

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



A light heart

It is in Lent that Jesus gives us the very words that will make our hearts light. *Page 10*

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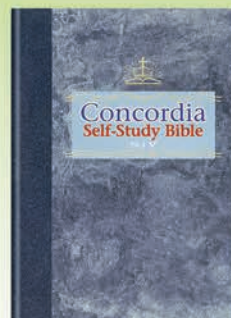
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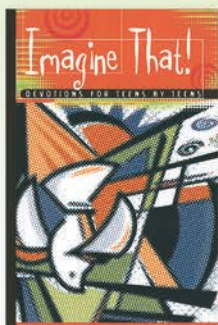
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*May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors;
may he never leave us nor forsake us.* — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

"What is truth?"

Pastor Glenn Schwanke reminds us of Pilate's question and how it is still asked today—especially on our college campuses (p. 18). But he also reminds us of God's answer—an answer we can find in the Bible: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

The season of Lent is the perfect time to reexamine this truth—we are saved only through Jesus. Our back-page article reminds us of this opportunity to be in the Word and to hear again the amazing story of how Jesus saved us. Staying in the Word year-long through daily devotions (p. 23) also allows the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and our understanding of a gospel message that we need to share.

We are reminded of the importance of sharing these truths about Jesus in this month's "Confessions of faith" article (p. 14). There we meet Sean Young and learn about his discovery of the truth of the gospel—a message he now is involved in sharing around the world.

Even though some question if there is absolute truth, others are searching for it. And we need to be ready to tell them what we know. Read how one Hmong pastor seized the opportunity to proclaim God's truth when a church body in Vietnam contacted him to learn more about law and gospel after viewing his sermons online (p. 20).

Julie Wietzke



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ORIGINS: TWO MODELS

Many thanks to Dr. Eggert for “Origins: Two Models” [Dec. 2015, Jan. 2016]. May these articles serve to encourage a synodwide discussion of creation apologetics. Many or most WELS called workers see evolution as a significant issue for the church but hold various views regarding the proper way to proceed. This was a primary conclusion from the fall 2015 survey of all WELS called workers conducted by the Lutheran Science Institute (www.LutheranScience.org).

As Lutherans, we hold to the biblical teaching that faith is created and nurtured solely through the gospel in Word and sacrament. Human reason (including science) has no power whatsoever in creating or in strengthening faith. Yet reason does have a place in apologetics (in our defense of the faith), as Dr. Eggert so skillfully shows in his December article. Reason (including science) can sometimes blunt temptation for believers by pointing out logical inconsistencies, which are often inherent in unbelief. How and to what extent should this be applied as we teach the revealed truth of creation to our children? That and other questions stand before us.

*Mark Bergemann
New Berlin, Wisconsin*

I agree with Dr. Eggert’s article “Origins: Two Models” [Jan.] but I was disappointed with his comments about Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum. In this day and age, when evolutionists and secular scientists keep saying it’s the Bible against science, there are creation scientists that will say science supports the Bible.

*Dean Mitzner
Balaton, Minnesota*

It was disappointing to read Arthur Eggert’s article dismissing creationism [Jan. 2016]. More than half a century ago, as a naïve freshman at a Lutheran university, I was indoctrinated by an evolutionist professor. While I never lost my faith, I am convinced that I would have soon begun questioning

why we should be blamed for sin and why we even need a Savior if we are actually evolving upward. Many youth today, sadly, may be following that same path.

However, I have often thanked God that I soon discovered creationism. Today, I regard creation science, when joined with Scripture, as a valuable tool for thwarting Satan’s efforts to destroy people’s faith. Creationism, of course, is not a means of grace. Yet I believe we are making a serious mistake if we ignore the natural knowledge of God (Psalm 19:1), which is powerful enough to convict unbelievers of their unbelief (Romans 1:18-21). God himself often referred to nature in his discourse with Job.

*Warren Krug
Racine, Wisconsin*

CHASED BY DEMONS

Your article about PTSD [“Chased by demons,” Nov. 2015] and those it impacts is appreciated. Our veterans and police officers do indeed deserve our utmost thanks, respect, and support! I would just ask that you also remember others who serve their communities and are similarly impacted by the ravages on human lives that occur every day. Unfortunately, PTSD and other mental health impacts are also found

in high percentages of the first responder communities of EMTs, paramedics, and firefighters. While they may not be put in as many personal life-and-death situations and choices as our servicemen and women or our police officers, these public servants regularly experience other peoples’ worst days, where life and possessions are lost or irrevocably impacted.

*Kelly Hanink
Eden Prairie, Minnesota*

LITTLE WHITE LIES

January’s parenting authors did a good job of warning against “white lies.” But unintentionally they also laid a burden of guilt upon those who travel to the wonderful world of make-believe. Honesty is important, but not as important as love. If we are not speaking the truth in love, we are not speaking the truth.

*Rolfe Westendorf
Dalton, Wisconsin*

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Through my Bible in 3 years



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MARCH 2016

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|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Matthew 12:22-50 | 12. Jeremiah 1 | 23. Jer. 17:19-18:23 |
| 2. Matt. 13:1-23 | 13. Jer. 2:1-3:5 | 24. Jer. 19, 20 |
| 3. Matt. 13:24-52 | 14. Jer. 3:6-4:31 | 25. Jer. 21, 22 |
| 4. Matt. 13:53-14:12 | 15. Jer. 5, 6 | 26. Jer. 23 |
| 5. Matt. 14:13-36 | 16. Jer. 7:1-8:3 | 27. Jer. 24, 25 |
| 6. Matt. 15:1-20 | 17. Jer. 8:4-9:22 | 28. Matthew 19:1-22 |
| 7. Matt. 15:21-39 | 18. Jer. 9:23-10:25 | 29. Matt. 19:23-20:28 |
| 8. Matt. 16:1-20 | 19. Jer. 11, 12 | 30. Matt. 20:29-21:22 |
| 9. Matt. 16:21-17:13 | 20. Jer. 13 | 31. Matt. 21:23-46 |
| 10. Matt. 17:14-27 | 21. Jer. 14, 15 | |
| 11. Matt. 18:1-35 | 22. Jer. 16:1-17:18 | |

Louder than words

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. Matthew 1:24,25

Joel C. Seifert

I've never been comfortable with public speaking.

As a pastor, that's not the easiest thing for me to admit. I'm grateful for every chance I get to stand in the pulpit or in front of a class and talk about what God has done for us in love, but there's always a fair dose of self-consciousness, fear, and nerves that I'm never able to shed. I am not better than other Christians, and so many of them quietly serve God so well.

Maybe that's one of the reasons I'm grateful that God tells us about Joseph, Jesus' human stepfather.

The Bible's accounts only mention Joseph a little bit, but in that little bit, God tells us so much. Joseph went through with his marriage to Mary, even though he knew she was pregnant with a child that was not his. Can you imagine the whispers and the glances that would have greeted him everywhere he went? Then he left behind everyone and everything—perhaps including his business as a carpenter—in order to take Mary and the infant Jesus down to Egypt when Herod threatened Christ's life. That couldn't have been easy.

TRUE IMPORTANCE IS FOUND IN GOD'S WORD

Read through the accounts of Joseph, and you'll find wonderful things. But there's one thing you will never hear—Joseph speak. Joseph played an incredibly important role in God's plan of salvation. But it wasn't his words that spoke so loudly. It was his actions.

We tend to notice people who speak powerfully and lead well: a powerful preacher, an influential voice in a meeting, the person who always seems to have the great insight in a Bible class



or knows the perfect thing to say to someone who's struggling. Joseph did not speak a word that was recorded for us, but he listened to God's message. He trusted God's promises, and he followed God's will. And God did incredible things through him.

The quiet people don't often get noticed in this world. . . . But they're so important in God's plan.

GOD STILL WORKS WONDERS THROUGH SILENT SERVANTS

The quiet people don't often get noticed in this world. Maybe they don't often get noticed in our churches either. But they're so important in God's plan. They are women and men who don't stand in pulpits or in front of great groups of people. They might not even be the most comfortable in one-on-one conversations. But they listen to God's

Word. They trust his promises, and they seek to follow his will.

And through them God does wonderful things. Children are raised to know their Savior. Offerings are given to support the spread of the gospel. Church buildings are cleaned and schedules organized. The poor are shown love, and countless prayers are offered on behalf of the sick. These Christians might not say a word, but their actions speak volumes about God's love.

Many Christians celebrate the Festival of St. Joseph on March 19. Consider taking time that day to think about those men and women who silently do so much to serve God and his people. They don't say much, but they listen and they let their faith shine by their actions. Let them hear the same thing we'd want to tell Joseph: Thank you for the way you listen to God's Word. God speaks loudly through your actions.

Contributing editor Joel Seifert is pastor at Shining Mountains, Bozeman, Montana.



Mark Schweden

The One who
secured our eternal
future by his
resurrection tells
us we have no
reason to fear,
and he proved it
by his exit from
the tomb.

Words—and actions— that drive out fear

What are you afraid of?

I'm not talking about the kind of fear that comes suddenly with an approaching severe thunderstorm. Or the kind of fear that grips you in an instant when it feels like you are skidding on an icy winter highway. Or the kind of panicked fear you experience when you realize your little child has wandered away from you in a busy crowd.

The fear I am asking about is the ongoing, relentless fear that takes hold of you over time and doesn't seem to let go. It's the kind of fear that lurks in your consciousness when your company is downsizing and you wonder whether you will still have a job next week. It's the kind of fear that settles into your thinking when you hear about increasing terror attacks—not somewhere across the world but right where you live. It's the kind of fear that comes when you look at the direction in which society is heading and you wonder what kind of world your children will inherit. It's the kind of fear that gnaws at you when you know that you have a family history of cancer or heart disease or Alzheimer's and you are convinced that you will be an inevitable victim of that disease. It's the kind of fear that creeps up on you in the quiet night—the fear that comes from knowing that you are a sinner and that someday, sooner or later, you will face the deadly wages of that sin.

You could, no doubt, add your own fears to that list. But just as those fears threaten to overwhelm us and drive us to despair and hopelessness, we hear some of the sweetest words ever spoken. They were words spoken more than once on the first Easter Sunday. When the women arrived at the tomb of Jesus, an angel appeared to them

and said, "Do not be afraid!" A little later, the risen Jesus himself met the women, and he delivered the very same message: "Do not be afraid!"

These were not just empty words. These were not just words intended to offer cosmetic and momentary comfort in a hopeless situation. These were not words that were intended merely to distract people from some very frightening realities.

No, these were effective and powerful words—words that could be spoken and proclaimed with full authority and promise because of what had happened earlier that morning. The lifeless body of a crucified Savior came alive by his own power. In rising from the dead, he defeated death itself and showed himself to be the One who makes and always keeps his amazing promises.

So when we find ourselves fearing the future and all of the uncertainties in our lives, the One who secured our eternal future by his resurrection tells us we have no reason to fear, and he proved it by his exit from the tomb. When we find ourselves concerned about the church and its mission, the living Savior promises us that the gates of hell itself will not prevail against his church. And when we fear the results of our own sin and failings, the same resurrected Savior assures us, "As far as the east is from the west, that's how far I've taken your sins from you" (cf. Psalm 103:12). Then he adds, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19).

What are you afraid of? Whatever it is, Christ's Easter victory assures us that we do not need to fear anymore.

Light for our path

Why do we say Jesus “rose again” in the creeds?

James F. Pope

Your question addresses a phrase we speak week after week in worship services. When we confess our faith using the Apostles’ Creed, we declare that on “the third day he rose again from the dead.” When we use the Nicene Creed as a confession, we profess that “on the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” Your question will help clarify part of our worship vocabulary.

A SAVIOR WHO DIED AND ROSE

Like many words in our language, the word *again* can have different meanings. It can mean “once more” or “another time.” We can rule out those definitions for *again* in the creeds because Scripture speaks of Jesus dying only once and rising to life only once (Romans 6:9).

Again can also mean “in addition.” Our use of the word *again* in the creeds has that definition in mind. After confessing that Jesus died and was buried, we declare that, in addition, Jesus rose from the dead. In other words, his death was not the end of his life. *In addition* to laying down his life for our sins, Jesus took up his life again, just as he said (John 10:18).

A SAVIOR WHO ROSE, NEVER TO DIE AGAIN

While Jesus’ resurrection was the fulfillment of prophecy, the Lord was not the first person to rise from the dead, was he? The Bible provides several accounts of individuals who died and were raised to life: the son of a widow in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:22), the son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7:15), a brother of two sisters in Bethany (John 11:44), and brothers and sisters of the faith in Jerusalem (Matthew 27:52). But in those and other resurrection accounts in the Bible, the people experienced death a second time. They died, they were raised to life, and they died again. That was not the case with Jesus.

Jesus made that clear when he appeared in a vision to the apostle John on the island of Patmos. To a very startled disciple, Jesus offered these words of comfort: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17,18).

The Savior who died for our sins and “was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25) will not suffer death again. Nor will his followers.

A SAVIOR WHO ROSE AS THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE DEAD

In the Bible’s great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul describes Jesus as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v. 20). In Old Testament times the concept of firstfruits (Exodus 23:19) indicated that while the first portion of the harvest was given to the Lord, it was only the beginning of the harvest. Similarly, Jesus is the first of those raised to life, never to die again. As the firstfruits of that kind of resurrection, there will be others. On the Last Day, the bodies of Christians who died will be raised to life and reunited to their souls. Their bodies will be glorified, and they will never experience death again.

These blessings are possible only because Jesus “rose again,” as we say in the creeds. We make that confession because it is what Scripture states: “We believe that Jesus died and rose again” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Contributing editor James Pope, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

James Pope also answers questions online at wels.net/questions. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

Your
word
is a lamp
for my feet,
a light on
my path.

Psalms 119:105

The dark and solemn hours of Lent bring joy and comfort.

Eric S. Hartzell

You probably have never heard anyone say, “I just love this Lenten time of year because it makes me feel so lighthearted!” It doesn’t seem that Lent would make our hearts light. There are the somber evening services with heavy colors of purple and black. Death is spoken of freely and often, and human weakness and failure are presented in depressing detail. It all culminates on Good Friday with services that focus on the death of Jesus. You just don’t see that much that makes your heart light and happy.

Lent is about the heart. It’s about the cleansing of very dirty hearts with the solvent of the Savior’s blood. Lent tells of Peter’s broken heart when Jesus turned in the courtyard of the high priest and looked straight at Peter—right into that heart that wanted to do

right but did what was wrong. It tells of the hard heart of Judas. “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” (Matthew 26:15) is a question that can only come from a hard heart. It tells of the fearful heart of the young man in the gospel of Mark, a heart which turned and twisted and left its identity as a believer in Jesus in the hands of the enemy as the young man ran away naked into the night (Mark 14:51,52). Our own hearts squirm uncomfortably when we think of the times we also run scared from confessing, “Yes, I am one of them! I am Jesus’ disciple!”

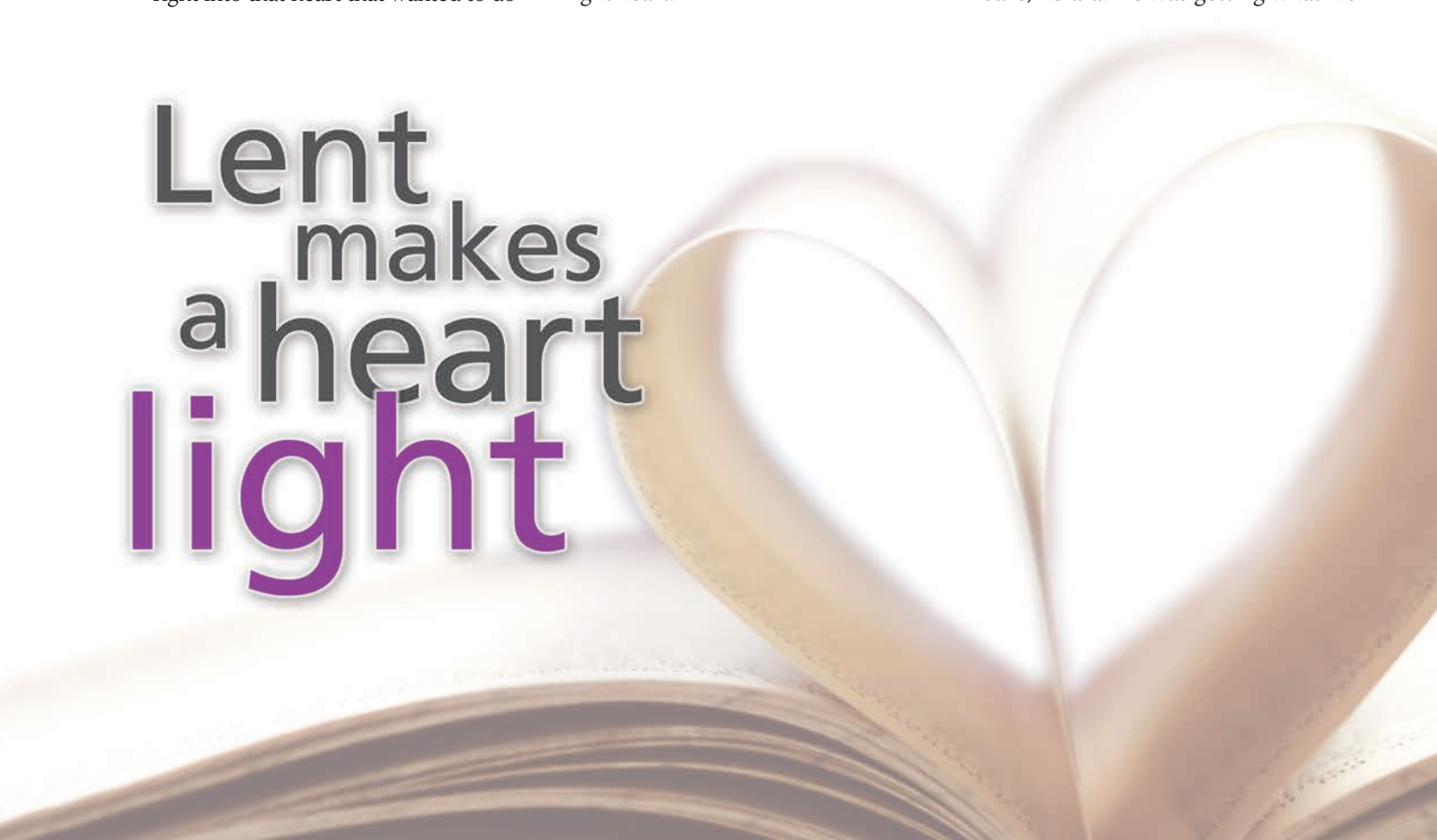
Jesus says in every Lenten season, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” He knows our hearts, and he talks to our hearts in Lent.

JESUS AND THE THIEF

It seems hard to see a light heart anywhere in the Lenten story, until we watch the thief who was crucified with Jesus. We understand in the thief’s story that all of Lent is heading for a light heart.

Actually, both the thief and Jesus had light hearts. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame! What a happy thing that was! Jesus wouldn’t die of a broken heart. His heart became silent, but it was never broken. Think what his heart could consider as he said, “Father, forgive them.” He was taking away the black murder of the murderer. He was plunging the adultery of the adulterer with all its shame and hurt into the depths of the sea. He was erasing every sniping sentence of the gossip and the sharp-tongued. He was transferring to his account all the transgressions of every trespasser. He looked at the one who had just hurled insults, and he still said, “I love you so! I want you with me forever in paradise.” He was finishing his work. He was saving us all and setting our hearts free by grace to run and frolic like spring calves free from their winter barns.

The thief died with a light heart. For sure, he did! He was getting what his



Lent
makes
a heart
light

deeds deserved, but the unimaginable also was happening: God loved him still and God loved him so! He could say the name of Jesus! It was his belated Palm Sunday exclamation: “*Hosanna!*” That word means “save me now . . . please!” That’s what Jesus was doing for the heavyhearted thief. The light heart stands close to the name of Jesus. He is the One who saves! That’s what the angel told Joseph and Mary to name him—Jesus! That was the name tacked over his head on the cross: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!” Pilate didn’t put the exclamation point there, but we do. Our light hearts can’t help themselves when they punctuate Jesus’ name and Pilate’s misspoken epitaph. He’s our King too!

The thief got it. His life was snatched from death. Angels were at that moment winging toward him in swift flight. His legs were broken, but the angels lent him their wings. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!” And Jesus did!

LENT TODAY AND TOMORROW

Lent also is about our lives today. Jesus said to the thief, “Today!” Lent speaks to our needs right now. We need forgiveness right now, and we get it when we hear Jesus say, “Father, forgive them.” We need Jesus’ care today when we think of our physical needs. We see Jesus providing for his mother there at his cross, and we know that this was our God giv-

ing her the daily bread of care for body and life. Bread tomorrow is unknown. Bread today is good in all that it promises us for our lives in this world.

Jesus takes care of our today in Lent. He also claims our future and calms our worries about it with his words, “You will be with me in paradise.” We will most certainly be saved. In a world that is broken, we have something to look forward to. As we, with all the

Our hearts are light
because something
good is coming. . . .
In Lent we know that
our Easter is coming.

believers and worshipers in Lent, rub up against the broken and jagged edges of this life, we are promised that something good is coming. We live today looking forward in faith to tomorrow. During the year it is easy to lose this anticipation and this hope, but Lent reminds us and helps us. Our hearts are light because something good is coming. We all know it. We stand on tiptoes with creation and wait for it. In Lent we know that our Easter is coming. We can look at our baptisms and realize that we too shall be raised to a new life! The anticipation is palpable and touchable.

It is very hard to be lighthearted when we think of death. Mary and Martha had trouble being lighthearted when their brother, Lazarus, died. Jesus did too. He wept. But Jesus speaks into the weeping Lent of Mary and Martha—and ours: “Even if you die, you will not die! Do you believe this?” (cf. John 11:25,26). It is in Lent that Jesus gives us the very words that will make our hearts light even in the dark and heavy company of death. He says to us when things grow dim and dark, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

This makes our hearts light because it is true. God tells us the truth. We get to Lent tired from the devil’s lies to us. All year he has said about his seductive sin, “This won’t hurt”—but it did hurt. He lied about our death-deserving deeds: “These won’t matter”—but they have mattered and they do matter. And he delivered the most devilish lie of all: “This will make you happy”—but it doesn’t and brings hours of bitter regret.

In the face of all the devil’s lies, Jesus tells us the truth: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

And that makes our hearts light.

Eric Hartzell is pastor at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.



Paul reminds us that, although we are all different, God draws us together in faith to work as one.

James R. Huebner

It is important to remember that God did not single us out to be his own because we are so wonderful or because we have such great qualities. No! He chose us by grace. He redeemed us to be his own dear children.

For the apostle Paul, *redemption* was not an abstract theological term dug out of an old, dusty doctrine book. Redemption is the only way out for people in prison because it involves two things: a payment is made, and then captives are set free. At the time he wrote to the Ephesians, Paul was under house arrest and had no idea whether or not someone would be able to make a ransom payment so that he could go free. But he did know that whether he

was under house arrest or just walking the streets of Rome or Corinth or Ephesus, Jesus had already made the ransom payment for all the sins of all sinners. Jesus paid the ransom with his own blood. With that payment, we sinners were set free from the prison of sin and the chains of guilt and declared to be one with God.

We are no longer corpses, nor are we scratching and clawing to get away from God like a trapped raccoon. We are God's dear children, grateful for his love, wanting to do what he wants, because all of what God did for us in Christ becomes ours personally through faith.

Faith is trust that what God says about us is true. Faith is passive. It is the empty bowl that God created in us by his powerful words of promise and love. It catches all the good things God pours into our hearts. It is not the reason he loves us. It is the result of his love for us.

But faith is also active. It is alive and produces fruits of faith

like an apple tree produces apples. “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

BUILT ON ONE FOUNDATION

One way to track the history of your congregation is to note the building projects. But you don’t want to overlook another building project that has been going on in your church: the building of the holy Christian church. And when we talk about the holy Christian church, we can’t help speaking about its chief architect, designer, and engineer: Jesus Christ. He is the foundation for our faith and the cornerstone of our faith.

Jesus unites us in faith.

You don’t have to be an expert builder to know that a firm foundation is essential for any building. But what about your congregation? What about our synod? If our church body was built on human qualities and capabilities, it would have

collapsed long ago. We make mistakes. We sin. Some days we do what God wants, and some days we don’t. It’s a good thing that God doesn’t build his church on sinners like you or me. Instead it is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

Martin Luther couldn’t sleep at night. In fact, he nearly killed himself trying to beat sin out of his body. He knew that “God is holy, and I’m not, and I have to be as holy as God is if he’s going to open heaven’s gates for me.” His superiors were afraid he’d go nuts. So, to keep him busy, they had him study to be a parish priest and also got him a job as a university professor. Of all things, they asked him to teach the Bible. For the first time in his life, Luther dug into Holy Scripture. What he found there astounded him.

What Luther found is what a young man in our Bible information class also found. He said, “Pastor, the thought of judgment day scares me. I’ve tried to be as good as possible at home, at work, and with friends, but sometimes I can’t sleep at night because I’m going to be at the pearly gates one day and St. Peter might not let me in.” Ever have a thought like that pass through your brain? I told him what I’m going to tell you: If we think we have to get in by being good, we’ll never make it, because we can’t be good enough on our own. That’s why God sent Jesus to be perfect in our place. And here’s the incredible news of the Bible: God credits what Jesus did to your account and mine. He treats us as though we never sinned, even though we do all the time, because we are covered by the rightness of Jesus. The young man looked at me and said,

“Now I can sleep tonight. I’ve got the golden ticket.” That good news of Jesus’ rightness draped over us is the foundation for our faith.

PART OF GOD’S DWELLING

Buildings often have a cornerstone to mark the date of construction. In ancient times the cornerstone not only held up and supported the building, but it also aligned the walls so that they’d fit together just so. The Christians in the congregation of Ephesus weren’t fitting together. They had a hard time finding common ground and working together. My grandma used to say, “*Es gibt allerlei Menschen in Gottes Menagerie*” (“There

are all kinds of people in God’s zoo”). She was actually saying what the apostle Paul taught: “You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (Ephesians 2:19). When the diverse people of Ephesus were

filled with the good news of Jesus’ mercy, it didn’t matter whether they were Jews or Romans, Greeks or Egyptians. There could be harmony and oneness among sinners of all shapes, ages, and colors.

Are we any different from the Ephesians? Have there been disagreements among WELS Christians in the past 165 years? Of course. We have disagreed on building projects, mission efforts, where to build schools, whether or not to close schools. The list is long. How in all the world can a synod with people who have differing opinions work together?

The answer is that we are all parts of one spiritual building. Some of us are the bricks; some, the mortar; some, the light bulbs; some, the doors. But we are all joined together to form one functioning building. The apostle looks at you and me today and says, “In [Christ] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

No matter how old or young we are, no matter how tall or short we are, no matter what the amounts and distributions of melanin pigment in our epidermis, no matter where we live, we are one in faith, trusting in Jesus Christ. No disagreements or dividers here. That’s what it means to be one in Christ.

James Huebner, pastor at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the first vice president of WELS.

This is the second article in a four-part series based on the 2015 synod convention essay entitled “One in Christ.”

A man who helps share the gospel around the world started with his own journey of faith.

Julie K. Wietzke

Sean Young says he's not much of an adventurer. He doesn't even really like to travel.

Yet since he took the job as director of missions operations for WELS in 2012, he has been to the jungles outside Kumba, Cameroon; to Red Dirt Village in the mountains of Thailand; and to Kiev, the largest city in Ukraine—all to help plan how to spread God's Word around the world. "It's crazy that the Lord saw fit to put me here to help with that," he says.

But Young will be the first to say that going to these exotic locales hasn't been his greatest journey. His greatest journey has been one of faith—a trip that gave him true freedom through the gospel.

Growing up in an Irish family in Milwaukee, Young was raised in the Catholic Church, which included going to confession, serving as an altar boy, and being a Christian Youth Organization representative on the church council.

It was during a church council meeting that he started questioning the congregation's priorities. The group was discussing an annulment request that came with a monetary gift—a request

that came from the parents of one of Young's friends. When the council began talking about how to use the money, Young raised the question, "Shouldn't we be talking about the marriage?" His question was ignored, and when he brought it up again, he was asked by the priest to step out into the hallway. When he told the priest that he couldn't go to a church like this, the priest said, "Don't worry, you'll learn the ways of the church."

"I left and never went back," says Young. He was 18 years old.

Even though he left the Catholic Church, Young wasn't giving up on religion. He began attending worship on Sunday at other denominations—United Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Free Church. "Eventually when you're church shopping, you end up sitting in the back so you can get an easy exit in case something goes wrong," says Young. "I wasn't finding truth anywhere."

During the week, Young had to travel crosstown by bus to get to his high school. One day he was heading home from school and stopped outside St. Lucas to look at the church service times. "I thought, *This looks like a big old Catholic church—I should try this*," says Young. "I had no idea what Lutheran was, much less WELS."

As he was looking at the times, a hand came down on his shoulder. "I heard someone say, 'Looking for a church, son?'" says Young. "[The pastor] started

talking to me and invited me inside. I asked him all sorts of questions, and before I knew it, three hours had gone by."

That Sunday, Young took the bus to St. Lucas to attend worship. As in the past, he sat down and had his exit strategy ready when he walked the girl he was dating with her family. They sat right in front of Young. After some initial confusion, Young sat with his girlfriend and her family for the service.

At this church, Young found what he was looking for. "My perception was that in the Catholic Church, the priest was telling you what the Bible said. Here the priest—I didn't know he was called a pastor—was reading from the Bible," he says.

"The sermon blew my socks off. It scared the snot out of me. He had me going to hell the one minute, and the next minute he told me why I had eternal salvation. It was the best sermon I ever heard," says Young. "In 20 minutes, he opened my eyes. I was blown away. I thought, *I have to get more of that*."

After the service, the pastor invited Young to Bible information class (BIC). Young agreed, and his girlfriend, Kirsten, offered to go with him.

Two years later, Young became a member. "I went from a two-time BICer to a confirmed adult," he says. "I went twice, not because I was a slow learner but because my commitment to my faith was huge and I didn't want to go through what I just went through at [my old church]."

Confessions OF FAITH



Young's becoming a Lutheran didn't sit well with his family. His mom, a strong Irish Catholic, had him excommunicated from the Catholic Church, kicked him out of the house, and didn't talk to him for close to three years. "If you're brought up Catholic, anything other than Catholicism is considered a cult," Young explains. "She wanted me to be a priest."

His grandmother finally helped convince his mom to rekindle the relationship—about five months before his wedding to Kirsten.

After that, Young shared his faith often with his mom before her death. "Our first conversation was about having to go to confession," he says. "Growing up a Catholic kid, you dreaded going into the box. I was telling her that this isn't something she needs to do. The Lord is not asking this of her—for her to demonstrate her faith. That [discussion] went on for years." He continues to witness to his brothers and sisters, who still don't all know the truth. "I know their eternal salvation depends on it, but all I can do is plant the seed and leave it up to the Lord."

His family members aren't the only people whom Young has told about the gospel's saving message. "I've been on the evangelism committee of every church I've ever been at because we have to share this," he says. "Growing up Catholic, I didn't have this kind of faith. I didn't have this kind of relief. I didn't have this kind of joy in my faith."



Sean and Kirsten Young and their children, Athena and Neil.

It was all the black marks on the soul. It was all the heavy lifting you had to do to stay ahead of it. And you just can't do it. Here it's just the truth; it's just the gospel."

Being part of WELS Missions is giving him an opportunity to spread that good news even further—though he didn't immediately apply for the job. At the time, he was running a construction company and doing quite well. "I was making money. My plan was all set—here I am, still thinking it was my plan!" he says.

Several pastors kept encouraging him to apply. "Two and a half months later, [my family] took a big step off the cliff, not knowing, and God instantly caught us and kept providing for us," says Young. "It was like a rebirth. [Before] I was living for the dollar; I wasn't living for my family or for my faith. This was a nice way for God to slap me upside

the head and say, 'Hey, let's get back to doing what you love.'"

Doing what he loves means sharing the freedom the gospel provides by helping plan mission opportunities around the United States and the world and helping administer the gifts the Lord has provided for outreach. It's a fitting next leg in his journey of faith.

And though we can't all be part of the day-to-day work of WELS Missions, Young reminds us that we all have mission work to do. "We have to stay vigilant," he says. "We have to make sure that we don't just rest on the Word and be comfortable with it. We have to understand that our purpose is to share that gospel message with folks because there's not a lot of time left."

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ magazine.



heart to heart parent conversations

Most of us have been “that person”—the one who doesn’t know what to say or do when she meets a person with special needs. We don’t want to ask the wrong questions or make the wrong assumptions. We want to show we care, but we aren’t sure if offering our help might be interpreted as an insult. When our children are present, it just ups the ante because we need to model the best behavior for them.

This month, Heart to heart contributor Wendy Heyn shares her thoughts on the best practices when meeting a person with special needs. Wendy’s son, Liam, was born with a genetic neurodevelopmental disorder known as MECP2 duplication syndrome.

Nicole Balza



Join the conversation!

Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist and look for the *Heart to heart* link. Read uncut versions of the articles, learn more about the authors, and give us your thoughts and reactions.

HOW SHOULD WE AND OUR CHILDREN RESPOND TO THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

“Why does he have that chair?”

“What’s wrong with him?”

Children often ask these questions about my son, Liam. Sometimes they ask me directly. Sometimes they ask their parents. Sometimes they yell the questions to any listening ears. Many children stop in their tracks to stare. For our family, every grocery store trip, neighborhood church event, or walk brings us into contact with people who have questions.

People notice Liam’s chair. They notice that he cannot talk. They hear him make loud noises. They see that his body moves very differently from most. I understand their curiosity. Liam is different, and people just want to understand.

Children are honest and open in their curiosity. I appreciate that they ask questions. Certainly there are days when I want to avoid stares and questions, when I want to blend in with the crowd. Yet I know that it is a great service to Liam when we use every teachable moment. If people can become comfortable with Liam and can learn to interact with him appropriately, all of our lives will be richer.

Children’s questions are often intercepted by chagrined parents. The parents apologize and pull their curious children away from Liam without allowing us to say hello or answer their questions. This leaves everyone feeling awkward.

Ironically, when I am out with only my daughters and we meet individuals with special needs, I have trouble knowing how to behave. The social cues are confusing, any assumptions that I make are usually wrong, and I overthink every word that I say. Being Liam’s mom has helped me to think about these situations and how we can all respond better. I have found following these guidelines to be helpful for introducing children to someone new who has special needs:

1 Remember that people with disabilities are people first. The disability is a part of them, but it isn’t who they are. They have feelings, ideas, wishes, and hopes just like you do. I explain this to my children, and we talk about what each of my children likes, thinks, hopes, and wishes. We talk about how every person is similar in these ways, even if he cannot communicate this or looks or moves differently.

2 Start by smiling and saying hello. Even if your child started the interaction with a loud question, parents of children with disabilities understand that this happens. We are human. Our kids are too. Don’t lose this teachable moment because of your own embarrassment. A smile and a kind hello are so much friendlier than pulling your child away. Most days, we will even take a minute to explain the wheelchair to your child or to introduce Liam.

3 Acknowledge Liam, not just his family. Liam won’t answer you. He may not even look at you, but say hello to him. Look at him. Use your regular voice. I will help you out by interpreting his response. Liam is so valuable and worthwhile, and your hello to him helps both him and me see that you know this.

4 An “I’m not sure” is better than a wrong or made-up answer. While “God made him that way” is certainly true of Liam’s inability to talk and walk, it oversimplifies

Liam's differences. It doesn't answer the child's questions. It is not true of why he is in a wheelchair (which is usually what kids want to know). Liam wasn't born with a wheelchair. For a small child, an age-appropriate response that might be better would be to explain that Liam's brain doesn't send the right messages, and so his body never learned to walk or talk the way that most children's do.

If you and your child are talking with Liam, tell your child a few things that are similar about him and Liam. "Do you like books? Liam loves to listen to books." This helps your child to see Liam as a little boy. Conversations like this are a great way to become Liam's new friend. They also help your child understand that Liam is similar to him in so many ways.

Examine your own responses. When I interact with others who have special needs, I am always worried about doing or saying the wrong thing. My kids pick up on this no matter how kind my words are. The easiest way I've found to overcome my own fears has been to get to know real people with special needs. Every single person is different, and my comfort with differences grows as I get used to being with all sorts of people.

Reassure your child. Recently a girl told my daughter, "Your brother is just creepy." What people don't understand feels scary to them. Children need to be reassured that children like Liam are not scary. They are actually very much like every other child. They like to play. They want to have friends. They want to be loved. Explain to your child that children can be born disabled or become disabled from an accident. You cannot catch a disability from another child. Being friends with them is perfectly safe.

Do not reward or congratulate your child for being friends with a child who has special needs. Being a friend to someone with special needs is not a charitable act. It is a mutually beneficial relationship. Typical peers often learn and grow in huge ways through such friendships.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Helping your child lovingly interact with others is a natural part of Christian parenting. In his explanation to the Eighth Commandment, Luther says that we are to "take [our neighbor's] words and actions in the kindest possible way." If each of us strives to approach situations with this attitude, we can truly become comfortable with interactions involving all kinds of people. As you encounter children with special needs, imagine how you would want to be treated. Just as your child and my Liam have many things in common, so do you and I. We are parents doing our best to nurture and love the children that the Lord has entrusted to us—probably more alike than different.



Wendy Heyn and her husband, Juerg, have three children—Sophia, Liam, and Miriam.

Advice from Liam's big sister, Sophia

Sophia Heyn is a creative 10-year-old who enjoys reading historical fiction and acting out scenarios that she learns about from Laura Ingalls Wilder, the American Girl series, and other beloved books. Because her father was born and raised in Germany, she has traveled to Europe many times, and this gives her a different perspective on the world. Perhaps having a brother with a genetic disorder that causes severe cognitive and physical disabilities has also contributed to the mature way that she carries herself.

I sat down with Sophia over a cup of hot chocolate to hear her perspective on how other children should treat her brother.



Sophia reads to Liam.

Q: What do you like to do with Liam?

Sophia: I play Thomas [the Tank Engine] with him and help him get a drink. He likes me to set up his Thomas cards so that he can wreck them.

Q: When people meet Liam for the first time, what kind of questions do they ask?

Sophia: Some people ask, "What's wrong with him?"

Q: How do you answer when people ask that?

Sophia: I tell them that he has a disability and his brain doesn't work the same way that ours does. I like when they ask questions. Some people just stare, but I think it's better to ask questions.

Q: How does it make you feel when people stare or treat Liam differently?

Sophia: I don't like it.

Q: What would you like to say when that happens?

Sophia: It's okay if you have questions.

Sophia encourages people of all ages to talk with her family about Liam. When she talks about him, her love for her brother shines through as does her sense of protection. Like most big sisters, Sophia wants children to be kind to her brother. As you help your children learn how to respond to those with special needs, consider sharing Sophia's thoughts with them.

Nicole Balza

“What is truth?”

Pilate's age-old question still rings true today, and God's answer remains the same.

Glenn L. Schwanke

“What is truth?”

The words rip us back in time to very early on Good Friday morning at the residence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, where Jesus had been led like a lamb to the slaughter by the Jewish leaders and their temple guards. They needed Pilate's permission for the death sentence against Jesus.

You might expect their request to result in a thorough, legal review of the case against Christ. But there were only feeble attempts to avoid handling the case and two brief exchanges between Pilate and Jesus.

The first of those exchanges led to three of the most infamous words ever spoken:

“You are a king then?” Pilate asked.

“You say that I'm a king,” Jesus replied. “I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.”

“What is truth?” said Pilate. (John 18:37,38 HCSB used throughout this article)

We shudder at those three words, because in our hearts, we hear the mockery in Pilate's voice. And we weep at what follows. Jesus—mocked. Jesus—scourged. Jesus—sentenced. Jesus—crucified. And Pilate? He does nothing but wash his hands of the affair (Matthew 27:24).

“What is truth?” When I hear those words, I think of Pontius Pilate. But I also think of millennials, a generation whose worldview has been dramatically shaped by television, movies, computers, tablets, and smartphones; Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Twitter; Siri, Cortana, and “OK Google.” A generation always connected with an overwhelming flood of information that is just a voice command or a few keystrokes away.

Unfortunately, far too much of that information stream is little more than snake oil, a slick but poisonous repackaging of Pilate's snide comment, “What is truth?” This is particularly true when it comes to issues of morality or spiritual matters and questions about life, death, and eternity.

Is there absolute truth? The skepticism of our modern age boldly shouts, “Absolutely not!”

Is Jesus the only Savior, the only way to eternal life? How are millennials expected to believe that when a 2015 Barna Group study found that only 48 percent of millennials believe that Jesus is God! On the other hand, 56 percent of millennials believe Jesus committed sins while he was on earth. Hardly the makings of a Messiah. So it's not at all sur-

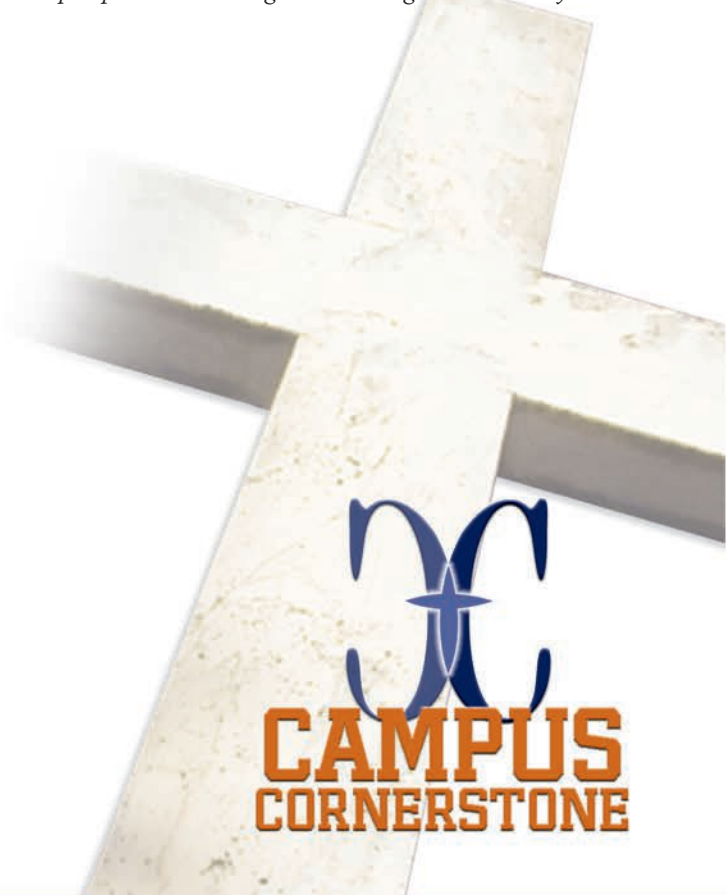
prising when that same Barna study concludes, “Millennials are less likely to believe that Jesus is the path to heaven than are other generations.” As Barna Group President David Kinnamen comments, “Jesus is a friend of sinners, but many millennials are ‘unfriending’ him at a time when their lives are being shaped and their trajectories set toward the future.”

“What is truth?” I think of the college students I serve in Campus Ministry. I see no sneers on their faces. I detect no mockery in their tones. What I do see are young Christians who are constantly being inundated by the worldview around us. I do hear doubt, and I do see confusion written on their faces. I think, *So much has changed since I was their age!*

But, thank God, the answer remains ever the same: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

“This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Glenn Schwanke, pastor at Peace, Houghton, Michigan, serves as campus pastor at Michigan Technological University.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Dolan, David B., to retirement
Hein, James M., to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Hoff, Jacob M., to St. Paul's, Franklin, Wis.
Kunde, Arnold J., to retirement
Scharf, David G., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Stein, Stanley C., to retirement
Welke, Paul F., to Beautiful Savior, Austin, Minn.

Teachers

Albrecht, Daniel M., to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.
Beglinger, Nicole M., to Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.
Bengel, Adrienne R., to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
Bengel, Brett J., to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
Boehm, James H., to St. John's, Burlington, Wis.
Freudenwald, Kathryn M., to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.
Hackbarth, Keith J., to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Hartzell, Luke J., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Hirschmann, Craig R., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Kopp, Cheryl L., to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Landwehr, Erik B., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
McGehee, Rebecca M., to Bethel, Bay City, Mich.
Moser, Betty, to retirement
Schneck, Bryan A., to Zion, Monroe, Mich.
Schomberg, Scott H., to St. Matthew's, Winona, Minn.
Scriver, Phillip P., to Christ Our Redeemer, Aurora, Colo.
Strong, Abbie R., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Sullivan, Heidi M., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Tjernagel, John G., to retirement
Tjernagel, Judith K., to retirement
Vandenberg, Alexander J., to Zion, Columbus, Wis.
Wendland, Louise A., to St. John, Watertown, Wis.

Staff ministers

Koch, Donald H., to retirement

ANNIVERSARIES

Little Chute, Wis.—St. Luke (50). Apr. 17. Worship, 9 A.M.; Wisconsin Lutheran

Seminary concert, 2 P.M. Website, www.stlukeslittlechute.com.

COMING EVENTS

Pathways to Christ retreat—Mar. 11–13. Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Website, www.pathwaystochrist.org

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 11–13. Sheraton, Brookfield, Wis. Theme: "Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20b)." Maureen, 262-784-0412. Website, www.christianwomantoday.org.

Martin Luther College choir tour—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, www.mlc-wels.edu.

- Mar. 11, 7 P.M., Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.
- Mar. 12, 6:30 P.M., East Fork Lutheran Elementary School, Whiteriver, Ariz.
- Mar. 13, 10 A.M., Grace, San Carlos, Ariz.; 7 P.M., Shepherd of the Hills, Tucson, Ariz.
- Mar. 14, 7 P.M., Cross of Glory, Peoria, Ariz.
- Mar. 15, 9:15 A.M., Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.; 7 P.M., Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev.
- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, Calif.
- Mar. 17, 7 P.M., Christ the Vine, Temecula, Calif.
- Mar. 18, 10:15 A.M., California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.; 7 P.M., St. Paul First, North Hollywood, Calif.
- Mar. 19, 6:30 P.M., St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
- Mar. 20, 10:30 A.M., Hope, Penryn, Calif.; 7 P.M., Mt. Calvary, Redding, Calif.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus Spring tour—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, www.wls.wels.net.

- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Mar. 23, 7:30 P.M., Trinity, Crete, Ill.
- Mar. 24, 7 P.M., Christ Our Savior, Columbia, Tenn.
- Mar. 25, 7:30 P.M., Risen Savior, Pooler, Ga.
- Mar. 26, 6:30 P.M., St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.
- Mar. 27, 10:30 A.M., Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.; 7 P.M., Crown of Glory, Orlando, Fla.
- Mar. 28, 7 P.M., Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla.
- Mar. 29, 6:30 P.M., Our Savior, Port Orange, Fla.
- Mar. 30, 7 P.M., Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.
- Mar. 31, 1 P.M., Open Bible, Oxford, Fla.; 7 P.M., Victory, Jacksonville, Fla.
- Apr. 1, 7 P.M., Living Savior, Asheville, N.C.
- Apr. 2, 7 P.M., Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind.
- Apr. 3, 10:30 A.M., Lamb of God, Lafayette, Ind.; 6:30 P.M., Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.

Ironmen of God men's conference—

Mar. 19; 9 A.M.–2 P.M. St. Paul's Lutheran School, Ixonia, Wis. Website, www.ironmenofgodwi.org.

WELS Church Librarians' Organization conference—Apr. 30. Zion, Columbus, Wis. Rebecca Retzlaff, 920-623-2623.

53rd annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 23–26. Pheasant Run Resort, St. Charles, Ill. Theme: "Christ Alone, Our Cornerstone." Registration is open. Website, www.lwms.org.

WELS International Youth Rally—June 28–July 1. Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo. Theme: "Our God Reigns." Registration opens in March. youthrally2016@wels.net. Website, wels.net/events.

Women's Ministry Conference—July 21–23. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: "Mentors." Registration is open. Website, wels.net/wmconference.

WELS Night at Miller Park—July 29. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Brewers vs. Pirates. Website, wels.net/events.

NAMES WANTED

College students—Register college students with WELS Campus Ministry so they receive helpful college materials, including *Forward in Christ* magazine and *Meditations*. Website, wels.net/campus-ministry.

Northwest Arkansas—people visiting or moving to the area. Neil Hansen, Beautiful Savior, 479-876-2155. Website, www.beautifulsaviorwels.org.

Palm Springs, California—people living in the area as well as winter visitors. Crown of Life, Corona, Calif. Steve Koelpin, 909-810-1045; pastorsteve@crownoflifechurch.net.

RESOURCES

Purchasing program—ShopWELS is the group purchasing program for WELS organizations and members. It exists to provide the best products and services for the faithful steward. Some vendors provide products and services to WELS churches and schools, WELS called workers, and individual WELS members. Learn more at www.shopwels.net.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

New outreach opportunities in Vietnam

Bounkeo Lor, pastor at Grace Hmong, Kansas City, Kan., didn't know how the Holy Spirit would use the sermons he was posting online. But he probably didn't expect to be contacted by a church body of 70,000 members more than eight thousand miles away.

Leaders from Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC) in Vietnam contacted Lor because they appreciated his clear presentation of law and gospel. They wanted training in leadership and theology so that they could establish their own church body based on the Word of God.

Lor says that the 324 pastors in the church had received informal training through a Reformed church called the Christian Mission Alliance. "This consisted of only a couple months training to become church leaders and to serve their people," says Lor. "This group formerly had legalistic teachings and decision theology."

Lor made his first trip to Vietnam in 2009 and has been back at least a dozen more times. For the past three years he has been training the leaders in Hanoi. "Some of the leaders were so eager to attend the training that they sold a water buffalo to pay for their trip to Hanoi," says Lor. "That would be the equivalent of a U.S. farmer selling his tractor!"

Those who attend the training often bring the message they hear back to their villages. Lor shares a comment he received from one attendee: "Thank the Lutheran Synod for giving us training in the Word of God," the leader wrote. "Before the training, I oppressed my congregation under the law and thought that salvation was through the law. But now, I know that I am wrong; we are saved by grace. Thank you for teaching me the love of God. After my first training in the law and gospel, I went back to my villages and congregation. I told them that we are not saved under the law but under God's grace. My members rejoiced and praised God for such teachings."



Bounkeo Lor (standing) shares the law and the gospel with leaders of the Hmong Fellowship Church, a church body of 70,000 members, in Vietnam.

Lor also is distributing materials—including nine thousand copies of a Hmong translation of Luther's Small Catechism—to help with Christian education and evangelism in the villages.

Lor's most recent trip to Vietnam was this past January. "The next step is to continue to strengthen ties with the HFC and to develop a training program," he says.

World Missions became involved in this outreach opportunity in 2014; the Asia Pacific Rim Administrative Committee now supports Lor in these trips. In April 2015 the Joint Mission Council authorized a Global Hmong Committee that will work with all Hmong ministry—at home and abroad—and determine where funds should be spent. The committee, which consists of representatives from both Home and World Missions (including Lor), is calling a Hmong pastor to work with Hmong ministry in Thailand as well as to continue to train and work with contacts in Vietnam and China (see sidebar).

"It is a huge opportunity for WELS to share the gospel with people in a communist country that has not been overly friendly to the message about Jesus," says Lor. "Who knows? The door may be closed tomorrow. More than 98 percent of the people in Vietnam live in darkness—they need the gospel."

FURTHER HMONG OUTREACH

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Let your light shine

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith.

More than 175 people participated in Faith in Action Day at Trinity, Crete, Ill., on Oct. 17. Many more were involved through donations of food, clothing, and money.

Lori Lorig, who helps coordinate Trinity's Member Ministry program, explains that Trinity began hosting an annual Faith in Action Day in 2010 to give members an opportunity to respond to what Jesus has done for them and to experience the joy of serving together. Lorig says, "Faith in Action Day is a day on which we respond to God's love and mercy by a concerted effort to serve others in the church, school, community, and world."

As the program has developed, Trinity has joined forces with families from Zion, a fellow WELS congregation, and Illinois Lutheran Schools, both in Crete. The response has been overwhelming and makes a real impact on those they serve.

For example, Illinois Lutheran High School students organized a community-wide food drive for the local food pantry. This year more than 4,000 items were collected, plus 1,000 pounds of pasta were donated by a local warehouse. The food pantry's shelves were bare when

the students arrived but overflowing once the students stocked the shelves with the donations.

Some other projects included collecting and organizing items to help local shelters, collecting and packing items for college students and military personnel, delivering thank-you platters to local first responders, painting cow-shaped banks for a world mission project (see below), and participating in an Adopt-a-Highway cleanup project.

Lorig says that the church looks for ways to help and serve those in need, because meeting people's physical needs often provides opportunities to share Jesus with them. In keeping with that thought, the theme for this year's event was "Do everything in love."

On the Sunday following its Faith in Action Day, Trinity celebrates Ministry Appreciation Day. This gives the congregation an opportunity to celebrate everyone who gives of their time and talents throughout the year, including called workers who are celebrating milestone anniversary years.

"Many individuals have been blessed through these efforts," reports Lorig, "and whenever someone asks why we do this, the answer is always because of what Jesus has done for us. It truly is remarkable to see what God can accomplish through his people in a very short amount of time. To God be the glory!"



Clean up of a local road for Adopt-a-Highway was one of the many projects supported by WELS churches and schools in Crete, Ill., on Oct. 17.

CASH FOR COWS

Article removed for security concerns.



New worker training program starting in Cameroon

The Lutheran Church of Cameroon is taking a big step toward becoming an independent church body by calling its first full-time Cameroonian teacher and dean of students for its worker training program in Kumba, Cameroon. Mesue Israel, the church's only second-generation pastor, has accepted the call. Plans are to start the program in September.

"[Having] a Cameroonian man on campus will help to make this a truly Cameroonian worker training program," says Daniel Kroll, missionary in Cameroon. "That means that much application will be made to ministry in Cameroon that we from WELS might not be able to understand or explain."



Mesue Israel is the first full-time Cameroonian teacher and dean of students for the Lutheran Church of Cameroon's worker training program.

Israel has been a pastor in the Lutheran Church of Cameroon since his graduation in 1999. A bone disease he contracted in 2008 makes it difficult for him to move freely, which, Kroll says, allows him to study more. "He has been outspoken and is not afraid to tackle hard issues; he is straight-forward and fair," says Kroll. "Pastor Israel gives credit to God for teaching him perseverance through the difficulties of his disease and his ministry."

Israel will be responsible for teaching several of the courses as well as for enforcing rules for campus life. The campus has modest dormitories where students will live from September through mid-May, with two weeks off at the end of each quarter to go home to see their families and tend their crops. "For one week each quarter, we plan to bring wives onto campus so they can study with 'Momma Karen [Kroll]' about what it means to be a called workers' wife," says Kroll. "It will give the wives a chance to see how the husbands work at their studies and will give us some chance to make 'fellow workers' of the wives."

After the two-year Bible institute, students will immediately begin three years of seminary studies and then be eligible for a call.

Currently 10 pastors serve 32 congregations in Cameroon. Thirteen men have been selected from among 27 certified assistants to start classes this fall. These certified assistants have had limited training but help their supervising pastor with keeping records, teaching Sunday school, and occasional preaching.

Having a Cameroonian man involved in the training of church workers is important for the future of the Lutheran Church of Cameroon. "Funding, health issues, government regulations, and a host of other matters can create problems for us keeping a missionary here," says Kroll. This is actually the first active called worker training program in Cameroon since 1999 because of turnover in missionaries and other issues.

He continues, "But even if there is a lack of a missionary (or inconsistency thereof), we hope to create a program that will have some consistency for many years to come."

Meet a national pastor's wife on p. 28. Learn more about mission work in Cameroon at wels.net/missions.

One in Christ —UPDATE—



The 2015 synod convention launched the "One in Christ" debt elimination offering through June 2016 to eliminate the remaining \$4.7 million synod debt. If successful by God's gracious blessing, the "One in Christ" campaign will put our synod in a better financial position to continue the ministry of training workers and establishing missions at home and abroad.

Orville Taecker was a delegate at the 2013 synod convention that voted to implement the One in Christ offering. He has generously and with love for Christ and for his synod made an offering to help retire the debt and hopes to make a second one. "To me it's a no brainer to get rid of that debt," says Taecker, an 85-year-old member at Bethlehem, Watertown, S.D. "What we are called to do by the Bible is to teach all nations. How can we do that when we have a debt hanging over our heads?"

Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry of Christian Giving, says, "We praise Jesus for all the congregations and individuals who, like Orville, have already honored the Lord with an offering to 'One in Christ'!"

Learn more about how you can help at wels.net/oneinchrist.

New weekly devotions produced for teens

New in 2016, the WELS Commission on Youth and Family is introducing “Transformed: Devotions connecting teens to Christ,” a weekly devotion tailored specifically for the Christian teenager.

“We recognize a need to address devotions and topics pertinent to the lives of teens. They face unique challenges and we want to try to bring God’s transforming Word to them,” says Nathan Bourman, a member of the committee producing the devotions. “We recognize the challenges and changes in their lives and want to connect them to the one thing that never changes.”

Each Sunday, a new devotion is published at **wels.net/transformed**. Or they can be delivered via e-mail by subscribing at **wels.net/subscribe**.

Bourman says, “These devotions could be used simply to share and pass on to the teens and youth leaders for their own personal devotions. That’s really the intended purpose. But beyond that simple purpose, they could also be



used in group settings and perhaps even could be a starting point for a Bible study.”

The devotions for teenagers join an offering of devotions developed to meet WELS members’ needs already available on WELS’ website. The most popular, WELS Daily Devotion reaches tens of thousands of people every day via e-mail, Facebook, and the WELS App. Women’s devotions, weekly devotions for military service people, and weekly devotions for early childhood educators also are available at **wels.net/devotions**.

A timeless message for a new generation

“So often we look at life through the lens of the world—striving to get ahead, to carve out a piece of the pie for ourselves,” says Tim Lehman, president and CEO of Time of Grace Ministry, “but we often fall short or just feel overwhelmed. *Your Time of Grace* wants to bring people a completely different perspective than that worldview, a perspective that comes directly from God’s Word and is firmly rooted in God’s grace and the freedom it brings to our lives.”

Your Time of Grace is a new ministry that offers daily video devotions from WELS pastors. The two- to three-minute videos are released on Facebook and YouTube Monday through Friday. Lehman says that the vision for *Your Time of Grace* is that by sharing the good news of Jesus, an online community of believers is formed that can receive encouragement from the video content as well as from the other Christians who are using these platforms to strengthen their relationship with Jesus.

As Lehman notes, “The hope is to share the timeless message of Jesus in a way that connects with the people and culture of today.”

Your Time of Grace complements the television, print, and online offerings of Time of Grace. It also targets a younger audience, which consumes information primarily on smartphones and tablets.



Mike Novotny, a pastor in Appleton, Wis., is one of five WELS pastors sharing God’s Word through video devotions for *Your Time of Grace*.

Your Time of Grace’s devotions, which launched in January, are hosted by a group of WELS pastors that includes Ben Blumer, Jon Enter, Mike Novotny, Jared Oldenburg, and Dave Scharf.

Blumer says that his goal “is to share the message of Jesus in a way that is understandable and engaging. As I do that, I hope to use words and examples that relate to people of all different backgrounds and familiarity with the Bible. I hope that they can take something from the devotion that will be a blessing for their day.”

Lehman encourages those who are looking for daily encouragement from God’s Word to start their day with *Your Time of Grace*. He adds, “This is also a great tool for people to use to share Christ with their friends who might be too nervous to walk into a church. Sharing the videos with friends like this will give them the opportunity to hear that God’s promise of grace is for them as well. It is a tool designed to meet people where they are in life.”

To subscribe to *Your Time of Grace*, visit **YourTimeofGrace.com** or **facebook.com/YourTimeofGrace**.

Q&A on campus ministry

In 2014, Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, the campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, started a new group called Cross Culture to “take Christ’s light to campuses around the world.” This group began working with a few pastors from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Zambia (LCCA) to help develop a campus ministry at the University of Zambia in Lusaka (UNZA). Different student groups from Cross Culture traveled to Lusaka to meet with and encourage UNZA students. UW–Madison seniors Phil Anderson, a member at Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis., and Maria Gruetzmacher, a member at Salem, Stillwater, Minn., went to Africa in January 2015. Here they share more about their experience:

Q: Why are you involved in Cross Culture?

Anderson: Since I have been able to enjoy a wonderful time at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, I want to help fellow college students around the world experience that same joy with their own respective campus ministries.

Q: Why did you decide to travel to Africa?

Gruetzmacher: Each correspondence we had with the Zambians made me more and more excited about traveling to their homeland to see the Holy Spirit’s work firsthand. Through these conversations, we could also see that encouragement from fellow believers would be extremely beneficial in the work of the Zambian campus ministry. I wanted to personally meet and encourage them to see that they have been given the gifts and opportunity to create something that will impact people eternally.

Anderson: I went to Zambia to help sisters and brothers in Christ my age develop their faith and spiritual gifts.

Q: What was your favorite part of the trip?

Gruetzmacher: My favorite part of the trip was seeing the Holy Spirit work in everyone’s hearts. Throughout the three-day leadership workshop we led, the students’ eyes were opened to their unique God-given abilities. They then realized all that they could do by utilizing the talents of each group member. Listening to the group brainstorm ideas and collaborate with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ made my heart so happy.

The evening we arrived, Pastor Kangongo [LCCA pastor who helps with UNZA campus ministry] was so excited! He kept smiling the biggest grin I have ever seen while clasping his hands together and giggling. One of my favorite things he said was, “You are standing here before me all because of the amazing power of Jesus’ holy blood.” That moment made me realize that no matter one’s walk of life, we are all children of God and will be together for eternity, praising our Creator and Savior.

Anderson: My favorite part of the trip was the final day we got to spend with the students facilitating a Bible study. Though we were in a dark corner room on the campus while it was raining heavily outside, we were able to join in



Phil Anderson (back row, second from right) and Maria Gruetzmacher (back row, far right) were two of four UW–Madison students who traveled to Africa in January 2015 to work with university students on setting up a campus ministry.

fellowship with these wonderful fellow students. We were able to laugh with them and find spiritual truths as we walked through the Bible with them. It was amazing to experience this kind of fellowship with people I would never have met without this opportunity through Cross Culture.

Q: What did you learn on the trip about yourself?

Gruetzmacher: I learned that I crave encouraging fellow believers in their walk with Christ. While I may not have a wealth of Bible knowledge, the Lord has blessed me with the ability to encourage and support others. As I pray with them and grow with them, my heart fills with joy and gratitude for all that God has done for me and them. It motivates me to continue letting my light shine!

Q: What does it mean to you to be involved in helping a world mission field?

Gruetzmacher: This has been an invaluable experience in which I have gained countless skills that I am excited to contribute to my future home congregation. Through working with Zambia, I have realized that the Lord truly will send me wherever he needs me to further his ministry most. I just need to trust him.

Anderson: Being involved in this mission field has opened my eyes to a large world filled with many souls, yearning for God’s forgiveness. I was able to experience firsthand what it is like to step outside of your country and experience other parts of the world and see God’s creation. I truly feel blessed that I could be a part of God’s plan for the spreading of his Word.



UNZA students began conducting small group Bible studies on campus in 2015. Cross Culture wants to continue discussing the importance of campus ministry and sharing ministry experiences with other campus ministries and congregations. Learn more at www.crosscultureglobal.org. Learn about WELS campus ministry in the March *WELS Connection* or online at wels.net/campus-ministry.

District news

MINNESOTA

On Jan. 17, **St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.**, dedicated its school addition.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis., dedicated its renovated church during a special service on Jan. 31. The new interior allows worshipers to more easily focus on four key symbols for the means of grace—cross, pulpit, altar, and baptismal font.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Victory of the Lamb, Franklin, Wis., dedicated its first permanent ministry center on Jan. 10. WELS Church Extension Fund and Kingdom Workers' Builders For Christ helped make this new worship facility possible for this home mission congregation that began nine years ago.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

NE—Messiah, Wichita, Kan., is celebrating its 50th anniversary with special services throughout the year.

Obituaries

Ruth M. Vater 1922–2015

Ruth Vater (née Struss) was born Jan. 16, 1922, in New Ulm, Minn. She died Dec. 4, 2015, in Red Wing, Minn.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.; St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.; Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Walter. She is survived by one step-daughter, three step-grandchildren, and five step-great-grandchildren.

Anita A. Boldt 1922–2015

Anita Boldt (née Quade) was born Oct. 25, 1922, in Sauk Centre, Minn. She died Dec. 24, 2015, in Watertown, Wis.

NEBRASKA



Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School moved to a new campus in Commerce City, Colo., in January. The high school is now sharing a campus with Living Hope, a home mission congregation. Pictured is Pastor Philip Kieselhorst, president of the board of directors for the high school, speaking at the school's dedication service, which was held Jan. 19.

NW—Grace, Sugar Bush, Wis., is celebrating 100 years of ministry throughout 2016.

SEW—Peace, Wilmot, Wis., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Jan. 11.

She taught at Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.

She was preceded in death by her husband, George; one grandchild; one great-grandchild; one brother; and four sisters. She is survived by 3 daughters, 1 son, 25 grandchildren, 78 great-grandchildren, 1 brother, and 1 sister.

Jean D. Vogt 1933–2015

Jean Vogt (née Meers) was born Mar. 7, 1933, in Stevens County, Minn. She died Dec. 8, 2015.

She taught at St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. John, Lannon, Wis.; and Zion, Hartland, Wis.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Herbert, and one son. She is survived by two sons, two daughters,

DAKOTA-MONTANA



A group of dorm students at Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D., created a mural of the nativity scene using more than 1,500 Post-it® notes.

WW—On Jan. 24, St. Mark, Watertown, Wis., celebrated 25 years in the teaching ministries of **Sue Hahn** and **Marilyn Bock**.

Christus, Delavan, Wis., celebrated its 125th anniversary on Jan. 31.

The district reporters for this month are: D-M—Dave Ruddat; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Ursel E. Seidl 1930–2015

Ursel Seidl was born June 25, 1930, in Fairfax, Minn. He died Dec. 8, 2015, in Brookings, S.D.

A 1951 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Calvary, Thiensville, Wis.; St. Matthew, Iron Ridge, Wis.; Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis.; St. Andrew's, St. Paul Park, Minn.; and Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis.

He was preceded in death by one son. He is survived by his wife, Barbara; 1 son; 2 daughters; 11 grandchildren; and 5 great-grandchildren.



Unexpected Love

Jesus defends an extravagant gift of devotion.

Theodore J. Hartwig

This dinner in honor of Jesus happened six days before the Passover, and, as Matthew reports in his gospel (26:6-13), the host was Simon the Leper. Undoubtedly, Jesus had healed Simon of a disease that had made him a social outcast for many years, so it is not unusual that “leper” became fixed to his name, an enduring reminder of his gift from Jesus. This dinner was a special occasion for Simon, a way to show his gratitude to Jesus and to invite others not only to share in his

joy but also to show Jesus honor and praise themselves.

MARY’S SPECIAL GIFT

Mary and Martha’s brother, Lazarus, was a guest at the meal. John chapter 11 recorded the astonishing miracle of his return to life after being dead four days. We know nothing about the state of his existence during his four-day sleep in the tomb. As might be expected, Martha was busy at her specialty of preparing and serving the

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

—John 12:1-8

meal. It was a chastened Martha. We hear not a word of criticism that Mary was not helping her. Jesus was the focus of attention at the banquet. His disciples as well as other guests were there for this dinner in honor of Jesus.

With her expression of loving devotion for Jesus, Mary unexpectedly became the center of everyone's attention. The perfume she poured on his feet was generous, an entire pint. It was also of the highest quality. That its fragrance penetrated the room evidences its high value. It was derived from nard or spikenard, a bush native to the faraway Himalayas. Mary spent a great deal of money for this special gift for Jesus.

Then we come to Judas Iscariot, the villain of the story. Supported by the other disciples in Matthew's account, he criticized Mary for what they called her prodigal use of costly perfume. Judas was from the town of Kerioth in Judea and may have been the only non-Galilean of the Twelve. He may also have been the most educated, which could account for his having been entrusted with keeping the common purse used for the gifts gathered from Jesus' admirers. Judas certainly seems knowledgeable about the value of the perfume, which was worth a year's wages. But his concern for the poor was sham talk. His fingers dipped habitually into the purse, not to cover the cost of expenses but to line his own pocket. It seems that the disciples were not yet aware of it, and though Jesus "knew what was in each person" (John 2:25), he did not use his authority to veto Judas' offense. He let the disciples discover this mundane truth at its own good time. We feel the full impact of Judas' fault-finding when we put ourselves into Mary's place. When criticized by

Judas and the others, she must have wanted to crawl into a hole. At huge cost to herself, she had shopped for a gift that would express the dimensions of her gratitude to this man who was her Savior. He deserved the very best from her. And, throwing all Jewish conventions to the wind, she let down her hair in public to dry the feet she had anointed. Yet what reward had come of it from the bystanders? Their response grated on her ears and sensibilities. Mary was crushed by the critical voice of Judas that was seconded by the other disciples. More than everyone else in that dining room, these men should have known better.

Jesus spoke on a far higher plane than defending Mary for her human devotion.

JESUS' IMPORTANT MESSAGE

In the highly charged atmosphere around the table, it was vital that Jesus come to Mary's rescue. Judas had rendered a judgment that for the practical-minded guests must have seemed common sense. Jesus might have scored Judas for his accusation. He might have said to Judas as he said to Peter for contradicting Jesus' prediction of his death: "Get behind me, Satan" or, in this context, "Get behind Mary, Satan."

But Jesus spoke on a far higher plane than defending Mary for her human devotion. Of course the poor for whom Judas seemed so sympathetic needed the service of others, and poor people would always be present to be helped. But Jesus would not always be at hand. On its higher

spiritual plane, Mary's perfume anointed Jesus' body for burial.

Such words, however, ran counter to the hopes and aspirations of most guests at the table. True to human nature, their minds were set on earthly things, not on things above. They expected Jesus to liberate them from their Roman masters and, like David, to establish another glorious Jewish kingdom on earth. At least they wanted him to be always with them to speak of God's grace and to perform miracles like the one performed for Simon. They did not want to hear Jesus speak about his burial.

In the face of this negativity, Jesus kept to his message and mission. He did not flinch from his Father's assignment. Of this determination, Isaiah writes of Jesus in his prophecy, "I set my face like flint" (50:7). Despite all the wrong ideas about his mission harbored by friends and followers, Jesus remained faithful to the mission he had come to complete. He was determined to go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be buried, but also to rise again. In Matthew's account of Mary's devotion, Jesus enhances his defense of Mary with this forecast: "Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (26:13).

Commendation does not come any higher. And it remains as Jesus said: This episode still holds a high place among the four gems from John.

Theodore Hartwig, professor emeritus at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

This is the third article in a four-part series on the gems of John.



Mission stories

A bumpy road made smooth Karen S. Kroll

While traveling on the road, my son observed that driving in Cameroon “isn’t so much driving as it is fighting with cars.” It’s true—driving in Cameroon is a unique experience. One hears a symphony of sounds: a constant hooting of car horns; taxis revving their engines; and the occasional “spirited” conversation between drivers, each of whom believes he has been cut off. It seems that the person who pushes the hardest, hoots the most, or speaks the loudest wins.

This is especially obvious in what is referred to as the third lane. When driving on a two-lane highway, the aggressive driver pulls out to pass with the expectation that the other cars will go onto the shoulder to accommodate him.

The temper of drivers in Cameroon sometimes seems to run as hot as the weather or the “pepe” (Scotch Bonnet Peppers, found in most of the food here). A friendly conversation can sound like a heated argument; pushing, posturing, and promoting oneself is championed; and showing weakness or humility only opens the door for others to take advantage.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

Maybe it’s this stark contrast that makes Sabina stick out of the crowd.

Sabina is the wife of Pastor Ewang Njumbe Joseph, the current president of the Lutheran Church of Cameroon. Sabina is a humble woman with a servant’s heart. She follows well the Lord’s example from the night he was betrayed—a real foot washer. She is that go-to person who will always come through when no other volunteers can be found to cook a meal for a meeting. She will welcome someone to her wide-open home, whether from a different town, tribe, or nation.

She doesn’t complain or get frustrated about what others aren’t doing . . . she just works to serve the Lord. She may be sick or have

heard bad news, but afterwards she just utters the traditional “*Ashia*” (“Sorry to hear . . .”). Then, with her ready smile, she pauses and giggles and, with a wave of her hand, moves on with her tasks.

Like most Christian attributes, hers have sprung up from the gentle rain of the gospel and have grown in a response to affliction. As God reminded the children of Israel, “I have tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10), so it was with Sabina. When she and Pastor Joseph wanted to marry, there was a problem: Pastor Joseph’s father had recently died, and there were no other relatives to ask for assistance to pay the “knock door” (bride price). And so Sabina waited until Pastor Joseph could raise funds to pay the amount owed to her family in accordance with Bakossi custom.

Marriage and children are “wealth” in African culture, so when Sabina and Pastor Joseph could not conceive, it was another problem. In Africa, the question isn’t what caused this but rather *who* caused this, and almost always, witchcraft is involved. These are the times when relatives whisper and begin placing blame, a time when there is talk of annulling the marriage and finding a more suitable partner. These are the times when African Christians have to put their trust in the Lord, knowing that he knows what’s best. This often involves standing up to tradition and family—serving God rather than man. And so they patiently waited and trusted in the Lord. God heard their prayers, and after four long years, he gave them a son and then another and then another.

In the meantime, Pastor Joseph had graduated from the seminary and had been assigned to serve at Nyandong congregation. Things finally seemed to be going well, until one day their firstborn son collapsed when walking to school and began shaking. It was determined that their son had epilepsy. The “village diagnosis” was that witchcraft was involved and that Pastor Joseph and Sabina should leave Nyandong. But they didn’t. They waited and patiently served the Lord, knowing he was in control.

Are you getting the picture? With challenge after challenge, the Lord himself produced a quiet, humble servant for himself. Sabina’s

quiet demeanor exemplifies what Peter's first letter calls "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (3:4). I've never heard her suggest that she didn't deserve these difficulties or brag about how much time she spends serving the Lord. She sees beyond those in front of her to know whom she truly serves and the reason why.

I sometimes wish I could be more like Sabina. Instead, I often live my Christian life in the same way people drive in Cameroon. Sometimes I push when I should be thinking of others first. When wronged, I become angry and indignant and loudly proclaim the injustices against me. I too often and too easily look at others with proud thoughts of how much better I am than them and how they should be serving the Lord like I am.

Do you also struggle with quietness and humility? Do you become impatient with those

with whom you work and worship? Do you sometimes feel that others should be working as hard as you do in the church? Do you need to be thanked for everything you do at church and feel "put out" when you are not? Do you feel pride when your service is mentioned in a newsletter or bulletin? Do you feel you've served "enough years" on a certain committee and others should jump in and serve as faithfully as you have?

Whether we're pushing ahead while driving in Cameroon or putting ourselves ahead of others in America, the problem is sin. Sin causes us to puff up, promote, and posture. Especially now, during the Lenten season, we appreciate Jesus' willingness to do the opposite. Since he "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28), we can celebrate that such sins are forgiven in Jesus. Because of his death and resurrection, we have a different view on life. We still struggle with our sins, but knowing that they have no power to condemn us helps us to relax and leave matters in the hands of our almighty Savior.

If somebody were to write Sabina's life story, it would not be as exciting as a heroine in a novel nor as spirited as a driver making a third lane. Outside of those reading this article, Sabina will never be famous. But I do thank God for not only coming into the world to save us from our sins but also for this wonderful example of a faithful fellow believer named Sabina.

Karen Kroll, wife of Missionary Daniel Kroll, lives in Kumba, Cameroon.

Learn more about the worker-training program in Cameroon on p. 22.

Karen Kroll and Sabina; Sabina cooking in front of the fire; Sabina and her husband, Ewang Njumbe Joseph, the current president of the Lutheran Church of Cameroon; the church for the Nyandong congregation where Pastor Joseph serves.

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF CAMEROON

Baptized national members: 640

Number of congregations: 32

Preaching stations: 1

National pastors: 10

Preseminary students: 13

Certified assistants: 14

Missionaries: 1

Unique fact: Due to the remote locations of some of the congregations, it is not uncommon for the pastors to trek one to four hours to get to church. "I recently did a study . . . where a woman trekked four hours to get to the Bible study and then turned around and trekked four hours back," says Karen.



Living a NIGHTMARE

How one man's faith gave him strength when his life went from a dream to a nightmare—twice. Linda R. Buxa



When Chris Nowakowski was a junior in high school, a friend pulled up unexpectedly and asked if he wanted to go for a ride. “I jumped in the back, and there was Laura,” he says.

They dated on and off through high school and freshman year of college but then went their separate ways. Senior year he kept thinking about her, but he couldn’t muster up the courage to call her. “My roommates kept egging me on, and I finally gave in. But as I went to pick up the phone to dial her, it rang. It was Laura calling me,” Chris says. “After over two years of no contact, we were calling each other at the same time.”

They married on August 26, 1995, and spent the next years working, raising children, and being active in church. “On Dec. 23, 2009,” he says, “we went to bed with what I would describe as a near perfect earthly life. Good careers, wonderful home, beautiful children, great family and friends.”

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

He woke up in the morning and found Laura dead—not dying. He performed CPR for 12 minutes while their children, ages 10 and 8, watched.

In the ambulance, the paramedics restored a heartbeat, but Chris was told Laura had so little heart function that she would never survive. They put her into a medically induced coma, and he fell asleep holding her hand, going from living the dream to living a nightmare.

Then a miracle happened. On Christmas Day, she fought through the induced coma, and “*she* woke *me* up by squeezing my hand!” he says. Two days later she received a pacemaker to prevent her heart from stopping again. A follow-up visit in March 2010 discovered her heart had normalized. “We went from meeting with transplant teams to being told she was perfectly fine. We received a miracle,” he said.

Her pacemaker remained in case this ever happened again. She fully recovered, and life returned to normal. Laura served as president of the parent/teacher association, volunteered to serve her children’s youth swim team, taught Sunday school, and was studying for her master’s degree.

A SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE

Three years later, they woke to the sound of her pacemaker beeping. Laura was fine; a wire from the device had failed. But as she underwent the procedure to replace the wire, things went horribly wrong. There would be no miracle this time. Laura died on Feb. 27, 2013.

While Chris was grieving for his wife, attorneys were telling him that any award from a trial would be based on Laura’s fixed-companionship worth—an amount set by the state—plus her annual income as a substitute teacher and stay-at-home mom, two jobs that

don't pay well. And they also would subtract "value" because Chris would no longer have to provide her food and clothing. "Can you imagine they would say that to someone who lost their wife under very questionable circumstances?" he asks. "It was horrible, insulting, and infuriating."

In addition to legal battles, he found himself struggling spiritually. "After she passed away, I had a very difficult time talking about 2009 anymore. When you see a miracle, it is hard to want anything else," says Chris.

"I had a searing anger with God. I called him horrible, shameful things, yet he was with me in ways I could never have imagined. He got me through such terrible, difficult times, and all I ever felt back from him was intense love," says Chris. "I wish I could have behaved more like Job. Job questioned God in the midst of his sorrows, but he did not demonstrate anger toward God like I did."

Returning to their home church wasn't easy either, but he remembered his children's example from Christmas Eve in 2009. While Laura was in a coma, Christyna and Patrick had asked to go to their Christmas Eve service because that's where their mom would want them to be. "Ultimately I believe getting right back to church was the best thing for us, but I cannot tell you how difficult it was to go. To go to communion without my wife. To see somebody else leading the children," he says. "It was incredibly painful and took some time before it didn't hurt so much."

The members of the congregation lent enormous support during the funeral, provided six months of meals, and gave the children rides when Chris needed help. "The compassion I have received from our church family gave me hope and helped me remember there are good people in this world even when you are in the midst of dealing with some very bad people." Christyna became more active at church. At age 14, she became a Sunday school teacher because "she was



concerned about the void in teachers when her mom died," he says.

It also helped him to remember the day he talked to Laura about her first cardiac arrest. "I asked her if she had a near-death experience," he says. "She responded she did not, but didn't need one. 'God will take me when he is ready,' she told me. I was so impressed with what she had been through and how incredible her faith was."

A STRONGER FAITH

Three years have now passed since Laura's death. "Though I am still but a sinner, I have stayed in the Word, continued attending church with my children, and my faith is stronger than I think it has ever been—even if I don't always act like it," he says. "I feel like I have grown closer to God than I knew was possible."

Chris has also been able to forgive the medical staff. When he realized that one day those responsible for Laura's death would be held accountable, "my anger toward them turned to pity. I was able to pray for them and eventually forgive them," he says. "I know it is possible to forgive but still seek justice. The two are not incompatible."

As he continues moving forward, Chris also sees blessings in the ways God has used his suffering to help others. He realizes that back when



he was living the dream, he couldn't relate to those who were suffering. Now he can relate and reaches out to others who are hurting. "That was actually the first step toward my own healing was learning how to help others again," he admits.

As he helps others, he shares his story and the depth of his awe about God. "I cannot tell you how deep I was in a dark pit of anger, depression, sadness, frustration, and despair," he says. "I have learned that our God is true to his Word and is with us always and loves us always—even when we are not capable of seeing it."

Linda Buxa is a member at St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

Throwing God's money after good

Jeffrey L. Samelson

We shouldn't
assume that
what's new
and exciting
is automatically
more worthy of
our gifts than
what is familiar
or long-standing.

If I had \$10 million, I wouldn't give it to start a new mission overseas or even a new congregation here at home, to endow a new program, or to start a new scholarship program.

Why not? It's not that any of those ideas are unwise or unworthy; it's that I have become convinced that in many cases, "new" money could actually do much more for the kingdom supporting "old" concerns that struggle for funding than by following what is fresh and exciting.

I would start by talking to our district presidents, mission boards, circuit pastors, and maybe even the WELS Church Extension Fund to identify congregations that are doing everything they can to keep their mission and ministry moving forward but that have mortgage or other payments due every month that are so large they have little or nothing left over to spend on actual mission work. Then I would take my \$10 million and use it to help pay down the debts of the congregations where I thought it would make the biggest difference. I wouldn't pay them off entirely. Knocking \$400,000 off a \$1.5 million debt here or \$250,000 off of \$900,000 there would free up thousands of dollars in those congregations—money that is already being given by their members—for new, fresh, and exciting efforts where they are already established and have connections. I think the members' hearts would thrill to see the gospel on the move where they are. No, \$10 million wouldn't take care of every church's debt, and yes, some congregations' bad decision-making would make them poor candidates for such debt relief. But I love to imagine the difference that such gifts could make.

"Throwing good money after bad" is an old expression that some might use to counsel against helping pay down someone else's debts, and I can even think of

some examples of churches that don't seem to make outreach or excellence any kind of priority. Yet, as a general rule, things like keeping the church doors open so that the Word of God can be preached and heard; freeing up funds for outreach and excellence; and, yes, paying church workers the wages they deserve are good things that God approves of, even commands. Remember also who that money in our bank accounts really belongs to: not us, but God. He's just entrusted that money to our care.

Now, I don't have \$10 million, and I doubt I ever will, so don't bother hitting me up for donations. But I hope this exercise reminds us that we shouldn't assume that what's new and exciting is automatically more worthy of our gifts than what is familiar or long-standing. I don't want us to forget that something as "boring" as paying down a mortgage can have church-growing implications of the greatest kind.

Chances are that you don't have \$10 million either, but what do you have? And what are you doing with it? Too many people hold back from giving to their churches because budgets and bill-paying don't excite them. Don't let that be you. You can still give to missions, new church starts, and ministries that you feel a passionate connection to, but don't forget the "old" opportunities around you and don't dismiss less-than-thrilling giving. It's throwing God's money after good.

Contributing editor Jeffrey Samelson is pastor at Christ, Clarksville, Maryland.

Matthew chapter 1 lists the ancestors of Jesus. You will learn more about your Savior as we trace through segments of his family tree.

God is willing to be part of a family that includes the worst of sinners—including you and me.

Judah, fourth son of Jacob, went off to live with a friend named Hirah, an Adullamite. In Adullam Judah married a Canaanite woman and had three sons. When his oldest son, Er, came of age, Judah found a wife for him. Her name was Tamar.

A SHOCKING STORY

But God put Er to death because he “was wicked in the LORD’s sight” (Genesis 38:7).

So Judah asked Onan, his second son, to marry Tamar in order to provide a son that would be considered the son of Er, his dead brother. It was a proper request even if it seems strange to us. But Onan didn’t want to provide a child who would be considered his brother’s, so when he and Tamar had relations, “he spilled his semen on the ground” (38:9). What he did was also “wicked in the LORD’s sight” (38:10), and God put him to death too.

With two of his three sons dead, Judah told Tamar to live in her father’s house as a widow until Shelah, his third son, was old enough to be married.

After a long time, Judah’s wife died. After a time of grief, Judah went to where his men were shearing his sheep. Tamar was told that her father-in-law was going to visit the sheepshearers. She veiled herself like a shrine prostitute and sat down at the side of the road that Judah would be traveling down.

Judah saw her and wanted to pay her to have sexual relations with him. He

promised that he would give her a young goat as payment; she wanted something to keep as a pledge. So he gave her his seal, cord, and staff, all of which would have identified him.

Later, when it became obvious that she was pregnant, Judah wanted to burn her to death as a prostitute! He still did not know that he was the father of the child. She produced the evidence (seal, cord, staff), and Judah recognized his own sinfulness. From that sinful alliance, Tamar bore twins, Perez and Zerah. Amazingly, Perez was one of the ancestors of our Savior.

GOD’S AMAZING LOVE

If you hadn’t heard that account before, perhaps you are surprised by its graphic sinfulness. But if we’re honest as we look at our own hearts, it’s not much of a surprise. Lent—spring and sheepshearing time—gives us that opportunity to examine our hearts. But Lent is so much more. It’s about the Savior who came for us. He was willing to be part of a family that included Judah, Tamar, and Perez!

He is willing to be part of a family that includes you and me too. That’s amazing! The holy God was willing to suffer and die so that you and I could be part of his family.

That’s even more amazing! The holy God made sure that you and I heard about what he did for us, and he led us to trust it. That too is amazing! And thankfully, it’s also true.

So, goodbye to regret and sorrow.
Hello to Jesus and his gracious victory for us.

Contributing editor Thomas Kock, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Atonement, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is the eighth article in a nine-part series on people in Jesus’ family tree.



Thomas D. Kock

REALPEOPLE REALSAVIOR



It's Lent,
and soon it
will be Easter.
One real Hero
emerges from
the pages
of Scripture—
Jesus.

One real champion!

I read the comics when I was younger: Superman, Batman, and others too. Now I even confess an addiction to reading Prince Valiant in the Sunday papers. I always want to know how he will vanquish new enemies and return to Camelot victorious, waiting for the next challenge.

Movies have taken things a step farther. New heroes have emerged: Thor, Flash, the Hulk, Spiderman, Captain America, and others with special powers. They seem invincible, but they are not. Superman has always had to worry about kryptonite. But in the fantasy of the superhero, they are ageless. Prince Valiant hasn't grown one grey hair in all the years I've been following his adventures.

With special effects, the movies make sure that the heroes defeat their enemies even though the enemies are menacingly evil and also have special powers. The world seems to teeter on the brink of tyranny and evil until the final battle or struggle. Then all is back to normal. Peace reigns. Joy fills every heart. We can go on with our lives safe from threats, at least until the next episode or movie.

We cheer for these heroes. The stories of their exploits are distractions that imply that all will turn out in the end. I'll spend a few dollars for a couple of hours of fantasy that allow me to dream of the ultimate success. Of course, it's not real, and the solutions offered are only the creation of someone's imagination and dazzling and exciting special effects.

When I come home, I face the reality of another day, sometimes without realizing two important shortcomings of these distractions. First, they change nothing. Yes, they are only imagination. When the smoke clears and the explosions disappear, everyone is back to the same world with its evil, sorrow, pain, and misery. They simply wait for the

next evil to arise. Then another hero—or the same one—must arise to meet the next challenge. Prince Valiant just keeps going on and on, and when they threaten to remove him from the comics, a storm of protest arises.

Second, the superheroes are often quite limited. Some disguise themselves as normal humans and cannot confront every problem. They only wait for the worst of the problems. But even then they sometimes need the help of other superheroes to be victorious. And the problems and challenges they face are themselves a distraction from the larger problems we face in this life—death, sorrow, pain, evil. Those problems remain after the credits of every tale.

Now you know where I'm going, I think. It's Lent, and soon it will be Easter. One real Hero emerges from the pages of Scripture—Jesus. He has become like us—actually, one of us, true human—but he is also true God. His mission was to take our place and overcome our worst enemies. He did that. He changed the forever. He changed the world of every sinner from an endless procession of guilt and death to forgiveness and life. He took away sin with his bloody sacrifice and smashed death with his triumphant resurrection. No other hero has come close.

It's no surprise that so many people spend money to go to the movies as entertainment. But should these distractions and so many others keep anyone from taking the real Hero—this Savior—seriously? Maybe this Hero is dismissed because there are no special effects. Perhaps some would rather be entertained and distracted than forgiven and filled with hope. I'll go to the movies and read the comics, but I will not forget to honor and worship the one true Champion who is not a fantasy.

GREAT STORIES OF THE BIBLE

DAVID & GOLIATH Joel S. Heckendorf

Rudy. Hoosiers. Moneyball. Miracle. The Karate Kid. Cool Runnings. Rocky. What do all these sport movies have in common? Against all odds, the underdog wins.

We love such movies. But we don't just love the big-screen stories; we also cheer for the underdog in life. We cheer for the "Cinderella" team in the NCAA basketball tournament. Underdog victories are heart-warming and motivational.

David and Goliath is the ultimate underdog story (1 Samuel chapter 17). Standing at "six cubits and a span" (about 9'6"), Goliath towered over David by about four feet. The giant's 126-pound armor alone weighed almost the same as his opponent. The iron tip of his spear was as heavy as a bowling ball. David had five smooth stones from a stream. To say the Vegas odds were against this sling-shooting shepherd is quite the understatement. And Goliath knew it. Shaking his massive head in disbelief at the boy coming to meet him in the valley, the Philistine pumped his armored chest out just a bit more.

But you know what happened next. Pride goes before the fall. One stone. That's all it took. One stone to the head, and the giant fell.

David versus Goliath wasn't just a clash between a boy with a peach-fuzzed face and a man's man. It wasn't just a battle between a sling and a sword. The battle didn't belong to David. "The battle is the LORD's" (1 Samuel 17:47). Goliath's sarcasm was true . . . he was a dog in this battle. Against the Lord, Goliath was the underdog.

We often go through life with an underdog mentality. With chips on our shoulders, we are out to prove something. We want to "be a David." Self-help books encourage us to "be a David" as we face our giants. But this popular story is not about being the hero. If David walked into the valley alone, he would have died there. Don't try to be a David; rather, see David's greater Son. See Jesus, the Son of David.

Although he didn't look like much, Jesus, the Son of David, took down bigger giants than Goliath. When the devil tempted him in the desert, Jesus slung the smooth stone of his Word at this mighty foe. When sin towered over Jesus and pinned him to the cross, what did Jesus do? With his words, "It is finished," he hurled a stone and struck sin in the head, knocking it to the ground. Three days later, when death thought it had Jesus defeated, Jesus burst through the stone of the tomb and cut off death's head.

The big giants have been defeated. Therefore, little giants in our lives don't stand a chance. No matter what you are facing, you are always the favorite because "the battle is the LORD's."

EXPLORING THE WORD

1. Tell the story in your own words. Then read the account. Which details did you omit or mistakenly add?
2. Why do you think this story is one of the most popular stories included in children's Bibles?
3. What can we learn from David when Saul told him he couldn't fight Goliath (1 Samuel 17:33-37)?

Contributing editor Joel Heckendorf is pastor at Immanuel, Greenville, Wisconsin.



This is the fourth article in a ten-part series on the top ten stories included in children's Bibles and how they apply to our lives today. Find answers online after March 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



Retracing ^{the steps} of the **Lenten** **JOURNEY**

The annual reading of the Passion History offers us an opportunity to see our sinfulness and our salvation. Peter M. Prange

Since about the fourth century, Christians have read the gospel accounts of the Savior's suffering and death annually. Perhaps no other Christian tradition has been more beneficial to the life of the church. The Scriptures don't command us to do this every Lent. But we would be spiritually poorer if we left the Passion History unread in public worship during the 40 days leading up to Easter.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

A small minority might argue that there's no reason to repeat this tradition year after year because Christians already know the story so well. But how did we come to know it so well? Probably from the yearly reading of the Passion History in worship! And while *we* might know the story well, every new generation of Christians needs the same regular exposure to this central biblical account.

So can those of us who know the story so well simply "check out" during that part of the service, putting up with it for the sake of those who don't know it as well? Is there any benefit for us to retrace the steps of Jesus' Lenten journey?

Simply put, it's necessary and beneficial for every Christian because the Passion History—along with the gospel accounts of Jesus' victorious resurrection—form the very foundation of our Christian faith life of repentance. These readings are both the ABCs and the 123s of our lives. We can never ponder them enough.

TAKING A NECESSARY JOURNEY

If we don't receive any benefit from retracing those steps with Jesus, the problem isn't with tradition; it's with our hearts and ears. In a sermon preached around 1520 entitled "The True and False Views of Christ's Sufferings," Martin Luther highlighted how Christians often fail to weigh the Passion History properly, merely considering it a matter of routine reading. "Christ's Passion must be

dealt with not in words and a show," he asserted, "but in our lives and in truth." He instructs us how to retrain our hearts and ears so we can receive the benefit the Holy Spirit desires to give us when we hear the story again.

First, hearing the Passion History should lead us to ponder both the depth of our sinfulness and the enormity of our sins. When God's faithful people carefully contemplate how much wrath the eternal Father poured out on his sinless Son because of our sin, "they become terror-stricken in heart at the sight, and their conscience at once sinks in despair." If God should treat his perfectly obedient Son in this way, how would he have dealt with me, a sinful slug?

But the pondering of the passion must never end there, otherwise you will "miss the opportunity of stilling your heart . . . [and] never secure peace." It does us no good simply to hear the account only to wallow in self-loathing and sinful despair. Instead, "when we see that [our sins] are laid on Christ and he has triumphed over them by his resurrection and we fearlessly believe it, then they are dead and have become as nothing . . . they are swallowed up by his resurrection."

Retracing the steps of Jesus' Lenten journey produces "godly sorrow," which "brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

We may think we know that journey well, but it's a journey worth retracing every year and every day with ears and hearts open each time.

Peter Prange is pastor at Living Word, Gray, Tennessee.