why This Memorial

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ETHAN BRYANT,
Chief Pilot for the 96th Airlift Squadron,
Minneapolis/St. Paul

- Seven Combat Deployments,
- Bethany Lutheran College, Associate of Arts,
- MSU-Mankato, Bachelors in Aviation



President Obenberger, fellow veterans, and fellow Christians, thank you for the opportunity to briefly speak with you today at the dedication of this remarkable monument.

It might be possible that a similar monument exists where the vocation of warrior for the Christian individual is recognized and honored, but if it does, I certainly have never seen or heard of it. Part of me does understand why. Turning the other cheek is about the only traditionally Christian virtue that is still encouraged by modern culture, and while this is very convenient for our enemies, it has served to make depictions of Christians going off to battle seem incongruous to say the least, though to previous generations it would not have seemed so strange. In addition, the moral murkiness of modern conflict and the overpowering Christian desire to live a quiet and peaceful life make the employment of devastating and overwhelming force against other humans an unappealing prospect to many.

But in Professor Jaspersen's brilliant sculptures, we can see two warriors that see things not as they wish them to be, but as they are. While separated by 500 years of time, they are both dressed for imminent battle, showing that while many things change, they know mankind is not perfectible on this earth, and death and warfare are constants in this fallen world. And rest assured, they both know that in service to their God-ordained civil authorities, they will find themselves serving under many a fool and villain. But as we see their heads bowed as they study the scriptures, despite this horrible reality, they are called to protect the innocent and serve their fellow men. They are reminded that though this world might not see peace, their souls are already at peace with their God.

Not depicted but, I think, implied is the family they are leaving behind as they go off to war. I think this aspect of the warrior's life should always be remembered. Maybe there is a wife left

to run the farm or business, or a young son or daughter thrust into premature responsibility. Possibly a letter or picture from home is tucked into the pages of those Bibles, maybe even a letter, written and sealed but only to be delivered to a loved one in the event they aren't able to return.

Some are called to this vocation early in life or brought up to it as the "family business." But for myself, I was just over there 22 years ago as I watched the towers come down. For many of us, the twin facts that we were young people of a certain age and our country was under attack was enough to send us down the path. "Service" and "Sacrifice" were just abstractions to me then, if I'm being honest. However, if one finds oneself in this profession, a Christian will stand out as different as they profess the faith that precedes reason.

On one of my deployments to Afghanistan, I was assigned as an advisor to an Afghan Air Force squadron as they learned to operate C130 aircraft. Over many months, I worked and flew closely with my Afghan friends and we came to know each other well. Understandably, the topic of religion was a delicate one, to the point that I was ordered to not bring a Bible with me, though that was one order that I quietly disobeyed. There was a young Afghan aviator named Safi who I flew with often as we supported operations against the Haqqani network and other Pakistan-based terror organizations. Forgive me for not trying to replicate his Dari accent, but one day Safi told me: "You know, our enemies love death, while for most of us, we fear death above all things. You Christians, though, you hate death, but you aren't afraid of it!" A few months after I rotated home, I got word that my friend Safi had been killed. He was killed by those who love death. But he was right. Christian warriors hate death. We hate war. We hate the pain, we hate the destruction, the trauma, the heartache, the WASTE! But we know why these things exist. We know the darkness; but, in Christ, we aren't afraid.

IMPACT IN HAITI

by **REV. PATRICK ERNST**, Contributing Writer
ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, Frankenmuth, Mich.

Haiti has been impacted again and again, impacted by forces that have sent it spiraling downward. You might have heard about Haiti when a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck in 2010, leaving upwards of 300,000 people dead and over 1.5 million homeless. Maybe it was more recently when Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated in 2021, sparking political instability and deteriorating security in the country that had struggled to build a functioning democracy for generations. What remains is a weak central government unable to control gang violence and stabilize the economy. The situation faced by Haitian residents is dire. On top of everything else, Haitian culture is steeped in voodoo, a traditional religion that operates with fear and superstition. These impacts ripple through the country like that earthquake, leaving destruction and despair in their wakes.

There's one impact that's leaving something different behind: a generation of children with faith in Christ and hope for the future. **Branch Lutheran Schools of Haiti** (Branch Schools) is a WELS affiliate organization that began when several WELS organizations offered relief and gospel outreach to orphanages in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. That first small impact grew into Branch Schools, which now funds three Lutheran elementary schools at three orphanages—two preschools and kindergartens and one middle school—serving 1,100 students this year and employing 57 individuals to give those students Christ along with quality education and basic nutrition. The schools and orphanages are funded through the Branch Schools organization and the donations it receives. Haitian WELS-trained pastor **Rev. Rona Abraham** oversees the spiritual integrity of the schools, and through the schools, Lutheran congregations have begun to form with several hundred people in weekly services. **Rev. Terry Schultz**, who formerly served in the ELS mission fields of South America, continues to serve as Rev. Abraham's mentor. For more information, visit www.branchlutherschoolshaiti.org.

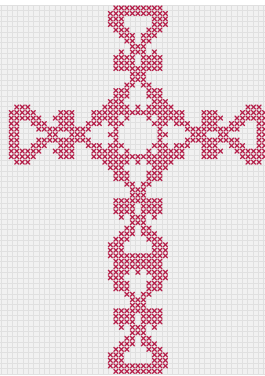
Let's go back to impact. May 11-13, 2023, the Planning Committee at St. John's Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan, held a rummage sale in the church gymnasium with the proceeds designated for Branch Schools. The sale itself garnered widespread donations of items from congregation and community members and generated \$3,200 in proceeds.

More than that, the sale is a testament to the impact of our congregations far beyond our membership in many directions. The announcements made about the sale after services, as well as a mention in a sermon as an application of Christian service and vocation, met the ear of a non-member who faithfully listens to St. John's weekly radio broadcast of the Sunday service. That community member was moved by the humanitarian disaster in Haiti and the work done by Branch Schools, and he made an anonymous \$10,000 donation to Branch Schools so the work would continue. When we might think our congregations are limited in their reach and impact, we should think again.

The story of Branch Schools and the story of our sale are reminders that the simple work we do has an impact that multiplies with God's blessing. And as much as we give and support the work of the Haitian schools, it's the students there who will make the greatest impact through their faith and Christian vocations in a country torn by the effects of sin.

He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:6). Often it's in the worst impacts that God prepares the soil for joy to be sown, the joy of the Gospel and the joy of human flourishing. Christ is the vine, and the greatest impact Branch Schools, or any Christian endeavor, can hope to have is by connecting souls to him (John 15:5).

Cross-Stitch is 25 Years Old



by **REV. STEVEN PETERSEN**, Contributing Writer
FORMER ELS WORLD MISSIONS ADMINISTRATOR

Cross-stitch is 25 years old, but its roots sink much farther back in time. Somewhere around 60 years ago, ELS Women's Mission Societies began to sprout around the country. Primarily, the seed bed was the Ladies' Aid groups that were so common among our synod years ago. The good hearts of the Ladies' Aid put out an offering basket on the kitchen counter at potluck meals in the church basement. They collected pocket change in "mite boxes." They received memorial donations from members. What to do with that money? Missions, of course!

The Ladies' Aid groups in the congregations of our synod's various circuits were invited to meet together in order to learn more about home and foreign outreach, to pray for the work and the missionaries, and to provide support with the offerings they had collected for the cause. In this way, chapters of the ELS Women's Mission Society were formed nationwide. The gatherings became annual events with congregations taking turns hosting the meetings.

What a blessing the Society is to our synod's mission program. Each annual meeting became a source of information and inspiration. Sometimes furloughing missionaries made presentations. Always news of developments and dreams were shared. And year after year, the ladies of the ELS contributed funds to assist in the work.

Twenty-five years ago, it was suggested that these many ELS Women's Mission Societies consider pooling their resources in order to increase the impact of their support. Cross-stitch was proposed as a way to "stitch together" these societies into a network of like-minded ladies to take on large projects. What sorts of projects? Why not build a church?

The thatched roof Peruvian village of Pelejo lies along the banks of the Huallaga River. The river flows north through the jungle toward Iquitos, once the rubber-producing capital of the world, where it joins several other rivers and bends eastward through Brazil—the Amazon.

Pelejo was a great place from which to reach out with the Gospel in the rainforest. So the ladies of the ELS built a church there! Its modest wood plank floor and walls became home to a small congregation of Lutherans. Like the members of most world missions, these are brothers and sisters in Christ. True, they don't look like us or talk like us—but they believe like us. Someday we'll meet them in heaven.

In the 25 years since its inception, Cross-stitch has raised more than \$600,000 in support of ELS home and foreign missions. Just think: orphans in India are cared for and clothed; meals are provided for school children in the jungle in Peru; and hymnbooks are purchased for budding home mission congregations in the US, to note only a few projects achieved. More important than the finances is the fellowship. Support for missions is prompted by the shared Christian faith among the members of the ELS. We're all in this together!

This 25th anniversary is a good time to say thanks: to the ladies of our synod who have shared resources for missions; to our missionaries and their families who have brought the Gospel to places we can't go ourselves; and to God for blessing the outreach efforts of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF GOD'S GRACE

Heritage Lutheran Church

13401 Johnny Cake Ridge Road, Apple Valley, Minnesota 55124
Sunday, October 22, 2023

Service at 10:00 a.m.
 Dinner to Follow

RSVP by October 12, 2023
 952-431-6225 / office@heritagelutheran.org

BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE

POMP & CIRCUMSTANCE at SCARVILLE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

Four years ago, Scarville Lutheran School was about to begin a new endeavor. The school board, Pastor Joshua Skogen, and a few teachers were preparing for the first 9th grader in the school's long history. We recognize that "unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1). All glory goes to the LORD for motivating and blessing the work and support of many individuals. The School celebrated the culmination of this work, giving thanks and praise to God at our first high school graduation on May 28th of this year. There were two graduates: Allison Rygh, daughter of Bill and Laurie Rygh, and Micah Smith, son of Rev. Glenn and Maria Smith.

Since he had been involved in the development of the high school from its inception, Pastor Skogen was chosen by the school board to give the graduation address. He gave a devotion based on Colossians 2:6-7, too. Both graduates also briefly addressed the attendees. Bill Rygh, the school board president, presented the diplomas.

Allison was the first high school student at Scarville Lutheran School. As the years went on, other students gave her company in the church basement, where much of the instruction takes place. At the beginning of her senior year, Micah Smith transferred to the school. Both of them will be attending Bethany Lutheran College in the fall!

Scarville Lutheran School began in 1927 while Rev. Justin Petersen served as pastor. Christ and Him crucified forms and fashions every aspect of the school. Chapel is held daily and every course is taught from a biblical worldview. The school utilizes the classical model of education with the hopes of producing logical, discerning, truth-loving, virtuous, and articulate Christian adults. This fall, the school will have eight students in the high school.

