# Forward in Christ

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# I love you this much

Jesus' passion paints the perfect portrait of love, which also helps us understand God's will. Page 10





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Nathan W. Strutz

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#### POSTMASTER

Send address changes to *Forward in Christ*, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and additional mailing offices.

#### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Print: USA—\$17.99; Canada—\$18.89; all other countries—air mail \$71.99. Digital: USA—\$15.99; Canada—\$16.79; all other countries—\$15.99. Premium: USA—\$18.99; Canada—\$19.94; all other countries—air mail \$72.99. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. nph.net/periodicals.

#### ON AUDIC

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

Indicates additional online content

COVER IMAGE: LIGHTSTOCK

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



This month, you get to meet members of the "Chain Gang" (pictured), classmates from Dr. Martin Luther College who have supported each other through a chain letter for the past 50 years (p. 30). It's an awesome tribute to the importance of Christian friendship.

Executive editor John Braun reiterates the blessing of having fellow Christians' prayers and compassion in our lives when we're faced with the crosses of this world (p. 34). Showing concern is one way we can help each other while on the road to heaven.

Because we all will face evil in this world. And sometimes it's hard to "see" Jesus when it feels like evil and hate and sadness are all around us. Our newest contributing editor Glenn Schwanke reminds us that we need to see with the "eyes of the heart" (p. 32).

The season of Lent is the perfect time to see Jesus and his love in the midst of evil. That love, pictured in Jesus' willingness to suffer death for all sinners, also helps us understand God's will better, even when it sometimes feels like evil is winning in this world (p. 10).

Julie Wietzke









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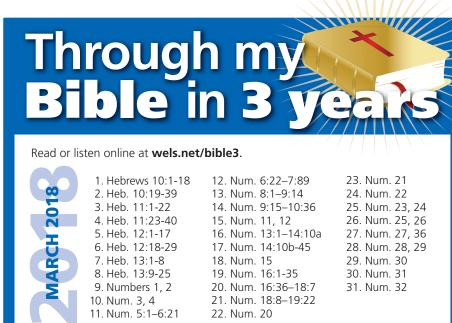


#### WHAT IS TRUTH?

"What is truth?" [Jan.] is an excellent article addressing the highly relevant concept of defining truth! This topic is so timely—as "intellectual teachings" currently challenge the existence of any absolute truth. We all benefit by understanding the pitfalls of human reasoning through examples. Dr. Arthur Eggert summarizes key historical philosophical rationalizations and juxtaposes them beside divinely given absolute truth in a very cogent manner. His article reminds me that Christian apologetics must always be solidly rooted in God's Word. Human logic alone fails. I am eager to read the next three parts of this series!

> Ann Waltz Houston, Texas

Send your letters to Feedback, Forward in Christ, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or Forward in Christ.





# Living in exile

#### Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. Genesis 28:10

Peter M. Prange

When St. Paul penned Philippians, he was languishing in prison. Life had not been easy for this witness of Christ Jesus, and it wouldn't get easier. But that didn't come as a surprise to him. The Lord Jesus had promised as much, even before Paul became an apostle. The Lord even said, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:16).

Paul was living in exile, and he knew it. Through his suffering he had come to appreciate that "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). But until the day of Jesus' glorious coming, he would be living away from his heavenly home.

## EXPERIENCING SUFFERING IN THIS WORLD

The Old Testament believer Jacob had a similar experience. He was the one who received the birthright, not Esau, his brother. Jacob was the one through whom the Savior of the world would be born. He was the one whom God chose for this blessing, even before he and Esau were born (Genesis 25:23). Yet it was Jacob, not Esau, who was driven away from his homeland to live in exile. He received the divine promises, only to be sent out into the wilderness.

Near the end of his life, Martin Luther remarked on Jacob's plight. "God seems to be a liar, because he promises in a kindly manner and puts forth good words but gives things that are evil. He gives Jacob a blessing and, on the other hand, allows it to be taken away. On the contrary, Esau, who has been cursed, remains in the house with his children, his wives, and his whole relationship, and governs everything just as previously he was head of the household and a priest of the church. Jacob goes into exile and abandons his blessing" (Luther's Works [LW], Vol. 5, p. 202).



Luther discovered in Holy Scripture that what was true for Jacob is true for God's people in general: "This is the constant course of the church at all times, namely, that promises are made and that then those who believe the promises are treated in such a way that they are compelled to wait for things that are invisible, to believe what they do not see, and to hope for what does not appear" (LW, Vol. 5, p. 202).

Jesus pushes the seed of his gospel deep into our hearts through the crosses we carry.

## USING TRIALS TO EXERCISE OUR FAITH

But why? Why does God deal with his dear people this way? Why does he allow his people to endure such pain, such persecution, such pushback from an evil world? Why doesn't he turn the tables and send the unbelievers into

exile and allow his children to live in peace in this world?

Why? Because Jesus wants us to trust him. He knows how faith works and how faith is worked. Faith needs to be exercised just like our bodies, and it is exercised through resistance, through trial. Luther explained that "faith is not a laughable, cold quality that snores and is idle in the heart. No, it is agitated and harassed by horrible trials concerning the nothingness and the vanity of the divine promises. . . . [So often in this world] I see nothing of what He promises. Indeed, I feel the opposite in my flesh" (LW, Vol. 5, p. 205).

But that's exactly when faith in God's promises kicks in! That's when faith is exercised. Jesus pushes the seed of his gospel deep into our hearts through the crosses we carry. The heavier the cross, the more we treasure his promises.

Like Jacob, we are living in exile. Thank God for it.

Contributing editor Peter Prange is pastor at Bethany, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

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PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK

March 2018



Mark Schwede

We face a "religious correctness" that others often try to impose on people who hold to and practice the truths of God's Word.

# Are you religiously incorrect?

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the US Constitution, but that guarantee is actively being set aside for the sake of "political correctness."

On college campuses, speakers who promote politically conservative views are threatened with violent protests if they dare to speak. When people hold views deemed by the culture to be "politically incorrect," they are often labeled as ignorant, closed-minded, haters, and bigots. It's not surprising that in the face of such condemnation their voices fall silent. They conclude that it's better to avoid the confrontation and the angry response of those who militantly claim to hold a more "enlightened" view.

Regardless of what side of those issues you may be on, a person with an appreciation for freedom of speech must recognize that silencing debate and discussion on controversial political issues cannot be healthy for a nation that is built on freedom.

The same kind of dynamic presents a challenge to Christians who strive to be faithful to the teachings of Scripture. In our interaction with other Christians and even with non-Christians, we face a "religious correctness" that others often try to impose on people who hold to and practice the truths of God's Word.

Years ago, one of my seminary professors was talking to his nephew about creation. The professor stated that the Bible is clear that the world and the universe were created in six days by the power of God's Word. His nephew said, "Uncle, nobody really believes that anymore." The professor said, "But I believe that!" The response from his nephew was, "Nobody *intelligent* believes that anymore."

Maybe you have had a similar experience. If we say that we believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, we will be mocked for believing in fairy tales. When we state that we

commune and worship only with those who share our beliefs, we are accused of being unloving, closed-minded, and judgmental. When we insist that marriage is a God-given lifelong union between one man and one woman, we are labeled as foolishly clinging to outmoded traditions and are encouraged to get with the times. When we insist that taking the life of an unborn child is murder, we are said to be people who want to trample on a woman's right to choose. When we confess that we know that heaven is ours only because of what Christ did for us, we are dismissed as misguided and naïve.

In the view of many other Christians, and certainly in the eyes of non-Christians, we are hopelessly "religiously incorrect." But that's exactly where we need to be—incorrect in the judgment of many, but standing firmly on the truth of God's Word.

So, our biblical beliefs may mean that we are "religiously incorrect" in the eyes of those who don't share our beliefs. What do we do in response to that? First, we continue to look to God's Word to strengthen our faith, to increase our knowledge of his Word, and to reinforce our belief in the doctrine that we have learned. We need to be ready to hold those beliefs without doubting or wavering even when we are challenged or face hostility. Then, instead of remaining silent when people condemn and criticize, instead of having a twinge of embarrassment that our beliefs may not be popular in today's world, we need to be ready to speak what we believe—with respect and love and gentleness. God will use the words of those who are "religiously incorrect" to bring others to know the truth that he has given to us.



# Light for our path

Years ago, Christians considered tattoos to be wrong. Nowadays, it is common to see Christians, even students preparing for the public ministry, with tattoos. Did the Bible change? Did people change?

James F. Pope

The answers to your questions send us to both the Old and New Testaments. Ultimately, we arrive at a conclusion that puts tattoos in the area of Christian freedom.

#### **IDOLATROUS IMAGES**

When Christians in the past considered tattoos to be wrong and appealed to Scripture, they pointed to Leviticus 19:28: "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD." The words are very straightforward, but we need to consider them in context. The surrounding verses contain God's instructions to the people of Israel as they traveled to the promised land of Canaan.

Heathenism was synonymous with Canaan, and God did not want the Israelites to exchange his truth for the lies of idols. God wanted his followers to keep their identity as his people and reject false ideas that could infiltrate the heart. That called for avoiding outward identification with those false religions. Because Canaanite practices included tattoos, God instructed his people to avoid them. As that prohibition is limited to Leviticus, God's directive involved only the Israelites and targeted the First Commandment, not the Fifth Commandment.

We are to take good care of our bodies. Consider this question and instruction: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Can Christians honor God with their bodies by injecting ink into them? This is where Christians may disagree as citizens of God's kingdom.

#### **CONSIDERATE CHOICES**

Christian freedom is a significant theme in the apostle Paul's epistles. In Galatians,

Paul directs Christians to be careful that others do not rob them of their freedom in Christ (5:1). In 1 Corinthians, Paul instructs Christians to think of others when they exercise their freedom in Christ (8:9). Going beyond that, Paul revealed how he was willing to give up his Christian freedom if that were in the best interests of others (1 Corinthians 8:13).

How might these thoughts apply to tattoos and Christians—especially the young people you mentioned in your question? Those serving in the public ministry and those preparing for such service definitely want to think of others. They do not wish to be a distraction in any way to the message of God's Word. That would suggest they evaluate the long-term meaning and visibility of potential tattoos. No doubt, a Christian symbol on a wrist can spark a spiritual conversation in a way similar to how a dubious marking on a neck might prevent a conversation from taking place.

So, could I ever give an unqualified approval of a body marking? Absolutely! The Lord used the prophet Isaiah to relay this message to us: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:16). Imagine your name inscribed on God's hands. That imagery illustrates how you and I are always in God's thoughts and on his mind.

If you ever question that, ponder what this season of Lent is all about.

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.

ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK

March 2018



#### We begin to understand God's will through his love at the cross of Jesus.

Ponder something with me for a while.

People scold and scoff about God's will being completely, constantly,

Some years ago a friend of mine was feeling an itch to get serious about Christianity. But he wasn't quickly buying into everything Christian. As he considered the biblical idea that God has numbered the days of every person's life, news at the time was heavy with an airline disaster in which all the people on board perished—a loss of more than one hundred lives. "Incredulous," my friend scoffed. "I cannot believe God preplanned the time for all those people to be up

And what about evil in this world? Some in governments abuse power. Terrorists detonate bombs in which even Christians are killed. And then there's the drive-by bullet that pierces a house wall and then a child's heart as she sleeps innocently in her crib. How can so much evil exist, dominating news and life, if God's will is re-

Do you wonder if the disciples were asking the same questions when they watched the wicked betrayal by Judas and the brutal sufferings lashed against the One in whom they had invested

## GOD'S WILL DETERMINES ALL THINGS

The Bible doesn't bat an eye when declaring, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Psalm 115:3). All things are under his feet (Ephesians 1:22). The plans of the Lord reach across time; they "stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Psalm 33:11). Even King Nebuchadnezzar, made beastly and then restored, learned at least this much: "He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'" (Daniel 4:35).

God's will brings out the constellations at his timing and in the places he chooses in the expanses beyond us. Any shifts in them over the millennia are caused by his will as he brings them out, one by one, night after night, each named and nudged by his interested, determining mind (Isaiah 40:26).

Job had it right: God has outlined our lives and placed the limits on our times (14:5). He coordinates all the details of each individual life, orchestrating everything so that specific people end up traveling together on the same doomed airliner. His sovereign will extends down to the molecules in your body—every single one of them. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). When the Bible says everything is under his feet, it does not leave room for even the tiniest exception. He adjusts and alters all matter, even at the subatomic level. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight" (Hebrews 4:13).

But his all-controlling will reaches even deeper, down to the subconscious, moving the ideas and plans of the human heart. If you want to see how a king's heart is like a watercourse, directed by God's hand wherever the Almighty pleases (Proverbs 21:1), read the thwarting of Ahithophel's advice (2 Samuel 15:31) or the census of Rome's Caesar that ultimately resulted in a pregnant virgin being in Bethlehem just at the time of giving birth in the fullness of time according to God's prophecy.

Did you think it was coincidence that Caiaphas, the callous high priest, managed to prophesy something so beautiful as God's plan of redemption without even realizing it (John 11:50, 51)? Or maybe you yourself have experienced a strange turn of events, obviously orchestrated beyond your ken. I once was about to make an observation to someone I was sitting next to, but something happened around us and the opportunity disappeared. Shortly afterward, I realized that if I had made that light-hearted comment, it would have done great damage to the other person's spiritual well-being.

[Jesus'] passion paints the perfect portrait of what love really looks like.

#### THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S LOVE

Now, don't be afraid. Ask the question buzzing around like a gnat swarm: If God is so fully, deeply involved and controlling everything and everyone, even Satan and his evil hoards, why does evil seem to get its way? It's a difficult question to consider. Perhaps one we will never answer. It's above our pay grade. Our hearts just accept and trust God's love in Christ.

In a world where the sun was designed to appear in the east and gravity pulls things downward, the power to make choices was created too. The human will was designed in harmony with the song of God's heart, but since the fall into sin, humans can use their will for evil, heinous evil. It's part of the fallen world. People can do unspeakable things to children; they can choose orientations that undermine faith; they can pit their plans against the Almighty's.

But God controls even this. "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21). He may allow people's evil for a time, but he is always

turning it for his mighty purposes. Joseph, abused by his brothers, ends up in desolate loneliness in Egypt. But that whole story is Romans 8:28 in action, as God uses even a person's evil for the good of those who love him.

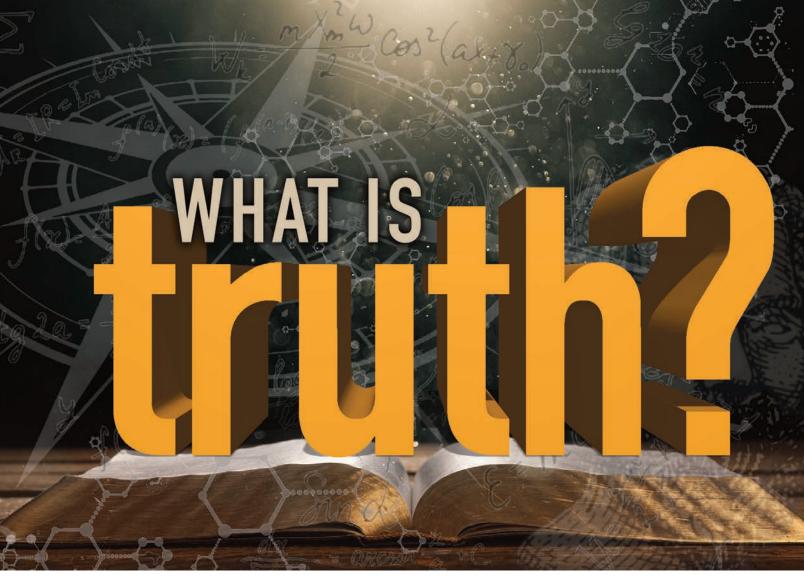
It is especially when you ponder Jesus' sufferings and death—as we are doing in this Lenten season—that you can see how God's will prevails even in the height of human wickedness. When they killed the Author of Life, we sinners walked out of the jaws of death. Evil doesn't really prevail, not in the end.

We can't always see good in God's decisions—when cancer comes knocking or a criminal gets to take something precious from us. Sometimes God truly is hidden (Isaiah 45:15), and his judgments are unsearchable, his paths beyond tracing out. And yet we can actually love God's will.

When Jesus was nearly dying for sorrow in Gethsemane, he yielded to his Father's will, resolute in its big-picture wisdom and its eternally faithful love. If you're tempted to wonder if God is just toying with you, if he is juggling your times or rolling your circumstances like dice on the board of life, if you fear he is marginally concerned about you or begrudgingly cares, trust the heart behind his will.

He absolutely cannot do anything in an unloving, unfair way, because he is love and he feels love for you down into his deepest essence. Do you want proof? Jesus willingly was abused and murdered. His passion paints the perfect portrait of what love really looks like. "I love you this much," he said, as he stretched out his hands to die. And when God's hand is stretched out. "who can turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27). His sovereign will decided, and that is why, when we ponder his will in the light of his passion, we can rest our very souls in his sovereign choice. We can even pursue his will as our life's ambition because, under the lamp of Lent, we find it only, always good, pleasing, and perfect (Romans 12:2).

Chris Cordes is pastor at St. John's, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota.



# Science has helped us to expand our knowledge. But how reliable is scientific truth?

Arthur A. Eggert

Mathematics and formal logic are examples of deductive reasoning. When using deduction, we learn no new information. We are working within a well-defined box with well-understood tools. If we begin with premises that are true, then our conclusion will also be true. This is of great value for business and engineering, but it does not meet the needs of scientific investigation.

The driving motivation for scientists is to expand knowledge. Therefore, they need to reach beyond the boundaries stated in the premises of what they are studying. This involves what is called "induc-

tive reasoning," which goes from specific cases to a more general conclusion. For example, "It snowed in February this year, last year, and every year that I remember. Therefore, it will snow next February." Next February, however, is not within the set of initial information, so we are drawing conclusions when we state something about it. Such generalized conclusions run the risk of not being true, even though all the premises are true. Perhaps unusual conditions will make next February without snow.

#### **SCIENTIFIC FACT**

Virtually all science is based on inductive reasoning. This is because scientists can usually study only a small fraction of the cases that occur in nature (e.g., all the stars in the Milky Way). Only in the rare instance when they are able to investigate every possible case can they say with certainty that something is true.

To understand the nature of scientific truth, one has to avoid being taken in by meaningless statements, such as "It's a scientific fact that . . ." This statement claims that the information being put forth is absolutely true. But how do we know the "fact" is true? Establishing that it is true might take considerable time and effort. Consequently, scientists regard something as a "fact" only if its probable truthfulness is accepted by everyone discussing it. If some people reject it, it is not a "fact." Such a "fact," whether true or not, becomes a part of one's set of unproved assumptions.

"Evidence," which is the heart of scientific investigation, is obtained through making observations of the physical world. Unfortunately, collecting evidence or data can be affected by physical limitations, such as the precision of the instrumentation or the bias of the

observer. For observations to be considered evidence, they must be made and validated based on a set of rules or standards that have been agreed upon *before* observations are made. For example, archaeological findings are sometimes announced that "disprove the Bible," only to have those findings later discarded once the observations are reviewed according to the accepted standards.

The goal of scientists is to create models that explain all their observations in terms of the natural properties of matter, energy, space, and time. Because the conclusions of inductive reasoning can never be absolutely certain, scientists have developed a method of determining which models are more likely to be true than others. "Scientific truth" is therefore the result of the scientific method. This method requires that observations be made; a theory (model) be formulated to explain the observations; the model be submitted for review by the scientific community (falsification challenge); and the model be modified, as necessary, based on any criticism. The process is then repeated until sufficient evidence exists for it to be generally accepted (i.e., scientifically true) or rejected. Because science does not have the absolute certainty of deductive reasoning behind it, the falsification challenge is critical to guarantee that the best analysts in the field see no reason that the theory is not true. Without this, one has only pseudoscience. Even still, scientific truth can be overturned if new evidence is found that does not fit the model.

#### THREE KINDS OF SCIENCE

There are basically three kinds of science. In the hard sciences like chemistry and physics, it is possible to isolate the entity being studied (e.g., oxygen atoms) from the environment, thereby eliminating interferences. Experimenters then hold constant all independent variables except the one of interest (e.g., temperature) to study a dependent variable (e.g., pressure). The experiments can be exactly duplicated by others with similar

equipment, thereby removing investigator bias and providing an easy way to falsify incorrect theories or verify correct ones. Scientific models are developed using mathematical models that seem to fit the evidence. The mathematical models are reliably valid, but the scientific models they are used to underpin might not be. Mathematical models are completely under the control of mathematicians, but natural phenomena are under the control of the Lord, not scientists. In general, models in the hard sciences do not pose a challenge to a Christian's faith.

The Christian should not be troubled by "scientific truth" because it is only a human explanation of the world.

Researchers can also do experiments in the "soft sciences" like psychology or pharmacology, but they cannot completely isolate the entity being studied, for example, drug metabolism, from other factors, such as emotional stress. Experimental environments are extremely complex because they involve living beings who respond to multiple equilibria and stimuli with various reaction speeds. Experimental results are often sensitive to the exact composition of the population (e.g., age, sex, culture, disease status) being studied. Repeating experiments can, therefore, yield significantly different results. This is why medical guidelines often change. Because it is so susceptible to variations in experimental conditions, "scientific truth" from the soft sciences is not nearly as reliable as that from the hard sciences. Challenges to Christian beliefs raised by the soft sciences include the way researchers conduct experiments on living beings, including humans; the methods they use to collect their

research materials, like aborted fetuses; and their assumptions about the nature of man, for example, if humans are capable of moral improvement.

Finally, in observational sciences like astronomy and paleontology, the investigators are limited to what they happen to encounter. They can search where they hope to find new or confirmatory information, but they cannot produce new cases to study through experimentation. For example, economists cannot start financial depressions to experiment with methods of recovering from them, and astronomers cannot create new earthlike planets to test their models. Because its models often change due to new discoveries, the reliability of observational science research is generally overstated in the media. Theories of macroscopic evolution that are inconsistent with the Bible come primarily from the observational sciences. Since there is no rigorous way to test observational science models, they will always remain relatively weak. Moreover, any effort to introduce acts of God into such models makes them completely unfalsifiable and turns them into pseudoscience.

When we are dealing with something that is claimed to be scientifically true, it is essential that we look at the type of science that is involved and ask, "Is it reproducible?" "Can it be tested by falsification?" While all scientific models are somewhat fragile and susceptible to being overturned by new discoveries, scientific truth in the hard sciences is more reliable than in the soft sciences and much more testable than in the observational sciences.

The Christian should not be troubled by "scientific truth" because it is only a human explanation of the world. The Lord is in control.

Dr. Arthur Eggert is a member at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a four-part series on different ways the world finds truth and where we as Christians should look for truth.

# A family finds joy when they discover the truth of God's Word.

John A. Braun

"When we got married, we decided to find a church where we could worship together," Kimberly begins. That search came to an end when Chris and Kimberly Zak joined a nearby Lutheran church. "It was comfortable. We made a good connection with the pastor, and they had a strong children's ministry," she says. The church was not a conservative confessional church, however.

For 12 years they made friends and were active in the church. The congregation was large, and it took over one hundred volunteers doing various tasks each weekend to ensure the services ran smoothly. Eventually Kimberly became the coordinator of those volunteers. "It was a tight fit for us for 12 years," she says. They felt comfortable with their choice. Soon Chris and Kimberly added a son, Adam, and a daughter, Kate, to their family.

#### THE YEAR OF POLITICS

But things changed for them in 2016. They call that year "the year of politics." The political divide was evident

then as it still is today. We may all have memories of the division and rhetoric of the campaigns. For the Zaks, politics invaded their church. Sermons became political. "The weekly sermon at our previous church touched on social and political issues often. This was disturbing to us," says Chris. "We wanted to hear about the Word and the amazing gift we have been given by Jesus, not lectures on how social and political issues fit into our Christian lives."

Kimberly agrees: "We wanted to grow in our faith. We did not want to hear politics in the pulpit."

They had already noticed that the messages they heard in Bible class were not clear. That year of politics brought those disturbing messages into focus. "We were frustrated with our Bible study, because there were never any real answers," says Kimberly. "The Bible was always a matter of interpretation."

Chris agrees, "We had numerous experiences in Bible studies where the consensus of the group was that you can take part of the Bible literally and then, at your convenience, take other parts of the Bible figuratively. Whenever you personally didn't like what the Bible passage conveyed, you could just wash it away by saying, 'Well, that

didn't really happen' or 'That was just a figure of speech.' "

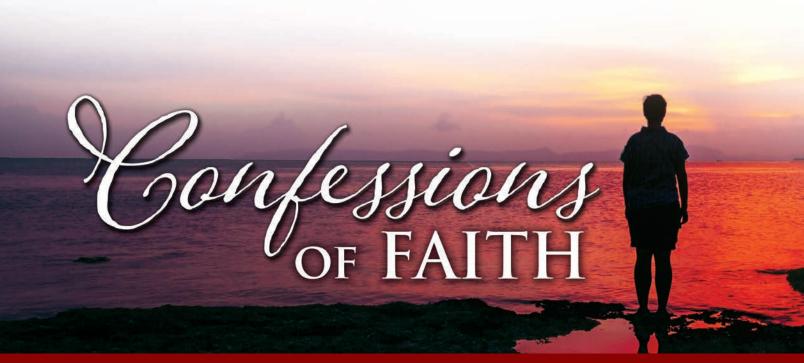
When they talked with others in the church, "there was a consensus that some of the Bible was true, but it was all a matter of interpretation," says Kimberly. They were confused instead of satisfied. Exactly what did the Word of God say? The answer often was vague and unclear. It seemed that it was all part of the approach in their previous church.

#### **AN ETERNITY OF JOY**

The Zaks decided it was time to search for a new church home. That meant researching other Lutheran churches. Kimberly did the research, finding a couple of more conservative Lutheran churches in the area.

This search for a church home ended suddenly when they stepped through the doors of Resurrection, Verona, Wis. It was the first church on the list. Kimberly says that it was "like a light bulb went off." The message they heard was different from what they had heard for 12 years. "We heard the Word of God, not interpretation," she says.

The entire family was amazed. Kimberly said, "This is where we belong. But we should check out the other



churches on our list." Chris, Adam, and Kate all disagreed and said they did not need to look any further. They had found the pearl of great value (Matthew 13:15,16)—the Word of God, the gospel of Jesus. It brought them joy. They had found their new church home.

They met with Nathan Strutz, pastor at Resurrection, who assured them that the Bible is the true Word of God. Together with Strutz, the Zaks began a Bible information course. For three months Strutz met with them once a week in their home to share the truths of the Bible. Kimberly comments, "We talked about Jesus, sin, grace, faith, works, the Bible, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and all the important topics."

The light bulb that had been ignited on that first visit grew brighter. Kimberly says, "We learned more in those three months than we did in 12 years at the previous church. We heard the Word of God."

Chris adds, "We were dead in sin, but because of God's grace, through faith in Jesus, we are saved. The message is steadfast and clear, without social and political commentary."

The assurance of heaven is especially important. Kimberly shares that lesson:

"I'm going to heaven. Period! In those Bible classes, Pastor Strutz would regularly ask if we knew we are going to heaven. The answer is yes, and the reason is Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose. It's amazing. It's that simple."

Their joy in finding the truth of God's Word brings them to church every Sunday. "Now attending Resurrection Lutheran, the message every Sunday is very clear," says Kimberly. They are growing in their faith and continuing to learn about God and what Jesus has done for them.

They still miss the people they grew to know during the 12 years they were members of their previous church. But now they have found the peace, joy, and comfort of God's love. "Now it is unbelievably awesome. Every Sunday is exactly what we need to hear," they say.

Every Sunday! What an important reminder for all of us. We all have the opportunity to hear the gospel every Sunday. The place and the pastor may be different, but the gospel is the pearl of great value that fills us all with joy and peace. The example of the Zaks can encourage us all to walk through the doors of our congregations and hear such great news every week. How thankful we are to the Holy Spirit who continues to work through the gospel.



Kimberly and Chris Zak with their children, Kate and Adam.

When I asked the Zaks what they would like to tell others about their journey, they both agreed: "We are blessed that God has shown us the truth of his Word at Resurrection and that he has led us to our new church home."

*John Braun is executive editor of* Forward in Christ.





SAME

STRENGTH AT .

HOW CAN WE TEACH GENTLENESS AND

Parenting is a balancing act in so many ways. For example, each day I try to help my kids balance their sleep. If they go to bed too early, they'll wake up too early and be ready for a nap before school. If they go to bed too late, they'll have trouble waking up and functioning the next day.

Character traits are like that too. We want our sons and daughters to be strong-strong Christians, strong citizens, strong students, strong friends. Yet we also want them to be gentle-gentle Christians, gentle citizens, gentle students, gentle friends. How do we help our children see that balancing act in action? How can we show them that gentleness and strength are both qualities to be admiredin the right circumstances, in the right amounts? Three Christian parents share their takes on this topic. If you have thoughts to share, comment on these articles at forwardinchrist.net.

Nicole Balza

# Join the conversation!

Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist and look for the Heart to heart link.

#### **Sometimes we** forget that Jesus is strong and gentle.

The One who commanded the wind and waves—"Be quiet!"—also let little children clamber onto his lap for a blessing. The One who started crying at the sight of his beloved Jerusalem also strode into the court of Gentiles with a whip, toppling tables, spilling coins, and driving out the merchants who didn't belong there.

It's a good reminder that a Christian man can be both strong and gentle, recognizing that strength is not brutality and gentleness is not weakness.

I still like the old term *gentleman*. I want to raise up sons who are gentlemen, whose gentleness is actually strength wrapped in wisdom. My picture of a gentleman is based on my gentleman father.

A gentleman knows he's physically stronger than most women, so he opens doors for them, carries the heavy boxes, and walks on the curb side of the sidewalk for their protection. Dads, let's model these courtesies. Moms, let's sometimes say, "I need somebody's muscles for this bag"—even if it's not that heavy.

**Teaching our kids** to find a balance between strength and gentleness is tough, because there's a tension, isn't there? On the one hand we'd like to see our kids strong—leaders making use of their gifts. On the other hand we want them to understand the value of gentleness—humility, putting others first.

As Christians we know to look to God's Word for answers, and what we find is very satisfying. Whether we're talking about the strength side of the scale or the gentleness side, it's not about us; it's about God. That takes the pressure off.

For example, a child who is strong in an area tends to gain a level of notoriety. If the child takes credit for the strength, there is a lack of consideration toward other children who don't have that strength. There is an unspoken condescension, a misunderstanding that she somehow achieved things on her own to be better than other kids. God's Word tells

**How wonderful** it is to have the opportunity to teach gentleness and strength to our kids. However, I have to admit, I wonder how my wife, Kelly, and I are fostering gentleness and strength in our kids within a culture that seems to encourage one over the other: "Be strong!" "Be assertive!" "Don't give in!" "Win at all costs!"

Gentleness can be seen by some as weak, vulnerable, or cowardly. Kelly recently witnessed this at our local drug store. A customer ahead of her became verbally abusive to a cashier when an incorrect amount was accidently charged on her debit card. The customer accused the cashier of trying to steal money and provided some extra choice words to enhance her position. Kelly noted, though, that the cashier was cool and calm, gently responding to the customer. The cashier acknowledged the customer's concern, reassured her, and made the adjustment or refund—even thanking her for shopping at the store as she left.

A gentleman knows when he has to get physical-as

Jesus did. Sometimes brutes only respond to brute strength, and a man has to defend himself, his friends, his family, or his country. Moms, if God made our little boys to be the wrestle-on-the-floor type, we can let them exercise that instinct. And if God made them more inclined to defend others with words than wallops, we can let them exercise that instinct.

A gentleman cries. Let's never say, "Big boys don't cry," if crying is exactly what a situation calls for. If we have an overly sensitive child on our hands, though, one who cries at the drop of a hat, well, that's a whole different article.

A gentleman respects others. This plays out in a number of ways.

- A gentleman gives others room to speak. He doesn't need to dominate, filling rooms with his opinions and thoughts and disregarding others. Instead, he's a leader who listens. Dads, you can help by leading that way yourself and by refereeing the kids' verbal tussles: "Hey, don't interrupt each other." "Find points of agreement before you disagree."
- A gentleman cleans up. Moms, we need to rein in our instinct to pick up every vagabond sock and clean up

every mess because it's faster. Let the lads take responsibility for themselves.

• A gentleman has good manners. He looks people in the eye, shakes hands firmly, and says, "Please." He doesn't start eating until everyone has their food, and he knows how to chew with his mouth closed. This isn't pretension. It's respect for others.

**Finally, a gentleman keeps his word.** He's trustworthy. He has integrity. The whole world can depend on the word of a gentleman.

Your picture of a gentleman might be different from mine. That's okay. Hopefully we all agree, though, that our boys can be both gentle and strong, like Jesus—the One who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18), and also, "Learn from

me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family that includes her two 20-somethings and his teenage son.



us that our talents and abilities are gifts from God and it is God who should receive the glory. A child who properly understands this can be strong *and* gentle, humbly thanking God for opportunities and acknowledging that other kids, through their own strengths or even weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10), are equally blessed with opportunities to glorify God.

A child's acts of gentleness can also be flawed. He may figure that niceness should earn him niceness in return. If that does not happen, the child might decide there is no longer any advantage to being nice. The Bible teaches that since God has shown us undeserved love in forgiving our sins against him through Jesus, we are called by God to show love to friends and enemies alike. A child who properly understands this can be gentle *and* strong, showing the grace of God even in the face of resistance.

As parents it's beneficial to be regularly in God's Word our-

selves and with our kids to grasp God's strength as well as his grace and to see how both affect our lives. The Bible is full of good examples, but perhaps the best place to start is with Jesus himself, our perfect model of strength and gentleness. His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5–7) offers a great perspective.

Remember how it felt to be kids dealing with social pressures? We can pray that God through his Word will help us relieve our kids' stresses by teaching them that they aren't alone when

it comes to demonstrating strength and gentleness. Rather, God through Jesus has blessed us with the privilege of sharing his strength and gentleness with others.

Adam Goede and his wife, Stephanie, have four children ranging in age from 5-12.



When we talked about the event, I asked, "How did that cashier not get angry?" I think that in that instance the cashier was using more strength than the customer.

We can appreciate our culture's understanding of strength, but we shouldn't use it as an excuse to be abusive and go well beyond appropriate assertiveness. As we consider the example of Christ Jesus and are motivated by his love for us, a simple act of gentleness can be an unselfish act of love that so many people are yearning to see.

Consider the strength it takes to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:3,4).

The amazing thing about this is that the strength it takes to be gentle and unselfish is given to us by God—it's a natural result of our faith and love for him. After thinking about Kelly's ex-

perience, I can now better appreciate the essence of a gentle response in the face of what some view as a "strong" approach. I can't help but apply this to my own parenting and my temptation to sacrifice gentleness for strength or control.

I'm convinced that experiences similar to what Kelly saw in the store are all around my kids on the episodes of the latest Netflix series, in school, or on the "funny" YouTube video shared by friends. These poor examples of people being strong or selfishly stronger than others won't teach appropriate boundaries or proper assertiveness to our kids,

but they can be opportunities to teach how to give to others what is so desperately needed—an example of strength in gentleness as a result of a loving faith.

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a teenage daughter and a preteen son.



# We need light

# Physically we need sunlight; spiritually we need the light Jesus shines into our lives.

James D. Roecker

Lack of sunlight can be detrimental to your health. A lack of sunlight can lead to developing seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Symptoms of SAD can include mood swings, anxiety, and sleep problems. The average age of onset of SAD is between 18 and 30 years of age.

The college years just might be when SAD can take hold of a person. An escalating problem can be caused due to winters in states that do not boast copious amounts of light. When the anxiety and stress of college life combines with anxiety caused by a lack of sunlight, the result can be described by the word *darkness*. Life would be better if this season of darkness would come to an end. Spring is a sign of good things to come—sunlight

People in Jesus' time needed a sign too. Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation" (Luke 11:29,30). The sign was Jesus himself. He was the Light. By looking at Jesus and considering his preaching and his works, we see that he continues to be a light burning brightly for all to see.

However, we do not prefer the brightness of Jesus' light. The sinfulness inside us all prefers, even favors, the darkness of sin. And the problem squarely lies on our shoulders. In a spiritual sense, our sin-stained eyes do not look to Jesus, the burning lamp, but instead continue groping about in the darkness. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Such darkness has eternal consequences far more severe than SAD.

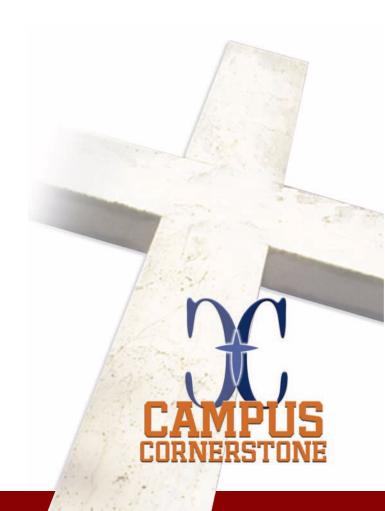
March 20 marks the first day of spring. It is a sign, a date on the calendar, that gives hope to those desperately needing to get into the sunlight. When we, with the eyes of faith, see Jesus, the true Light, we are assured that the darkness of our sin is no more. Jesus' sacrifice of his very life gives the light of forgiveness and life to the world, to you, and to me.

Jesus shares with us the importance of his light: "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body

also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you" (Luke 11:33-36).

College life can be a journey of darkness and sin, with temptation at every turn. Some collegians may not allow the message of salvation and forgiveness to penetrate and dispel the darkness of their souls. May the Lord move them and us to appreciate that God himself, through his Holy Spirt, illumines our souls and preserves the faith in our hearts.

James Roecker, pastor at Divine Word, Plover, Wisconsin, does campus ministry work at UW-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.



#### **CHANGES IN MINISTRY**

#### **Pastors**

Berg, Daniel, to Our Savior, Harrisonville, Mo.

**Bourman, Nathanael,** to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hoppe, Christopher,** to St. John, Vacaville, Calif.

**Kruschel, Peter,** to Beautiful Savior, Las Vegas, Nev.

Kuerth, Benjamin, to Divine Savior, Doral, Fla.

Kuske, Timothy, to St. John, Baraboo, Wis. Leach, Jonathan, to Truth in Love Ministry, Nampa, Idaho

Leyrer, Carl, to retirement.

Maasch, John, to Redeemer, Maple Grove, Minn.

**Peters, David,** to Our Redeemer, Wabasha, Minn.

Smith, Michael, to Asia Lutheran Seminary Winkelman, Aaron, to Bethany, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

#### **Teachers**

**Blum, Rachel,** to St. Paul's, Green Bay, Wis. **Buchholz, Katrina,** to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Dodge, David,** to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

**Duin, Kirsten,** to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis. **Finkbeiner, Lisa,** to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Gibson, Jason,** to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.

Jakober, Kjersti, to Bethel, Sioux Falls, S.D. Jost, Andrea, to Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis. Laitinen, Hannah, to Hannah's World, Austin. Texas

**Lepke, Megan,** to St. Paul, Bangor, Wis. **Loberger, Jeffrey,** to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

Moldenhauer, Mark, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. Oppermann, Elise, to Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Atkinson, Wis. Renner, Mark, to Resurrection,

Riesop, Shawn, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis. Saatkamp, Susan, to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis

**Schmitzer, Jordan,** to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Seeber, Emily, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis. Uher, Alan, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

**Uhlenbrauck, Monica,** to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

#### **ANNIVERSARY**

Rochester, Minn.

Apacheland, Ariz.—Native American mission work (125). June 22. KI Convention Center, Green Bay, Wis. 6-9 P.M. Oct. 26–28. Peridot, Ariz. Oct. 26, reservation tours. Oct. 27, 11 A.M.-4 P.M., crafts, music history; 4 P.M., worship; 5 P.M., dinner. Oct. 28, anniversary worship throughout Apache reservation. Debbie Dietrich,

NativeChristians1@gmail.com. Website, nativechristians.org.

#### **COMING EVENTS**

Marriage enrichment weekends—held around the country by WELS Adult Discipleship. Check for upcoming events in your area. Website, wels.net/events.

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

- March 1, 7 P.M., King of Kings, Clifton Park, N.Y.
- March 2, 7 P.M., Our Savior's, East Brunswick, N.J.
- March 4, 9 A.M., St John's, Newark, Del.
- March 18, 3 P.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
- March 23, 2 P.M., West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.; 7 P.M., Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
- March 24, 7 P.M., Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.
- March 25, 10:30 A.M., Ascension, Rochester, Minn.

Christian Women Today women's retreat—March 9–11. Sheraton Brookfield Hotel, Brookfield, Wis. Theme: "Give thanks in all circumstances." 414-507-5341. Website, christianwomantoday.org.

Pathways to Christ women's retreat—March 9–11. Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: "Speak O Lord." 920-233-1069. Website, pathwaystochrist.org.

Annual Butterfly Brunch—March 10. Christian Women's Leadership Circle, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wlc.edu.

Ironmen of God men's conference— March 24. St. Paul's, Ixonia, Wis. Website, ironmenofgodwi.org.

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

- March 28, 7 P.M., Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.
- March 29, 7 P.M., Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.
- March 30, 7:30 P.M., Shining Mountains, Bozeman, Mont.
- April 1, 9 A.M., St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; 11:30 A.M., Mountain View, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
- April 2, 7 P.M., Living Savior, Missoula, Mont.
- April 3, 7 P.M., Apostles, Billings, Mont.
- April 4, 7 P.M., Abiding Love, Loveland, Colo.
- April 5, 7 P.M., Zion, Denver, Colo.
- April 6, 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Kearney, Neb.
- April 7, 7:30 P.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
- April 8, 10:30 A.M., St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn.

WELS Handbells regional festival concerts—Theme: "Speak, O Lord." Website, welsbells.com.

- April 14–15. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.
- April 21–22. Pine Island High School, Pine Island, Minn. Hosted by Christ, Zumbrota, Minn.
- April 21–22. Emanuel, New London, Wis. Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee 60th anniversary concert—April 22. 1:30 & 4 P.M. Grace, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, lutheranchorale.org; 414-861-7092.

**Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention**—June 21–24. KI Convention Center, Green Bay, Wis. Theme: "Speak, O Lord, from the Valley to the World." Website, lwms.org.

WELS International Youth Rally—June 26–29. Bowling State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. Theme: "Never Alone." Youth leader registration opens March 1. Website, wels.net/2018youthrally.

#### **NAMES WANTED**

Apacheland, Ariz.—those interested in learning more about the upcoming 125th anniversary of mission work on the Apache reservation in 2018. Debbie Dietrich, NativeChristians1@gmail.com, or join its Facebook page at facebook.com/ NativeChristiansWELS.

Monroe, Wis.—WELS members or people living in the area. Nathan Strutz, pastor strutz@rlcverona.com; 608-515-4334.

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

#### **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

Teachers—East Fork Lutheran High School on the Apache mission near Whiteriver, Arizona, is looking for retired WELS educators to teach two or three high school level courses for the 2018–19 school year. In return, it will provide a stipend of \$4,000 per course, a fully furnished apartment on campus, and utilities. beapache@outlook.com; 928-338-4455.

Soccer coaches—Help with a soccer vacation Bible school at Our Savior, Arlington, Texas. June 11–15. Transportation costs, room and board, and a stipend for leisure time provided. Four people needed. oursaviorluth@gmail.com.

#### FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscribe to one or all of WELS newsletters and join more than 13,000 subscribers receiving free encouragements and news updates directly to their inbox. Subscriptions are also available for daily devotions and worship helps. Website, wels.net/subscribe.

Find additional community events and resources at **welsrc.net**. To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

# orrer KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP, KENYA Terry L. Schultz



#### PILGRIMS IN ANOTHER LAND

I met Nyaduel while visiting the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya to help conduct leadership training. Kakuma Refugee Camp and the nearby Kalobeyei Settlement have been at times the largest refugee settlements in the world, with over 185,000 inhabitants counted in 2017. For more than 25 years, South Sudanese men and women, even children with no accompanying relative or friend, have walked for miles to refugee camps to escape the carnage of the civil war in South Sudan.

Since 2014, Peter Bur, a revered elder among the Nuer people of South Sudan who emigrated to the United States and now serves as the synod's North American coordinator for South Sudanese ministry, has made trips back to Africa to train South Sudanese church leaders in Kenya and Ethiopia. The Spiritpowered results have been astounding. Currently 23 groups serve more than 2,600 people with the gospel. On the day of our visit to Kakuma, more than 300 members—including Nyaduel—gathered to worship.

Nyaduel is 17 and has already lived over 10 years in Kakuma. "How did you get here?" I asked her. She remembered and, in her second language of English, replied, "I am running. My mother is running. I never see her again." Nyaduel, her mother, and her father were in different locations in the village when the government soldiers arrived. They

each had to run for their lives. Nyaduel has met her father since then. Tragically, he is currently not a Christian. Neither of them have found her mother. But Nyaduel is blessed to be part of a family

of faith in Kakuma. And while Nyaduel would like to become a pilot one day, right now she loves serving as one of the congregation's youth leaders.

As a youth leader, Nyaduel teaches Bible lessons to the children. She also directs the choir and teaches dance movements to accompany the singing. Several large, goat-skin drums are used to keep the beat during worship. The drums are exuberantly played with beaters made from eight-inch strips of durable rubber tire tread cut from discarded tires.

Nyaduel's humble, servant-like attitude is clearly evident in her youth work. As a young girl, Nyaduel lost her left foot in a fire. She managed to obtain an artificial foot made of wood. But Nyaduel has grown since then and now needs a new artificial foot that is a couple of inches taller. But having one leg shorter than the other does not impede Nyaduel. The girl with one wooden foot doesn't worry about looking awkward as she teaches dance steps to the children and youth choirs to use in praise of Jesus!

During worship, the Kakuma congregation sings a song written by the refugees themselves: "Lord, we know you are here with us. Lord, you know we want to go back home."

No one will be going back home until there is peace in South Sudan. And no one is optimistic that that will happen any time soon. But God's message that in this world we are always aliens, foreigners, and pilgrims resonates deeply with our Kakuma brothers and sisters. An eternity with our heavenly Father in paradise is coming for those who put their trust and faith in Jesus.

On this Sunday, in the barren refugee camp of Kakuma, there is a three-hour worship service of preaching, prayer, singing, and dancing. The celebration has already begun! God's children in Kakuma are secure in the knowledge that the eternal kingdom awaits them, thanks to their Savior Jesus!

Missionary Terry Schultz and several women, including Nyaduel (far right), from the Kakuma Refugee Camp.

Terry Schultz serves as a consultant for WELS Multi-Language Publications.

## 60 years of presenting "Sermons in Song"

"What makes our group so special," says Levi Nagel, "and why it has been such a success for 60 years, is that we proclaim the truths of Scripture through the beautiful art form of choral music. . . . When one attends our concerts, they hear a message about the wonders of God through Jesus our Savior. Concert-goers hear this through many different styles of church music, from classical pieces to African-American spirituals—there's something for everyone!"

Nagel is speaking of The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee, of which he currently serves as assistant director. The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee includes 64 members who



During its 60 years, almost 800 WELS members have participated in The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee. Pictured far left is accompanist Lynn Kozlowski, who has served the chorale since 1970. Pictured far right is Mary Prange, who began singing with the chorale in 1974 and has served as its director since 1993.

hail from about 30 Milwaukee-area churches. The chorale presents two full-length concerts each year—one near Christmas and one in the spring—and also sings for special services. This year's spring concert will mark the chorale's 60th anniversary. It will be performed April 22 at 1:30 and 4 P.M. at Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.

Mary Prange, the chorale's director for 25 years, notes, "The chorale has changed very little over the 60 years of its existence. The biggest change has probably been the emergence of extremely capable WELS instrumentalists who have added their talents to the concerts. The motto of the chorale has always been "Sermons in Song." That has not changed and hopefully will never change!"

The April concert will commemorate Prange's retirement as director. Nagel will then take over.

"Mary Prange has had a profound and lasting impact on the Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee," says Nagel. "I have been asked many times what changes I'll be making. The truth is, all directors puts their own 'flavor' into the music of a choir. My musical tastes will come through in our repertoire, but I intend to continue to use some of the chorale 'standards,' which people have come to expect. I can say what won't change—we will continue to proclaim the truths of Scripture and the gospel message of Jesus, who alone gives us a reason to sing!"

For more information, visit **lutheranchorale.org**.

#### Quilters for Christ

Kay Jaschob knew she wanted to honor her mother's memory after her passing. So she took her passion for sewing and started a quilting group at her church, Immanuel, Waupaca, Wis. The quilters get together each month to turn old scraps of fabric into beautiful blankets.

What started as a legacy for Jaschob's mother has now blossomed into a thriving ministry. It began when Jaschob worked at the nursing home of Pastor Robin Robbert's grandmother. Jaschob got to know Pastor Robbert, who serves King of Kings, Wasilla, Alaska. Jaschob told the Immanuel Quilters about the church, and the group decided that people living in the cold climate could use their quilts. King of Kings has been donating those blankets to homeless shelters and other families in need. "It is such a labor of love," Robbert says of the ministry.

From there, the ministry began donating quilts to other organizations, including local homeless shelters as well as children's ministries like Mission to the Children in Sonora, Mexico, and Warm Hugs Ministry in the Apache mission field.

They also provide blankets to Lighthouse Youth Center in Milwaukee, a place for 10- to 18-year-olds to engage in safe and fun recreational activities while also receiving spiritual and academic assistance. James Buske, Lighthouse's executive director, says the organization is thankful for the blankets, which are given to youth in their program.

"Many of the kids have seen a lot of ups and down, and the blankets provide hope that there are some people out there who love them and care for them," he says. "It's a comfort item that's personally their own." Members of Immanuel help make the blankets in a variety of ways. About ten women sew quilts each month. Others donate pieces of fabric and cut patches. One 96-year-old member hand-binds each quilt in her home. Everyone's unique talents come together to create gifts that comfort and warm hundreds of different people.

"We figure that this is the way to treat your fellow man," Jaschob says. "We have the opportunity to serve someone, and as Christians that's something we want to do."

Gabriella Moline



#### Meet the editorial staff—uncut

Ever ask yourself, "Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ?" Through this series you can find out.

Even before I interviewed Glenn Schwanke, our newest contributing editor, I felt like I already knew him.

His name may not be new to you either. He wrote our Campus Ministry column for several years and has contributed numerous features as well—with a style that is filled with personal stories, humor, and pathos.



Glenn and Teresa Schwanke, and their daughter, Victoria.

Yet I learned even more about this self-proclaimed introvert who has served Peace, Houghton, Mich., and the campus ministry at Michigan Technological University for the past 21 years. Here's what I discovered:

- He lives in the snow capital of the Midwest. "Our snowstorms are biblical in nature: they last 40 days and 40 nights," he says. Snow and ice fit well into his favorite hobby: ice fishing. "What's not to love?" he jokes. "Brusque temps of 20 below; howling, blinding winds. Frozen face and hands after mere minutes of exposure. But then drill a few holes in the ice, pop up a portable shanty, turn on the heater, drop the flasher's transducer into the hole, and blissfully while away the hours jigging away!"
- His congregation grew out of a WELS campus ministry that goes back to 1969. Because of the university's large international student base, his ministry offers unique outreach opportunities. "There have been many even-

- ings when I walked home from our chapel, paused, looked up at the stars, and said, 'Lord, you have a sense of humor. World mission work in Houghton, Michigan!' "
- He has served WELS as a circuit pastor and as a member of the WELS Mental Health Committee and the Commission on Inter-Church Relations. He currently is first vice president of the Northern Wisconsin District and a member of the Translation Liaison Committee. He also is part of the Wartburg Project, a parasynodical organization working on the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) Bible translation.
- He and his wife, Teresa, have been married for 39 years and have one daughter, Victoria, who is getting married this summer. Schwanke took Victoria's fiancé through adult baptism and confirmation. "He's had a challenging upbringing, so it was rather overwhelming when he wrote me a Christmas card this year and told me, 'You're the dad I never had,' " says Schwanke.
- "Jovial" is how he describes himself.

  "I'd rather get wrinkles on my face
  from a smile and laughter than from
  weeping and frowns," he says.
- The message he wants to share with readers? "No matter what this life brings, no matter how hard it becomes, no matter how bewildered we get because of fast-paced changes in the world around us, there is always 'Jesus Christ . . . the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8 EHV)."

He continues: "Sometimes I wake up in the morning (always a good way to start the day at my age), and joy washes through me at this thought: I have been given the gift of life, now and into eternity, because Jesus lived, died, and rose again for me. I'd like others to have that same joy, peace, and confident hope—precious gifts that only Jesus can give."

Read Schwanke's first article as a contributing editor on p. 32.

#### **Obituaries**

#### Hildegard T. Homann, 1935-2017

Hildegard Homann (née Kunkel) was born March 23, 1935, in Stratford, Wis. She died Oct. 7, 2017, in Bloomer, Wis.

She taught at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.

She is survived by two sons, two daughters, eight grandchildren, one brother, and one sister. She is preceded in death by her husband, Harley; five brothers; and one grandchild.

#### Carolyn M. Smart, 1935-2017

Carolyn Smart was born July 31, 1935, in Montello, Wis. She died Oct. 18, 2017, in Montello, Wis.

A 1962 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Peter's, Plymouth, Mich.; Grace, Saint Joseph, Mich.; and St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.

She is survived by two brothers. She is preceded in death by one sister.

#### Nancy L. Callies, 1951–2017

Nancy Callies (née Priem) was born Feb. 10, 1951, in Shawano, Wis. She died Oct. 21, 2017, in Wauwatosa, Wis.

A 1973 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. James, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.; Trinity, Marinette, Wis.; St. John, Peshtigo, Wis.; and St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Arthur; three sons; three grandchildren; two sisters; and one brother.

#### Paul A. Manthey, 1930-2017

Paul Manthey was born Oct. 10, 1930, in Kenosha, Wis. He died Oct. 21, 2017, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1956 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; First, Aurora, Neb.; and St. Matthew, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; one daughter; two sons; three grand-children; two great-grandchildren; and one sister.

## On fire for ministry

While encouraging young people to consider the full-time ministry is part of any Christian's job, four people from Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., make it their full-time call.

For seven months of the year, MLC's admissions counselors are on the road, traveling around the country to meet with high school students. "I'm home just enough to unpack, reload, and then go again," says Lori Unke, one of the four counselors.

These counselors have an important job to do. They talk to students about the privilege of serving as a called worker. "I get to share my passion for ministry with them," says Unke, a 1984 MLC graduate. "A teacher has such a huge influence on growing bodies and growing hearts—spiritually, academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Teaching and role modeling God's love for [your students]—what could be better than that?"

Whether it's presenting to a group of freshmen and sophomores, meeting one-on-one with juniors or seniors, or mingling with teens during events like the WELS International Youth Rally, Unke says it's an honor to build personal relationships with these young adults. "I get to know them and their activities, their hobbies, what's important in their lives," she says. "Then we can discuss their talents and their Godgiven time of grace and how they might work to use those talents to serve God in his kingdom."

Unke says that she meets with hundreds of young adults every year. "A lot of conversations inspire me; it's sometimes quite emotional to see these high school students already so on fire for ministry," she says.

She recalls one example of a young man, Michael. "His parents are Buddhist, and they had great plans for their son that didn't involve WELS ministry," she says.

Michael's parents were looking for a good private grade school, so they sent





Lori Unke and the Admissions team from Martin Luther College went to the WELS International Youth Rally in Fort Collins, Colo., to meet with teens.

him to a WELS elementary school. Michael was baptized and became a member of the church. He also was encouraged to attend the nearby area Lutheran high school. "His teachers were very influential on him, and he wanted to help young people like his teachers helped him," says Unke.

Michael ended up attending MLC and is now a sophomore. "God continues to amaze me with young people like this one," says Unke. "His mom allows him to follow his dream, even though she still is Buddhist. That's just God's amazing grace that gets people [to MLC] regardless of skin color or culture or background."

Like Michael, many young people are inspired to go into the ministry by their teachers. "Teachers and pastors are our best recruiters," says Unke. Unke says even her own children, all

of whom grew up on MLC's campus and attended college there, were encouraged by the college students and the professors. "There were so many good role models for them," she says.

That's part of what Unke loves about serving as an admissions counselor: seeing the young adults whom she has recruited grow and blossom as MLC students and then as called workers themselves. "To see them get their diploma and go out into their first call is extremely rewarding," she says. "That puts it all together for me."



The need for teachers is great. Watch the March WELS Connection to learn more about increasing opportunities at WELS schools. Learn more about Martin Luther College and how you can support its students at mlc-wels.edu.

### World mission teams provide coordination and expertise

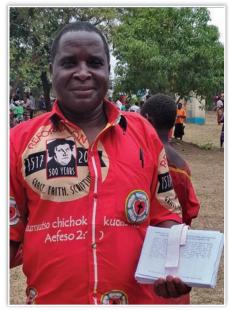
For decades WELS members have been hearing about the WELS mission work being done in Malawi, Zambia, Cameroon, and Nigeria and how God has blessed these efforts.

But what about Rwanda, Liberia, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Mozambique? New opportunities are blooming in Africa either as church leaders reach out to WELS for fellowship and help or as WELS and its African sister church bodies recognize new outreach potential.

To help WELS explore these burgeoning opportunities, the One Africa Team has been formed. This team, which comprises the 10 WELS missionaries serving in Africa as well as the US-based Africa administrative team, is coordinating WELS missionary work and resources across Africa.

"In the past we were separated into fields. One field would figure out how to help sister synods do evangelism, ministerial education, administration, publications, and whatever else we could help with," says Paul Nitz, missionary in Malawi and coordinator of the One Africa Team. "The new One Africa Team allows us to pool our knowledge and share our strengths to best serve the sister synods we work with."

While the missionaries will continue to serve in their respective countries, they will also coordinate their efforts across fields, especially in the areas of evangelism, theological education, communication, and administration. "As we focus our attention and resources on a particular function, the opportunities to do more effective work blossom," says Nitz. He shared a recent example in which the missionaries were working with a national church body to recruit qualified candidates to study for the ministry. "As we looked into that problem, we ended up looking across all the synods in Africa and comparing what is done,"



The One Africa Team is also working to produce Christian literature for its fields. It joined forces with Multi-Language Publications last fall to produce 10,000 brochures about Martin Luther, which were distributed at Reformation rallies across Malawi.

he says. "And so, working on a problem in one country will likely help us to improve what we do in all of them."

This team approach also will help WELS as it examines new opportunities for outreach in Africa, providing on-the-ground research and years of knowledge. "You combine the wisdom and experience of African missionaries who have served for decades and add that to the decisions WELS is making to reach out into other parts of Africa—it really is a blessing," says Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. "It should allow us to make quicker, more confident decisions and to be better stewards of the resources God has given us so more mission work gets done."

Already the One Africa Team has been collaborating with the Pastoral Studies Institute and WELS' sister churches in Africa to examine potential confessional relationships and provide training:

- In October 2017, WELS Zambian missionaries and several national pastors from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia (LCCA—Z) traveled to Kenya and Ethiopia to continue fellowship discussions with one church body, to encourage and teach South Sudanese refugees in refugee camps (see p. 20), and to participate in a graduation service with one of WELS' newest sister churches.
- In September 2017, Philip Birner, a missionary in Zambia, and an LCCA-Z national pastor visited Rwanda to meet with a young church body interested in becoming confessional Lutheran.
- Work also continues in Mozambique as the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Malawi Synod encourages Mozambican Lutherans who live right across the border from Malawi.
- Future priorities include looking more closely at two different groups in Liberia.

Africa isn't the only mission field using this team approach. 1LA (One Latin America) coordinates ministry opportunities in Spanish-speaking countries, and a similar method is used in East Asia. "WELS overseas mission work was started decades ago. The world has changed. Instant communications, easier travel, and migrant tides make broader efforts much more necessary than before," says Schlomer. "Our new world teams are poised to carry the gospel with an effective use of WELS resources to a rapidly expanding list of new people."



Read more about WELS mission work in Africa at **wels.net/missions** or visit **oneafricateam.com**.

#### District news

#### **MINNESOTA**

The students at **St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.,** donated gifts and money to the children at the Ronald McDonald House in Rochester, Minn., instead of exchanging Christmas gifts with each other.

#### **NEBRASKA**

Students and staff at **St. Mark, Lincoln, Neb.**, moved into a brand-new building to begin the second semester. On Jan. 14, St. Mark dedicated the new building.

#### **NORTH ATLANTIC**

Beautiful Savior, Summerville, S.C., suffered major damage from a pipe bursting during a snowstorm in early January. The congregation worshiped at its second site in Moncks Corner while the damage was being repaired.

#### **NORTHERN WISCONSIN**

On Jan. 13, St. John-St. James, Reedsville, Wis., welcomed the community to its new school building. Along with new classroom space, a new commons area with a kitchen and a gymnasium were part of the renovation, meaning the school can now host its own sporting events.

#### **PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

For 10 years, **Grace**, **Yakima**, **Wash.**, has provided free produce and perishables to people in need once a month.

Members of **The Vine, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho**, surprised people working on

Christmas Day by delivering gifts to them. The gifts were given in appreciation of the recipients' willingness to work while most people spent the day with family and friends. Police officers, firefighters, security officers, bus drivers, gas station attendants, and hospital emergency room workers received the gifts from members of The Vine after the churchgoers' Christmas worship service. The Vine is a home mission congregation launched as a second site for St. Matthew, Spokane, Wash.

#### **SOUTH ATLANTIC**

On Jan. 25, students and staff of Trinity Christian Early Childhood Centre, Castries, St. Lucia, took a field trip to display the unconditional love of God by performing random acts of kindness to their neighbors. Recipients included students at a local school that serves those with special needs.

#### **SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN**

Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., dedicated its new fellowship hall, of-fice space, and classrooms on Jan. 7.

#### **HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!**

**WW—St. John, Cornell, Wis.,** is marking its 100th anniversary this year.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Philip Gurgel; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; PNW—David Birsching; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

#### **MICHIGAN**



St. Peter, Plymouth, Mich., participated in the Plymouth Ice Festival, submitting a Reformation ice sculpture as a tribute to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

#### **NORTH ATLANTIC**



Redemption, Watertown, N.Y., received a new sanctuary cross. The timbers were reclaimed from an area barn. The nails were pulled out, and the edges were planed and straightened out. A coat of stain and varnish brought out its beauty. Church members (pictured) spent Christmas Eve afternoon hanging the cross so that everyone who stepped through Redemption's doors were reminded of why Jesus was born.

#### ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



CrossWalk, Phoenix, Ariz., created 500 care bags for the homeless as a neighborhood impact project in January.



There is a great amount of benefit in hearing and singing the gospelrich heritage hymns of Lutheranism, even those that "sound strange" and are "hard to sing."

Michael D. Schultz

There's a storage box in my basement that contains my high school and college football jerseys. My dear wife has inquired a number of times about whether or not we are still going to keep that box of old stuff. Each time she has been lovingly informed that we will hold onto the contents of that box as long as I am still breathing air.

There's a group of hymns that seemingly fall into the same category: (1) been around a long time; (2) not seeing much use; (3) holding onto them may seem rather questionable. They typically come from 16th- or 17th-century Lutheranism. Examples from Christian Worship (CW) would be Luther's "In the Midst of Earthly Life" (CW 534) or Gerhardt's "I Will Sing My Maker's Praises" (CW 253). They are sometimes nicknamed "heritage hymns." Some have wondered if we should preserve them under that name in a hymn category of their own. Others wonder, "Are we really going to print them, again, in the next book?"

#### **FACT CHECK**

Among the things people sometimes say about these "old Lutheran hymns"

is that they are "too sad-sounding," "too strange-sounding," or just "too hard to sing." There may be some truth to these statements, but it isn't necessarily the whole truth.

- "Sad-sounding"—Of 192 German chorales in *Christian Worship*, only 45 are in a minor or minor-sounding key. Music in a minor key can certainly be appropriate for serious themes such as contrition and cross-bearing, but it is not sad by definition. "What Child Is This" (CW 67) and "The King of Glory Comes" (CW 363) are both in a minor key, and we probably wouldn't call them sad.
- "Strange-sounding"—Our 21stcentury American ears sense that something's different when hearing the music of "Our Father, Who From Heaven Above" (CW 410). Of 192 German chorales in Christian Worship, 24 use what is known as modal music (as do some Star Wars themes and any number of Beatles songs). With its different scale of tones, it's not what we're accustomed to listening to, to say nothing of singing. And yet we do! Just not consistently. "What Wondrous Love Is This" (CW 120) and "In Peace and Joy I Now Depart" (CW 269) are both written in the same musical mode, but WELS congregations sing "Wondrous Love" 12 times more frequently than "Peace and Joy."
- "Hard to sing"—In a side-by-side comparison, musicians would conclude that the melody of "Evening and Morning" (CW 430) should be noticeably easier to sing than that of

"Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (CW 206). Yet WELS congregations sing "Wake, Awake" 20 times more often than "Evening and Morning." You may have never sung or even heard of "Evening and Morning."

#### TENURE

In the hymnal in which I write all my notes, "Wake, Awake" has a note that says, "TT 1599." That's shorthand for "this text and tune have been paired together since 1599." For "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come" (CW 38), it says, "TT 1539." You do the math.

Our next hymnal will include a good number of hymns written and composed in the 21st century, but something has to be said for a melody and a text that were sung together for more than two centuries before the United States became a nation. If 20, even if 40, of the seldom-sung heritage hymns appear in the next hymnal, there will still be 600 others to choose from if worship planners wish to bypass the "not easy" ones. What has to be said, though, is that such hymns have demonstrated their worth

#### THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Songwriter Harlan Howard is quoted as saying, "All you need to write a country song is three chords and the truth." That will always be at least half

When it's time to introduce those older hymns, Christian Worship: Handbook is one resource for interesting information about these hymns' backgrounds, authors, and composers. For example, consider the fascinating story behind CW 574. Access the story by going to Christian Worship: Handbook, p. 581, or by visiting welshymnal.com/cw574.

true of these classic Lutheran hymns. They will have the truth of the gospel, but seldom will they be a three-chord song. The composers were craftsmen, well-trained in their musical trade. The authors treated rich biblical themes that were not always in the shallow end of the pool. Stashing these hymns away in their own nostalgic hymn category—perhaps to be used on special occasions, perhaps not—falls short of what they deserve. What W.G. Polack (author of The Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal) said of one of the more difficult heritage hymns really applies to all of the musically challenging ones: "The congregation that masters this tune possesses a treasure of which it will never grow weary."

While I've enjoyed hearing it on the radio, I'm guessing people may not be singing Blake Shelton's "I'll Name the Dogs" three hundred years from now. But something good happens when worship leaders and musicians lay out plans, invest the time, and do the work of teaching the congregation solid Christian hymns that have already lasted that long. And that's what is most true of the "not easy" hymns—they need to be taught.

Even the chorale has to be taught to people before they can appreciate the lessons it teaches. A fundamental understanding of the chorale, as the sung Word of God and a confession of faith in music and poetry, can only exist in the realm of theory unless the people are encouraged to learn and sing chorales in practice ("The Chorale: Transcending Time and Culture," Robin Leaver).

There's no great benefit in pulling those old football jerseys of mine out of storage, even if I still plan to keep them. There is, however, a boatload of benefit in hearing and singing the gospel-rich heritage hymns of Lutheranism. While more frequent use of them does not make the pastor who selects them or

the congregation that sings them any more Lutheran, we encourage leaders to take up the task of teaching them because we have no plans to be the hymnal project that lets them go. They are one slice of many hymn resources we are working to make available.

When it's time to roll out one of these heritage hymns, remember to: (1) use announcements, articles, and classes to educate people about its upcoming use in worship; (2) let children or adult choirs learn it and teach it to the congregation; (3) sing the same one several weeks in a row to give people a chance to learn it.

Michael Schultz, project director of the WELS Hymnal Project, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.



This is the final article in a nine-part series on hymns and their use in our churches.

The WELS Hymnal Project wants your feedback as it works on finalizing which of the more than 700 hymns from *Christian Worship* and *Christian Worship: Supplement* will be included in the new hymnal. The WELS Hymnal Project has indicated online which hymns are slated to be kept and which are slated to be cut. You can view the list and, if you want, choose hymns from the cut list that you would like to see kept in the new hymnal. To take part in the process, visit **welshymnal.com**. The deadline is May 1.





# SALT of the EARTH

Christian humility gives us the opportunity to show our love as we faithfully serve God and others. James A. Mattek

"Jim, it's not about us," the old man blurted out from his bed in his abrupt style.

No truer words had ever been said. But who it was that spoke them led me to marvel again at the character-sculpting diligence of the Spirit. I had known him for over 40 years. Now, at age 96, he waited as death's door began to crack, and he knew "it's not about us." He was an example of humility for me. In a world that numbers accomplishments and rewards those who achieve much, humility is a rare quality.

It would have been easy and perhaps expected that this man would find some pride in his life's accomplishments. He was gifted and had been successful in life. He had traveled the world and had an expert's knowledge of the historic places he visited. He had a photographic memory. His grasp of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions often amazed me. He had interrupted his seminary years to teach at the high school level and later taught for decades as a college professor. He had studied at major universities, including Oxford. During and after his working years the lecture circuit kept him busy. He was also an author and musician. Not a bad resumé.

Yet he believed "it's not about us."

The apostle Paul would agree: "Do not

be proud.... Do not be conceited" (Romans 12:16). "It's not about us," he said, because he lived as a believer in Jesus, ready and willing to serve humbly as the Lord directed.

#### DO NOT BE PROUD

He had retained so much of his mental abilities as age slowly brought him closer to life's end. During this death watch I found myself reflecting on his life, especially the many conversations we had that made an impact on me. His comment jogged my memory. About 30 years earlier we had talked about a major event in his life. A gathering had been planned to celebrate his 40th year in the public ministry. It would be well attended by friends, family, and colleagues, some who were formerly his students. Nice things would be said. His accomplishments would be noted with praise. He was not looking forward to all of the attention, but he agreed to attend. He was uncomfortable that his quiet life as a teacher and scholar would be interrupted by the noise of attention focused on him.

Weeks later I asked him how it went. His response went like this: "As you know, I don't really care for these things. Many complimentary things were said about me . . . some true, some exaggerated. They arranged for me to be the last to speak. I had dreaded the

possibility of applause at the end of my talk and, God forbid, a possible standing ovation."

"Well, what happened?" I asked.

"As my talk came to an end, I announced that we will now all sing the Common Doxology. I started the singing, and everyone joined in. As we sang, I took my seat again at the table. When we were done singing, it was quiet . . . no applause, just the way I like it."

He was a humble man who gave all thanks and glory to God for his blessings: "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise him, all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heav'nly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!" (Christian Worship 334).

"Do not be proud. . . . Do not be conceited." "It's not about us." A bigger event was only weeks away for this fading father figure and friend. Always, it is about someone. That Someone is now receiving his perfect praise in his heavenly home. I have heard the lesson many times before. Luther wrote in his last hours that we are all beggars. I—all of us—bring nothing to God, but God gives us all things in his Son, Jesus. It's not about us because we have nothing to offer. Even our best is "filthy rags," as Isaiah reminds us (64:6). Humility arises in our hearts when we understand that God loves us, makes us his, and gives us both our talents and the opportunity to use them.

## BE WILLING TO ASSOCIATE WITH PEOPLE OF LOW POSITION

When we truly believe that it's not about us, it's amazing how important the unimportant people become to us.

It's been said that church is not a country club for the elite but rather a hospital for the hurting. It's not about our position, our power, or our prestige. After all, it's not about us. We were lost and have been found. We were blind, but now we see. It's about God and his grace. And God has right-sized his grace to fit everyone . . . even "the least of these."

At age 85, she still drove, but not at night anymore. Like clockwork, her Buick pulled up to church every Sunday loaded down with valuable cargo.

Edna always arrived a good half hour early for Bible class so she could unload her cargo. She would leave after the late service with the same valuable cargo.

At the door of church, she slowly got out of the car and helped the others do the same. One passenger was in his 20s; the other two were elderly widows like herself. She had picked them up at their homes and brought them to hear about their Savior and the permanent home he promised. The young man would never drive a car because of his disabilities. One widow was legally blind; she sang the hymns from memory. The other had recently lost her husband. All of them dealt with loneliness, but not on Sundays. A selfless soul made sure of that. To her, they were important, even if others didn't agree.

I'll never forget one particular Sunday. It happened near the side door of church. A young woman was attempting to slip into church unnoticed. It didn't work. Edna noticed and wouldn't let her go. Why? Because they were locked in a tear-filled embrace. The younger woman felt low and worthless, ashamed that another marriage had failed. Edna assured her again and again, "You're always welcome here. None of us is perfect." She was a humble servant of Jesus ready to embrace the forgotten and lowly.

Later, on a cold January day, Edna was found motionless on her kitchen floor. In her hand was the cross she wore every time I saw her. Her service to the "unimportant people" was over. The One who had been nailed to the cross welcomed her home.

"Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." I believe that Jesus welcomed them both home with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant[s]" (Matthew 25:21).

James Mattek, director of ministry at Christian Family Solutions, is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

This is the ninth article in a 12-part series about Christian love in action and how we can be salt in this world.

DO NOT BE proud, BUT BE WILLING TO **ASSOCIATE** WITH PEOPLE OF LOW POSITION. DO NOT BE conceited

**ROMANS 12:16** 

For 50 years, Linda, Sue, Lois, Judy S., Judy D., Joey, Doris, Jan, Joan, Ella, Lois, Shirley and Sandy—aka the Chain Gang—have kept in touch through a chain letter.

Ann M. Ponath

These days any mail stamped and in your actual mailbox is a special treat. Most things in the mailbox seem to be ads, but imagine receiving multiple personal letters all at once from old college friends every few months for 50 years!

In 1963, ten women from six different high schools began college together at the old Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers College (MLTC). After two years in Milwaukee, the group moved on to Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC), New Ulm, Minn., completing their teaching degrees in 1967. "Right from our freshman year, friendships were formed," recalls Sue Rittierodt of Tacoma, Washington. "By our senior year, we were very close. On call night we all sat in a row—except those who were out student teaching—and some even held hands. As excited as we were to hear where the Holy Spirit would be sending us, we also were wondering where each of us would be."

All of the letter writers received calls

that night. "Many taught more than 20 years, some over 30!" says Rittierodt. "One has played organ for 50 years and is still playing! Many of us have changed careers and very successfully. We all served and still serve our congregations in some manner."

The group decided to start writing a chain letter when one of their friends died in her sleep four months after graduation. They wanted a way to always keep in touch.

Rittierodt explains how the process works: "I send my letter to my friend. She reads my letter, writes one of her own, and sends my letter and hers to another friend. This friend reads the two letters, writes one of her own, and mails all three letters to another friend. This goes on until it all comes back to me. I throw out my letter and put in a new one, and it starts all over again."

Even when several friends took calls overseas, they were not forgotten. "When Linda and Lois took calls to Hong Kong, we did not include them in the chain letter, but each individually wrote to them, using the special blue airmail paper," says Rittierodt.

Over the years, these friends have grown into wives, mothers, and grand-mothers. Together they celebrate 35 children and more than 50 grandchildren with more on the way. "In the early years, when we were all busy teaching multi-grades, singing in choir, teaching Sunday school, and whatever

new teachers were asked to do, the letters would get around in six months or so," says Rittierodt. "Then we got married and had children and new activities to keep us busy. Once our children were grown and we had more time, the letters would get around much more quickly. When two of our group received their crown of glory, we asked two others to join us—they have blended right in."

Now the women are scattered from Washington to Arizona, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. "When Lois and Linda came home from Hong Kong on furlough, we had a big gathering. The last several years we also have been blessed to have weeklong retreats in Washington, Florida, northern Michigan, and rural Montana," says Rittierodt. "We have daily devotions, we sing, laugh, play cards, laugh, tour the area, laugh, attend a local church, laugh, take turns making meals, and eat chocolate."

"We have a lot of fun and laughs when we get together," says Ella Behrens of Crystal Lake, Ill. "There are plenty of women in our group who have a wonderful sense of humor. It doesn't take much for the group to break out in song. We love to remember and talk about fun times from the past."

The friendships expressed in this letter have been a definite blessing to these women. "I can't begin to express what I feel when that letter shows up in my mailbox," says Rittierodt. "It brings an

immediate smile, and for me, everything is set aside and I open that packet and read each letter, sometimes twice."

The letters came in good times and in bad. "Over the years, we have all had difficulties in our lives: parents died, a granddaughter died, four spouses, two sons, a daughter-in-law. Knowing these women are praying for me is such a comfort," says Rittierodt. "Letters often include favorite Bible passages, hymn verses, and encouraging words. Our faith shines through in all our letters—it might just be thanking God for a beautiful fall. Many letters are addressed to 'My Sisters in Christ.' I never had a sister growing up; now I have many."

Linda Philip of Kirkland, Washington, recalls, "As the years have gone by, the letters include more and more words of God to lift one another's spirits as we have gone through trials, health issues, and deaths of loved ones. I remember one specific wrenching sadness when one of our sister's grandchildren was very ill, and she sought our prayers. I know the letters were comforting especially after losing the young child."

"For me personally I received extra comfort from these friends four years

ago when my husband went home to heaven. Sadly, again this year, my oldest son entered heaven. Again my dear friends were here for me and our family. Bible verses flow so easily, and to see them in someone's handwriting becomes so personal," says Judy Diener, Plymouth, Wisconsin.

Lois Reichers of Peoria, Arizona, adds, "When I have sorrows in my life such as the sudden loss of my husband, I know these friends are there with their prayers and support! They are also there to share in my joys—births of children, grandchildren, and marriages! Such a blessing!"

Lois Tackebury, South Lyon, Michigan, is also grateful for the letters. "Every time I receive the packet it is a special time. I feel blessed to know I am connected to these Christian friends though separated by miles. . . . The letters have actually brought us all closer than when we were in college."

"The letters mean hope, love, support, and encouragement from each dear Christian friend no matter the distance that separates us. The letters bring us all together in spirit and thoughts. We keep each other focused on our ultimate goal—eternal life with our Savior and reunion with all our loved ones who have gone before us," says Behrens.

Janet Kneser, Brookfield, Wisconsin, sums it up: "Wow. Now in our 51st year, there must have been hundreds of letters that have rotated. Sitting quietly to read the letters, it feels more like a personal visit with dear friends. Time and distance have separated us, but gratefully, the chain gang letter has kept us bonded in a Christian love that began as college classmates. Tears of joy and sadness are shared while the comfort of praying friends gives us encouragement. Though we do supplement our way of communicating with e-mail and a Facebook group, I think we gals will hold on to 'snail mail' writing until we are all in heaven!"

Ann Ponath is a member at Christ, North Saint Paul, Minnesota.



Members of the Chain Gang at an annual awards banquet in Sleepy Eye, Minn., in 1966.

Through [God's]
Word, the Spirit
brightens our
outlook on life
by riveting
our attention
on Jesus.

# Seeing with the eyes of the heart

Glenn L. Schwanke

Before the opening hymn, I wondered, "What happened to our hymn boards? The white hymn numbers shimmer against the black backgrounds. Did one of the electrical engineering students in our Campus Ministry figure out a way to backlight the numbers?"

A split second after those thoughts flitted through my mind, I knew the hymn boards hadn't changed. My eyesight had. After cataract surgery, my vision was no longer clouded over by the yellowed-haze that had developed on my more than 60-year-old lenses, almost like fog and grime on a windshield. Instead, with new lens implants in each eye, I was finally seeing white again. Colors jumped out at me in a way I hadn't experienced since I was in the third grade.

That was when I couldn't read the blackboard in our classroom. I always had my nose in the book, not because I was exceptionally studious, but because I struggled to read the print. But after getting my first pair of glasses, I walked out from the optometrist's office onto the sidewalk to bask in the brilliant sunshine that flooded South 8th Street in downtown Manitowoc, Wisconsin. There I stood. Looking one way. Then the other. The colors took my breath away! Reds, blues, and, yes, whites leaped at me like never before—almost as if I could reach out and touch them.

Cataract surgery for us older folks, or a pair of glasses or contacts for the younger generations, can make a night-to-day difference to our eyesight!

But there's another type of clear vision that's far more important. The apostle Paul tells us about it in his letter to the Ephesians: "I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance

among the saints is, and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:17-19 Evangelical Heritage Version [EHV]).

Paul prayed that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened," because he knew how life's struggles can fog our spiritual sight. Endless chemo or radiation therapy, a stroke that leaves us debilitated just as we were taking our first steps into retirement—all these things and more can jaundice our outlook on life. A failed marriage or the sudden, unexpected death of a child can so darken the mirror of our soul that we may even lash out in anger against our God.

How can our spiritual cataracts be removed? Only by God's Spirit who performs surgery deep inside us with his sharp, double-edged sword, "the word of God" (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17). Through that Word, the Spirit brightens our outlook on life by riveting our attention on Jesus and enlightening us with the trust to see Jesus for who he really is. Jesus is the one who made you and me brighter than the white numbers on the hymn board.

That's the way I see it, and I think the prophet Isaiah would agree with me, although he used a different picture for purity. He wrote, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (1:18). Because of the crimson blood Jesus shed on his cross, our sins are buried. When our Father looks at us, he sees nothing but shimmering, blinding white.

For you see, everything looks different when viewed through the lens that is Christ.

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

Learn more about our newest contributing editor on p. 22.

# ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

#### JOEL: DELIVERANCE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Tears formed in Joshe's eyes as he scanned the devastation. The locusts had eaten everything! The two olive trees—his chief source of the so-often-used olive oil as well as a critical food-source—were stripped bare. Not only had the locusts devoured every leaf, they'd even attacked the tree bark! The grain had been gnawed to the ground, and the grape vines had fared no better.

And it wasn't just Joshe's property; the locusts had invaded the entire land. Devastation was rampant! What would people eat? How could they survive?

"Joshe" helps us to envision the situation when the book of Joel was written. A locust plague had devastated the land! Thousands, millions of locusts would eat voraciously and reproduce quickly. (There are even stories of clothing being eaten off people's backs!) And, while it's unclear, it seems as if an invading army—of humans—is on the way too, bringing even more devastation. How would the people respond? How would the Lord respond?

#### **OUR DEVASTATION**

Lent reminds us that sin has devastated humanity. Selfishness, anger, timidity, greed, lust, fear, substance abuse, rebelliousness—those things have devastated individuals, families, and nations! Only if you deny it will you claim to be untouched. Our heads and hearts contain devastatingly sinful thoughts and desires, earning us damnation.

How will we respond? Joel called to the Israelites: "Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD" (1:14).

Cry out to the Lord for help in time of distress! For rescue! The Israelites desperately

needed God's help both for their physical needs and for their spiritual needs. Our need is just as desperate.

And God wants us to turn to him! " 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning' " (2:12).

#### **GOD'S DELIVERANCE**

The people seemed to listen! And how did God respond? "Then the LORD was jealous for his land and took pity on his people" (2:18).

God pitied his people! He then promised to restore their fortunes, replenishing the grain bins and the olive oil. Joshe's fortunes were looking up! And in amazing grace God promised, "Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed" (2:27).

And yet it gets better.

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people.... And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance" (2:28,32).

Deliverance! The message of Lent! You and I need deliverance; Jesus came to win deliverance for us!

And so when the final day of the Lord comes? "The LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel" (3:16).

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

This is the second article in a 12-part series on the minor prophets.

#### **JOEL**

**Background:** Son of Pethuel. (We know nothing more about either man.)

Time he prophesied: Perhaps 722–586 B.C. (The Northern Kingdom is not mentioned; temple, worship is taking place.)

**Key phrase:** The day of the Lord. **The book's major truth:** Rescue for repentant, distressed sinners.

Interesting fact: Peter "preached" on Joel 2:28-32 on Pentecost.

**JONAH** 

AMOS

OBADIAH

MICAH

NAHUW

ZEPHANIAH

ZEPHANIAH

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI



Almo Ban

When we suffer,
God points us to heaven.

# Deliver us from evil

The prayer Jesus taught us begins, "Our Father in heaven." With those words Jesus directs us to look beyond our space and time to our Father above who cares for us while we are here. Each time we pray to our heavenly Father, we turn our attention above to the source of all our blessings.

But because we are here, our attention often drops to our own challenges. We get so wrapped up in our troubles, struggles, and burdens that we do not look up enough and we do not consider what our heavenly Father has given us. His love gave us the promise of heaven—citizenship where he will wipe away our tears and dispel death, sorrow, and pain. In Christ, he claimed us and made us his children, but he did not remove us from this world. Not yet.

Each birthday brings us face-to-face with a relentless truth: We are closer to the end of our earthly journey. Yet even the birthdays somehow turn our attention away from that reality. We think one day will be just like the next, and we will continue to be as we are. No change. And sometimes we pray, "Deliver us from evil," thinking that God promises to keep us and those we love just as we are—young, healthy, and happy.

God listens to our prayer and responds, but not in the way we often expect. Instead of removing our burdens and struggles, he leaves them as our crosses to bear while we are here. Those troubles are often especially painful and shattering. Then the sour notes of our anguish prompt a question: "Why me? Did God forget to deliver me from evil?"

We cannot always understand enough to answer the question, but God has his reasons. For one thing, when we suffer, God points us to heaven. We come to know: "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for a city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Our presence in that city is the greatest

good God could provide for anyone. He teaches us in our tragedies to groan and long for the complete absence of our earthly woes and for the peace and joy of heaven.

We are not only to look above, but also around. When you pray this prayer with your fellow Christians in worship, look around. Among your brothers and sisters in Christ some carry crosses of all sizes and shapes: cancer, disability, poverty, loneliness, heartache—a host of anxieties. It's a much longer list. These children of God come to their heavenly Father with their own versions of "evil" and pray for deliverance. Their crosses give you an opportunity to show your compassion. Your compassion, caring, and prayers—for your own family and for your fellow believers—is one answer to their prayers for deliverance.

For all of us, troubles are a time to look up to our heavenly Father and patiently wait. He continues to care for us in good and bad days. So when we pray, "Deliver us from evil," we must not think as small children who cry when they scrape a knee and think everything is coming to an end. As children of God, we know that our heavenly Father comforts us, picks us up, and gives us the strength and courage to face the next challenge. In the process, we mature and grow knowing that we need each trouble to learn and also to treasure the final deliverance God promises. He does not desert us. "Heavenly Father, deliver us from evil."



#### THE LAST SUPPER (JOHN 13:1-15)

Ding-dong. It's Mike and Maggie. Handing you a bottle of wine, Mike says, "Here. It's for you."

Ding-dong. It's Mike and Maggie. Handing you a bottle of hand soap, Maggie says, "Here. This is for you."

Mike and Maggie never show up at our door empty-handed. There is always a "for you."

Can't the same be said of Jesus? Every time he showed up as a guest, he came bearing gifts. But there is no bigger "for you" than the gifts we see him bring to the upper room.

His first "for you" comes wrapped in a towel. Nobody expected this gift. Peter almost refused it because he was so offended by it. But what a gift it was! After Jesus bent down to wash his disciples' feet, he asked, "Do you understand what I have done *for you*?" (John 13:12, emphasis added). He showed them—and he shows us—what serving love looks like. "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done *for you*" (John 13:15, emphasis added).

Consider how valuable it is to be shown how to do something. A coach is a good coach if he shows you how to shoot a lay-up. Parents learn from their parents how to parent. The old adage, "More is caught than taught," rings true. So when God in his Word says, "Love one another," how valuable it is to have this picture of a towel-wielding Savior in our mind. Our world and even our churches talk much about love, but they know so little about it. But Jesus does know. Jesus shows us that to love means to put others first.

But Jesus gives us an even greater gift in the upper room. We open Jesus' second "for you" gift as we get to see and taste his saving love wrapped in a wafer and wine. Many of you have heard "for you" hundreds of times as an observer from the pew or as a participant at the Communion rail. "Take and eat, this is my body for you. Take and drink, this is the blood of the new covenant poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins."

John's gospel doesn't record the Words of Institution. But cherish how this inspired writer captures the extent of Jesus' for you gift that he brought to the upper room: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). When John wrote those words, no doubt his mind went past the serving love he saw on display in the upper room. His mind went to the garden where he saw Jesus' soul overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. His mind went to the court, where he saw Jesus mocked and beaten. John's mind went to the cross

where the words still echoed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" knowing that he was the one who deserved to be separated.

This month, many of you will have the opportunity to attend Maundy Thursday worship. As you prepare for that meal, Jesus is the host. But might your prayer still be, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts of your serving and saving love to us be blessed. Amen."

#### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

- 1. What is the most special "for you" gift you have received?
- 2. Do we have a tendency to look past the gift of Jesus' example of serving love? If so, why?
- 3. How does Holy Communion bring Jesus' "for you" home for you personally?

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



This is the fourth article in a 12-part series that looks at Jesus as a mealtime guest and how he blessed his fellow diners—and us—with his living presence. Find the article and answers online after March 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK March 2018



The slow songs of Lent grow on us when we understand that they tell us of God's love. Nathan W. Strutz

I will be honest. Growing up, I really didn't like Lent. We had to go to church two times in one week! And then one week we went three times in four days! And the hymns were so slow. They took forever. At least we would stop for a Shamrock Shake after a midweek service or two.

But as I got older, I began to appreciate Lent, maybe even look forward to it. For one thing, I cannot escape my sin in Lent. The terrible, horrible, awful price is on full display. I caused the death of Jesus. I swung the whip. I put the nails in his hands. I joined the crowd and yelled, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Going to church twice a week cannot pay for my crimes. Trying a little harder to be a little better will not fix my problem. Only Jesus can fix my problem. Only the blood of God's own Son can pay for me. And would you believe God's Son loved me so much that he paid—in full—for all my crimes?

All the details of all those special services focus on just how much Jesus loved me. Betrayed for a measly 30 silver coins by a good friend! Spit on. Blindfolded. Struck on the head—again and again. That's how much Jesus loved me. He paid the price I owe. He died the death I deserved. He went through hell so I will never have to.

And those hymns! Yes, *those* slow hymns! Now they're my favorites. Now I sing those verses all year round. You might agree with my wife that "Oh, Darkest Woe" is not the best choice for singing your children to sleep, but what more wonderful words than those from Lenten hymns can we impress on our children and on our own hearts?

"What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
The Master pays the debt his servants owe him,
Who would not know him"
(Christian Worship [CW] 117:4).

"If you think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great, Here you see its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed; See who bears the awful load— 'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God" (CW 127:3).

So yes, now I love Lent. I long for Lent. The six weeks go by too fast, and I don't even get Shamrock Shakes out of the deal anymore. I know it's a hassle to drag children to church in the middle of the week. But I'm so glad my parents did. It's so worth it to hear over and over, year after year, just how much Jesus loves me. To see just how much he endured for me.

And as the services continue, the days start to get longer. Did you know *Lent* actually comes from a word that means "lengthen"? It's light a little bit longer. That's because light is about to burst from the tomb. The grave is not the end. The empty grave is the victory! And it will be my victory too.

Easter is coming! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Nathan Strutz is pastor at Resurrection, a multisite ministry in Verona and Monroe, Wisconsin.