

Speaking the truth in love | Trophies of grace

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Jesus rose!

Our faith is built on a solid foundation
that cannot be shaken. *Page 10*

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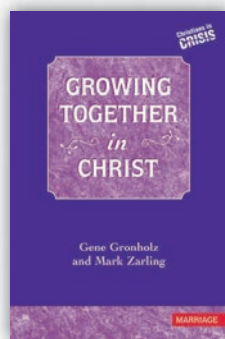
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COVER IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

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

One of our authors used a Bible verse this month that I keep thinking about: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Jesus used the phrase when talking to the 72 he sent out to preach the gospel. It paints a vivid picture: Satan is falling—being defeated—when God’s Word is proclaimed. The author goes on to assure us that even if we don’t always see it happening, God is working through us. (Read the whole article on p. 12.)

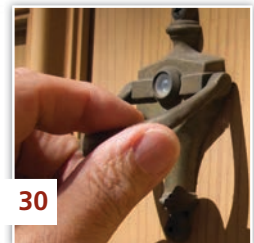
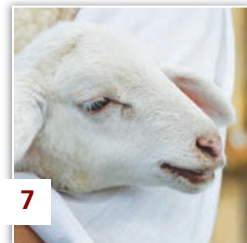
I kept remembering that phrase when reading other articles from this issue, including

- a pastor connecting with a Spanish-speaking immigrant over tacos (p. 14);
- congregations reaching out in love to their neighbors, offering encouragement and support and God’s Word (pp. 20, 22);
- a man becoming a “trophy of grace” after suffering a heart attack (p. 26); and
- an author sharing the importance of speaking the truth in love, even when people raise objections (p. 28).

And what better time to imagine Satan falling than Easter—when Christ crushed the devil’s head by his perfect life, death, and resurrection. Our cover article highlights the facts of that resurrection and the certainty of eternal life that we have because of it (p. 10).

What a message to proclaim!

Julie Wietzke



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INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS

Thank you for the article updating us on the recent informal discussion between the ELS, WELS, and LC-MS [Feb.]. It is encouraging to read about these discussions. I pray for the day when these three bodies are once again in fellowship.

*Karen Locklair
Belgium, Wisconsin*

RECENT EPIPHANY QUIZ

I did the Epiphany quiz [Feb.]. I remember a few years ago you added trivia quizzes. I thought they were fun and helped me remember certain things about the Bible. I think you should include trivia and more games.

Brenda Wagner

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. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

Through my Bible in 3 years

Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

2019
APRIL

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Matthew 22:1-14 | 11. Mt. 26:57-75 | 21. Jer. 31:27-40 |
| 2. Mt. 22:15-46 | 12. Mt. 27:1-14 | 22. Jer. 32 & 33 |
| 3. Mt. 23:1-22 | 13. Mt. 27:15-31 | 23. Jer. 34 |
| 4. Mt. 23:23-39 | 14. Mt. 27:32-50 | 24. Jer. 35 |
| 5. Mt. 24:1-31 | 15. Mt. 27:51-66 | 25. Jer. 36 |
| 6. Mt. 24:32-25:13 | 16. Mt. 28:1-20 | 26. Jer. 37 & 38 |
| 7. Mt. 25:14-46 | 17. Jeremiah 26 | 27. Jer. 39-41 |
| 8. Mt. 26:1-16 | 18. Jer. 27 & 28 | 28. Jer. 42 & 43 |
| 9. Mt. 26:17-29 | 19. Jer. 29 | 29. Jer. 44 & 45 |
| 10. Mt. 26:30-56 | 20. Jer. 30:1-31:26 | 30. Jer. 46 & 47 |

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25-27

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Wisconsin Dells, Wis.



June
27-30

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention
Des Moines, Iowa



July
12

WELS Night at the Brewers
Milwaukee, Wis.



July
18-20

WELS Women's Ministry conference
Watertown, Wis.

Learn more and register at wels.net/events
We can't wait to see you!

Keeping the festival

Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Corinthians 5:7,8

Joel C. Seifert

Over the years, Israelites joined in the Passover meal, remembering how through the blood of an innocent lamb God saved them from slavery and death. Then for one week after that meal, God commanded them to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days they were to eat no leavened bread; nothing with yeast was even allowed in their homes.

So, on the night before Passover, they'd get ready. The head of the household would light a candle. Together, parents and children would search through the house for any traces of yeast and throw it out. Then for one week they would "keep the Festival," celebrating how the sacrifice of the Passover lamb changed their lives.

It was a tradition, but it pointed to a greater truth. Yeast is a symbol of sin and wickedness—it spreads and it corrupts. That festival was a symbol for the Israelites. After they celebrated the deliverance God gave them through the Passover lamb, they had a weeklong reminder that they were to leave behind wickedness and corruption and live in the salvation God had won for them.

KEEP THE FESTIVAL IN SINCERITY AND TRUTH

Paul points us to that greater truth. Christ is the true Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us. By his death on the cross, Jesus gave us complete forgiveness—freedom from sin and death. We celebrate that truth this month. In our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, we see the Lamb of God offer his life as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. We celebrate his triumph on Easter Sunday.

So God says through Paul, "Keep the Festival." Live in the salvation and free-



dom God won for you. Your Easter celebrations aren't mere tradition. You have real victory in Christ. Let's "keep the Festival" in truth. Carefully search through your life and your heart. Is there a sin that you've begun to tolerate? Paul warned the Corinthians

Live in the salvation and freedom God won for you.

against sexual immorality, greed, and hatred. Do a careful search and seek to drive sin out of your life. You're not doing this to find peace with God. Remember, Christ your Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. We're simply living in the victory he's won.

KEEP THE FESTIVAL TOGETHER

I suppose Paul could have said it more simply: Jesus saved you from your sins; leave your sins behind. But the Holy

Spirit led him to point to the festivals that the Israelites had celebrated for more than a thousand years. God had been using the sights, smells, and sounds of those festivals to impress scriptural truths on their hearts.

We'd do well to do the same. This month, our churches will hold services with unique sights, smells, and sounds. Celebrate them as congregations and as families. Make a special effort to share them with your children. Gather together and worship Jesus. Let your family feel the somber and heavy darkness of Good Friday. Take in the fragrant lilies and triumphant alleluias of Easter Sunday. Young or old, use these outward celebrations to impress God's truths on one another's hearts.

Celebrate these things, but don't leave them behind. Let us keep the festival—living in the victory our Passover Lamb has won for us.

Contributing editor Joel Seifert is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Georgia.



Mark Schweden

We need to testify
to God's truth
more diligently—
whether people
want to listen or not.

No time for silence

"You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13).

David knew. He knew that his life began not when he was born but when God gave him the gift of life at conception. It was then that God brought together everything needed to create a human life. David knew that, and that's why he could refer to himself as "me" before he was born.

Human life begins at conception. This is something that we know from common sense, something that we understand instinctively from the knowledge that God has written in our hearts, and something that has been demonstrated by science. Because we know this truth, we find it incomprehensible that so many in our society deny it.

Ever since the US Supreme Court issued its ruling in the *Roe v. Wade* case in 1973, states have been unable to outlaw or ban abortions. In recent years, however, there have been successful efforts to pass laws that restrict when and how abortions can legally be carried out. Some states have passed laws stating that abortions cannot be performed after a fetal heartbeat has been detected or after a certain point in time of the pregnancy.

Others have banned the practice of "partial birth" abortions. Still other states have forbidden the use of tax dollars to support the practice of abortions. In some cases, the Supreme Court has ruled that states do have the ability to impose "reasonable" restrictions on abortion without violating the Constitution or the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Reacting to these successful but limited attempts to restrict abortion, pro-abortion forces have responded with an all-out effort to legalize even the most radical abortion practices. Last year, Illinois passed a law expanding the use of state tax dollars to pay for abortions; in January, its new governor boasted that Illinois was now the most

"progressive" state when it comes to access to abortion. In January, New York passed a law that permits abortions until the time of birth. The gruesome law that will end the life of fully viable human being was celebrated by lighting the One World Trade Center in pink. At least six other states are considering similar laws.

WELS takes a clear and consistent stance on the issue of abortion, publicly declaring our opposition both on biblical grounds and on the basis of natural law.

We testify that only God creates life and only God has the right to end it. We encourage our members to exercise their rights as citizens in efforts to put an end to the barbarity of abortion. We assert that unborn children not wanted by their mothers will be welcomed and wanted by those who are seeking to adopt a child. We support women who choose life for their babies, even in the most difficult and challenging circumstances.

But these recent efforts to promote later and even more horrible abortion procedures should lead us to do more. We need to hold on to God's truth more firmly in our own hearts. We need to resist the temptation to become calloused toward a tragedy that continues unabated. We need to thank God that there are churches and individuals who stand with us in defending the unborn. We need to testify to God's truth more diligently—whether people want to listen or not. We need to be the salt that brings needed change to a decaying world. We need to pray that God will rekindle a love and a respect for human life that seem to be disappearing in our land.

Light for our path

How do I respond to my husband who maintains that the word *Easter* refers to Ishtar, the Babylonian fertility goddess? He refuses to go to any church that uses that title.

James F. Pope

The response to your question includes some uncertainty and certainty. Thankfully, there is certainty in what really matters.

UNCERTAIN DERIVATION

It is difficult to determine precisely the origin of the word *Easter*. Some people have tried to identify it with the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, Eostre. That derivation is unlikely but, for argument's sake, let's pretend that is the case.

If we avoid using names that have ties to goddesses and gods, then we would not want to use *Thursday* because the name of the day is connected to the Norse god Thor.

When I write "August" on a check, even though it's the eighth month of the year, I am reminded it is named after Caesar Augustus—a god, according to the decree of the Roman Senate.

No matter how the word *Easter* came about, any connection to pagan gods, goddesses, or idolatry has disappeared a long time ago.

On the other hand, some propose that *Easter* is derived from the German "Ost" ("East") and "Ostern" ("Easter"). The sun rises in the east. Those first rays of the sun's light from the east shatter the darkness of the night.

CERTAIN DECLARATION

Christians recognize that constructing a church calendar and including events like Easter are matters of Christian freedom. While God gave Moses a church calendar with major festivals for Old Testament Israel, that no longer applies to New Testament followers of the Lord (Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16). Exercising their spiritual freedom, New Testament Christians designed a church calendar and then designated important events in the life of Christ. Easter is one of them.

If your husband is concerned about our church's usage of the title Easter, you may

want to point out to him that in the church calendar, the Sunday after Good Friday is called "The Resurrection of Our Lord." It is common for Christian churches to use "Easter" and "The Resurrection of Our Lord" interchangeably because terminology is not as important as meaning, and the meaning of Easter is all about God's declaration of acceptance and victory.

The apostle Paul wrote about Jesus, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25). The message that God broadcast to the world on the first Easter Sunday was that he had accepted Jesus' holy life and sacrificial death as the full payment for the sins of the world. On the cross Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30). God verified that declaration by means of the empty tomb.

Easter points us to the empty tomb that temporarily housed Jesus' lifeless body. Easter Sunday is God's declaration of his victory over death. Jesus said about himself, "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again" (Luke 24:7). Jesus did conquer death. In addition, the Lord imparted this promise: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25,26). Jesus guarantees that his followers will share in his victory over death.

Easter, then, is an uncertain term with certain meaning. Jesus lives! We live!

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105



RISEN INDEED!

The reality of Christ's resurrection affirms our faith.

Michael J. Berg

Christianity is the only religion that claims it can be proved false.

This sounds odd, but it is exactly what St. Paul meant when he wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14). It is as if Paul wrote, "Show me the dead body of Christ, and I will not believe and neither should you."

Christianity offers a way to invalidate its own teachings and does it in its own sacred texts. No other religion does this. Why would they?

FACT: JESUS ROSE

I do not mean that Christianity is actually false; I mean that Christianity relies on facts. If the stories of Christianity, specifically the resurrection of Christ, turn out to be mere myths, then the whole thing falls apart. What would be the point of following Christ if he cannot fix our ultimate problem: sin and

the death that follows? We would then remain in sin and have no hope past this life (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). Is he only a moral teacher then? Is he really any better than any other inspiring figure if he remained in the grave? And why should I listen to him and not another teacher since they all die and stay dead?

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead," as Paul so beautifully proclaimed (1 Corinthians 15:20). Paul's proclamation is backed up by eyewitness accounts to this historical fact. When Paul was on trial for preaching Christ, he made this defense: "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:25,26). Paul was saying that the actions of Christ are verifiable

facts. They were not done in secret (in a corner) but out in the open. Go investigate! There are eyewitnesses. This really happened.

This is one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and other religions. Christianity is concerned with reality. It is not a religion of mere morality, useful myth, or personal enlightenment. It is a religion of history. Other religions are not as concerned with these matters. Their purpose is to be a path to enlightenment or a useful story that helps humans navigate life. They offer a personal spirituality divorced from historical fact. Their ultimate goal is not correspondence to historical reality but rather a spiritual journey or moral code. Not so for Christianity. If Jesus did not pay for sins and conquer death with his resurrection, then Christianity's teachings are lies and should be shunned. This would also mean that the followers of Christ have been duped and should be "of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Our faith is not a blind faith. Yes, faith is being certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1), but it is not blind. It is based on fact. The facts of Christ's life and death are independently true of our believing them to be true. It is the Holy Spirit who makes our irrational and unbelieving hearts certain. What comfort! These facts of history remain true whether I have a good faith day or a day full of doubt. I do not have to base the truth of my salvation on my feelings but rather on the historical fact of the resurrection and the promises of the Holy Spirit to strengthen my faith.

And what confidence! You can almost see Paul's confidence leap off the pages of his letters. It is as if he said, "Go ahead and investigate. I am so confident in these facts that I will even give you a way to debunk my faith. I know for sure that Jesus actually rose from the dead." A personal confidence and comfort then emerge in the face of death. Listen to Paul's challenge to

death, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Paul's bold taunt to death is only possible because Christ won an actual victory in an actual time and in an actual place. This is no myth, and his faith was no placebo.

ANOTHER FACT: YOU WERE BAPTIZED

Another fact of history provides you with the same confidence: your baptism. There were eyewitnesses to this event. You probably have a certificate that documents exactly when and where you were baptized. You may have pictures or a video proving it happened. You might even remember it! Your baptism

Our historical baptisms connect us intimately with the historical death and resurrection of Christ.

is a fact of history like any other fact. As assuredly as the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 or last night's basketball score, your baptism is a fact of history that cannot be undone. You cannot unring that bell. Your baptism into Christ's death and resurrection means that your resurrection is secure.

So Paul's confidence is your confidence. It's a confidence in the face of death and, really, before any challenge in this life. You have already died with Christ. Paul reminds us, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3). Why should death scare us when we have already been crucified with Christ? We have already been through a death, and we came out the other side unscathed. Our sinful natures were crucified, died, and

were buried with Christ. We were resurrected with Christ in his righteousness. We are forgiven. We rise to live a new day every day until that one day when we enter paradise. Christ gives us permission to go through any tragedy, darkness, challenge, or heartbreak in this world. We have already been through a more daunting experience with Christ than anything this world can throw at us. Our historical baptisms connect us intimately with the historical death and resurrection of Christ. Our faith is built on a solid foundation that cannot be shaken.

Frame your baptismal certificate and hang it on the wall in your bedroom. Look at it every morning and say, "Bring it on, world! Whatever you have in store for me today, I will survive. You can rip away from me my wealth or my health, my job or my house, even my life, but you cannot undo these facts of history: Jesus rose from the dead, and I am baptized into his death and resurrection. My inheritance of heaven is secure. Nobody can take that away from me."

We echo Paul's confidence every day:
Where, O world, is your power?
Where, O devil, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?

So we sing this Easter season with joy, a joy grounded in the historical fact of Christ's resurrection:

This is a sight that gladdens—
What peace it does impart!

Now nothing ever saddens
The joy within my heart.

No gloom shall ever shake,
No foe shall ever take

The hope which God's own Son
In love for me has won.
(*Christian Worship* 156:3)

Michael Berg, a theology professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Philip, Milwaukee.



EVANGELISM

lessons from the Savior

What's happening when we don't even know it

Eric S. Roecker

I had no idea.

This was what went through my mind as I read his letter.

THE IMPACT OF MINISTRY

Let's call him "Jim." He had been a member of my church for a few years. Jim was a retired widower. He had been without a church home for some time when I met him. Now he was a regular. Every Sunday morning he attended worship and Bible class. He was a sweet, gentle sort of soul. He enjoyed painting and was a gifted artist. We had a few extended conversations over the years. But most of our interaction was the sort of small talk pastors tend to have with their members on Sunday mornings—so many people and so little time.

This is why I was so surprised—and touched—by his letter. He had written it because I had been called by another church to serve as its pastor. He wanted to let me know

why he thought it would be best if I continued serving at my current congregation.

It was not surprising that his letter was thoughtful and intelligent. I would expect nothing else from Jim. What I did not expect were the two ways he told me my ministry had impacted him. Allow me to share some of what he wrote:

"You are, I'm sure, not aware of how you helped me accept my recent eyesight crisis. . . ." Jim's eyesight was failing from disease. He had told me that he was no longer able to paint. The sadness in his eyes as he told me about losing the great love of his life had been heartbreaking. "I have not only accepted my handicap but consider it a blessing and thank our Lord. Several of your sermons and quotes from Paul's book of Romans were deciding factors. I'm painting again, with a different technique and renewed enthusiasm."

He went on, "You, Pastor, have helped me (unbeknownst to you) resolve some serious problems with my marriage that surfaced after my wife's death. Your instruction in Bible class strengthened my Christian faith and helped me to face my wife's behavior during our near 60 years of marriage. . . . I was able to forgive her only recently. The

clinch was some consoling words of yours at a Sunday morning education hour. I was miserable before I forgave her; you showed me the power of forgiveness.”

I was stunned. I had known that Jim’s eyesight was failing, and I had known a bit about his troubled marriage, but I had absolutely no idea how God had used my ministry to impact his life. All that time, preaching all those sermons and teaching all those Bible classes, the Holy Spirit had been working in Jim’s heart to help and to heal . . . and I had no idea.

THE IMPACT OF GOD’S TRUTH

So it is. So it is not just for pastors but for all of God’s people. We simply cannot know all that God is doing through us. This is especially important to remember when we share our faith with those who do not know their Savior. We can easily become discouraged if we don’t see the results we want. We can begin to believe it is doing no good.

But it is. Even when we are unaware, it is.

Jesus said something very interesting in Luke chapter 10. The 72 men he had sent out to preach the gospel had returned. After hearing their report about their mission trip, Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). In other words, while those men proclaimed the gospel, Jesus saw what was happening in the supernatural realm. Satan was being defeated. God’s truth was being proclaimed. Whenever God’s truth is being proclaimed, the devil’s lies are being defeated.

But it sure doesn’t seem that way. It seems like Satan is doing quite well. Christianity is on the decline in the West. Basic rights and wrongs aren’t so basic anymore. Mentioning Jesus in the workplace can bring a reprimand, even as believers are force-fed anti-Christian ideologies. Say that you are convinced that the Bible is true and you risk being laughed out of the room. It doesn’t look like Satan is doing much falling. It looks like he is gaining ground. We appear helpless, and we only seem to be losing ground.

But looks can be deceiving. There are spiritual realities happening that we cannot see.

Every time the good news of Jesus is proclaimed, every time a newborn baby is bathed in Baptism, every time God’s people are assured of his forgiveness as they receive his Holy Supper, Satan is falling like lightning from the sky. God’s truth trumps Satan’s lies.

THE IMPACT OF SHARING YOUR FAITH

Remember this! Remember it when you are proclaiming God’s truth to your wayward friend, your questioning coworker, or your skeptical schoolmate. It may seem like it is having no effect. It may seem like a waste of words. But remember that whenever God’s Word is proclaimed, unseen spiritual warfare is being waged. Victories are being won that you may not be aware of for years, perhaps not until eternity.

Jesus once made the same promise in a different way. He said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head,

then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26-29). We scatter the seed of God’s Word. He makes faith grow. We may not see it. We may not know it. But it is happening. We have his word on it.

So go ahead! Lovingly remind your wayward friend that she has a God who loves her and wants nothing more than to spend eternity with her. Go ahead! Lovingly tell your questioning coworker that there are answers to his questions—and then tell him what the answers are. Go ahead! Lovingly spar with your skeptical schoolmate, not to win an argument but to proclaim the gospel and to save a soul. Go ahead and tell the people the Lord has brought into your life all that he has done to give them eternal life.

And as you do, picture Satan falling like lightning.

Eric Roecker, director of the WELS Commission on Evangelism, is a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a three-part series on the account of Jesus sending out his disciples in Luke 10.

An immigrant discovers a church where he feels at home.

Rachel Hartman

In April 2008, Walter Ramirez stepped foot onto US soil. Originally from El Salvador, he spent his first months working and adapting to a new place. He settled in Detroit, Michigan.

As he struggled to learn English, finding a church home was a low priority. Ramirez knew of the Catholic church and had been baptized back in his home country. "All of my growing up was spent in Catholicism," he recalls. Living in Detroit and absorbed with adjusting, he didn't seek out a Catholic church or any other religion.

STUMBLING ACROSS SPANISH

One day in 2008, shortly after arriving in Detroit, Ramirez walked down a street named Springwells. "I didn't know much English, but I came across an American guy on that street. He greeted me in Spanish and invited me to church," he remembers. "I was so surprised he spoke Spanish. I told him I didn't have time for church, so he invited me instead out for tacos."

Ramirez took him up on his offer, and the two headed to a taco place. They carried on a conversation in Spanish while eating, and Ramirez learned the

American man was a pastor. The pastor mentioned he was also new to the area and was looking for people who wanted to come to the Lutheran church. He was particularly interested in helping those who spoke Spanish.

After eating tacos, Ramirez thanked the pastor for the meal. During the weeks that followed, he continued working but didn't start going to church. Then one day, he was again walking down Springwells Street and saw the church the pastor had mentioned. As he passed by, he could see the pastor inside through one of the windows. The pastor was at work, and Ramirez, recalling their conversation over tacos, decided to stop in.

"I wanted to see how he was doing and if he had found people interested in a church," Ramirez says. "I learned some people had started coming but that the pastor could use help." Ramirez also found out the church offered English classes. He decided to start coming to the classes to learn how to communicate in English at a more advanced level.

In addition to English classes, the church offered Bible studies. The pastor also handed out Bibles to anyone who wanted one.

FINDING A FRIEND

Ramirez kept coming to the English classes and then decided to learn more about the Bible. "I went to a Bible study on Tuesdays, and English class on Wed-

nesdays, and another Bible class on Thursdays," he says. "I liked the one on Thursdays the best because there was more of a chance to talk. At that point, I had more time on my hands. I was single and looking for a place to belong. We often went to eat tacos after the classes."

During the time he spent at the Lutheran church, Ramirez grew to enjoy the friendship of the pastor. This connection made him want to support the church work. If there were flyers to hand out, Ramirez took some and distributed them in the neighborhood.

He also started attending weekly worship. "I'm not sure if I started coming to church for religious reasons," he reflects. "It was more because I considered the pastor a friend and wanted to help him out."

As time went on, Ramirez learned more about his truest friend, Jesus, who offers full forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Ramirez studied to become a member of the congregation and continued to look for ways to participate. He helped with outreach efforts and knocked on doors to invite others to the Lutheran church.

"I'm still not sure why I started studying the Bible and going to church, but I do know that I liked it," Ramirez explains. "I felt good going there. I liked the doctrine, the teachings, and everything it offered."



Confessions OF FAITH

BRINGING IN OTHERS

After becoming a member, Ramirez remained active in the church and sought ways to help carry out outreach efforts. He invited other friends he had made to the church. Many of them were immigrants also looking for a place to fit in. Whenever there was an event, if the pastor needed someone to help, Ramirez came if he could. "I'm the kind of person who doesn't just like to come and sit," he says. "I want to do."

In 2010, he met his future wife, and the two got married at the church. "I like the church and so does my wife," he says. Ramirez' wife is an American, and the couple has two children. Ramirez is very concerned about bringing up his children in the Lutheran church. He even baptized his second son himself.

REMAINING IN GOD'S WORD

Sometime after becoming a member and taking on leadership roles in the church, Ramirez learned the pastor he had first met on the street and eaten tacos with was leaving to serve at a different place. Ramirez and his wife knew they wanted to stay in God's Word but found the next years difficult. During the next months, pastors came to preach, but no one stayed permanently. More time passed and still no pastor served the congregation on a full-time basis. "We didn't have a pastor for two years," Ramirez recalls.

During that period, however, Ramirez and his wife remained at the church. They appreciated the message from each visiting pastor, which was the same doctrine and teaching Ramirez had first heard and studied at the church. They were also thankful when a new pastor arrived to live in the area and serve the congregation full time.

In addition to treasuring the Word of God, Ramirez feels comfortable at the church. "It has been a blessing to be in the congregation and have so many Christian brothers and sisters in the faith," he says. "It is also a blessing to have so many friends there."

HOME SWEET HOME

Ramirez' wife is an American and a native English speaker. Since Ramirez' first language is Spanish, the two connect easily in bilingual settings. This has been an additional blessing for their family, as some visitors and members of the congregation speak English while others are more comfortable in Spanish. It has also helped bridge the gaps that can often form in families from different backgrounds.

Even though he now has a family, Ramirez enjoys serving however he can at church. "Whenever there is an opportunity to help, I always tell the pastor I'll come if I can," he says. He wants others to share in the comfort he has found in the gospel and in the



Walter Ramirez and his family are members at Palabra de Vida (Word of Life), Detroit, Mich.

sense of belonging he feels inside the church walls.

Ramirez' daily life has changed from the early days of tacos and English classes in Detroit. He is now a top manager at his job and has taken on leadership roles for the congregation as well. All of this he views as God's guiding hand to bring him to a new home. "I feel very blessed to be in the church," he says. "I am grateful to God for giving us Christian brothers and sisters in the faith."

Rachel Hartman is a member at Divine Savior, Doral, Florida.



Learn more about the ministry at Palabra de Vida, Detroit, Mich., in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.



As parents, we all know that we need to savor each moment. Those older and wiser remind us that the time passes so quickly. So, we squirm with guilt as we try to rush some of the days with our kids along. "I can't wait until she can . . ." "Things will be so much easier when he can . . ."

I don't think that guilt is the answer, though. What is? Read our articles this month and gain some perspective from two Christians blessed with godly wisdom on this topic.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

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

HOW DO PARENTS FIND CONTENTMENT?

Dear Future Self,

I'm curious, do you remember the winter of 2019?

We had more snow on the ground than I had ever seen in my life. And with the snow came lots and lots of ice and cold and wind. So much ice. So much cold. So many days off of school. Six in three weeks, to be exact. And let me tell you, it wasn't all sunshine and playdough. Allow me to refresh your memory:

The days were long and the hours of sunlight short.

There were times when you were sure if you heard the word *Mom* one more time, you'd go sprinting from the house, even if doing so meant running barefoot through the snow. The bickering between the kids led you to question your attempts at instilling kindness and patience in your offspring. You calculated the combined total hours of screen time each day, wondering if it was a healthy amount, and rationalized that just maybe, given the circumstances, a little extra might be okay.

Do you remember the day your youngest got the "Happy Birthday Song" stuck in his head and couldn't stop humming it no matter how hard he tried (or how many times his siblings asked, er . . . told, him to stop)?

Do you recall enlisting the help of little fingers to tear three layers of old wallpaper from the upstairs hallway, simply because you literally needed a change of scenery?

Do you remember the day you returned from a long family weekend up north, desperate for a break from the

Did you hear?

So much for doing away with helicopter parenting. Apparently, hyper-involved parenting works. They're saying it leads to higher test scores.

Oof.

I took my daughter to our first daddy-daughter dance recently. Before I did, I remember the comments when I told people it was coming. "How special!" "A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!" "You never get these moments back!" It felt like a lot of pressure for a dad rolling in from a long, long week.

Oof.

And Christian parenting even ups the ante. We don't just want our kids to grow up and be successful (whatever that means). We want them to serve people with their lives. We don't just want to love and connect deeply to our kids along the way. We want them to believe in the grace of our Lord Jesus. That's A LOT!

Oof.

constant questions and needs to fulfill, only to find that school was canceled the following day?

Do you remember how you tried so hard to be everything to each of them, to entertain and make each day fun and out of the ordinary, and then found yourself practically in tears over your afternoon coffee feeling like a complete failure as a mother?

Oh yeah. Those were the days. Or were they?

So you may be wondering why I feel the need to write these things down for you now. Why remind my future self of the frustrations, the housebound days when everyone's tempers were short and you were desperate for a hot, uninterrupted shower and kids who loved to read quietly in their rooms for hours on end?

Because I know you. And I know that you have read countless blogs and articles about loving the little years, savoring each moment with your children while they are young and resisting the temptation to wish away this season of motherhood. And, even though you may not remember it now, you thought about that a lot when they were young. You feared that your heart might never recover from having to let these children go and grow up. You wondered how you'd ever watch one of them walk down the aisle without standing up and shouting, "No! I'm not ready."

And as I think about you (future me) now, a mom with grown kids, I wonder what you'll remember. I hope it's all of the good and very little of the bad. I hope it's the sloppy kisses from your sons and the suffocating hugs from your

daughters. I hope it's the wonder in their eyes when they see just how much snow fell overnight and the ear-to-ear grins as they get their sledding path just right out in the backyard. I pray that you look back on these years I'm living now and smile.

But this is what else I hope: I hope that you are thankful for your current season too.

I hope that you remember enough of the challenges to appreciate how far you've come, how far *they've* come, and how much you've all grown. And just how perfectly your heavenly Father equipped you for this insurmountable, incredible calling of motherhood. He walked beside you on the good days and carried you on the trying ones. I hope that, even though you may miss aspects of the chaos that surrounds me now, you also appreciate the quiet in your house and the still-yet-hot cup of coffee in your hands.

Yes, those *were* good days. But they weren't perfect.

Those are still yet to come.

Love,
Younger Me

"He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Melissa Anne Kreuser and her husband, Michael, have two sets of identical twins ages five and eight. This article was originally published on holymhenhouse.com, a blog for "imperfect women spurred on by God's perfect grace."



What do I do with that? Punch back with my daddy manifesto. What does that look like?

I will remember: She's not mine. She hasn't been, ever since Christ claimed her in her baptism. Therefore, I no longer shoulder final responsibility for her. What I will do is be her dad. I will teach her, cuddle her, discipline her, protect her, love her. I will work on her sight words with her. (I'll obviously have to update this list as life progresses.) I will take her to gymnastics. I will teach her how to work through her emotions, what it looks like for a man to love a woman (her mom), and how to understand the commandments. I will work to crystallize in her an identity as God's child. I will be her dad. I will refuse, however, to be more than that.

I will not take up a God-sized burden I've never been asked to carry. I will not expect myself to be there for her everywhere. I will not expect myself to protect her always. That's too big for me! I will content myself to be her father—not her Father!—which is all my circumscribed, located, finite self can do. I will empower that contentment by remembering who her Father is. He is her Creator and

Redeemer who will shape her far better than I can; love her more than I ever will; and protect her everywhere and at all times with so much grace and power that, finally, he will resurrect her.

I actually think that last part is incredibly life-giving even now. **I refuse to believe that my moments with my daughter are here today and gone tomorrow.** I'm not going to let the heavy tonnage of that thought rest on me. I have every confidence that through Jesus my moments with her will never end. Try thinking about that the next time you're watching your daughter doing "the floss" at the daddy-daughter dance. It's an interesting juxtaposition. There I was, this dad weirdly proud that his daughter knows how to do stuff like that and simultaneously divinely happy thinking, *My Father has made me a true father to that princess—well—forever.* I'd call it a once-in-a-lifetime moment, but I don't think I should. I have moments like that too often.

Jonathan Bourman and his wife, Melanie, have a six-year-old daughter.





teentalk

Proof doesn't change anything

Thomas wanted proof. We simply believe what God tells us.

Gilbert Haw

Do you remember the story of Thomas?

After Jesus rose from death, he appeared before his disciples. Most of them, anyway. Thomas was not present. When the others told him what they saw, Thomas didn't believe. He said that if he did not have proof—seeing the marks from the nails in Jesus' hands and feet and the stab wound from the spear in his side—he would not believe (John 20:24-29).

When I was younger, I don't think I understood this. Why would Thomas doubt what the people he'd been traveling with for three years were saying? Why should he need proof? Jesus said he would rise!

Unfortunately, that opinion begins to change as we leave our Christian bubble. As we go and see the rest of the world, we don't see universal support for our beliefs. We see a morally decayed world abandoning the God who created it and encouraging others to do the same. We are taught to demand absolute, irrefutable proof to justify our beliefs. It becomes easier and easier to question God. After all, how can we possibly prove that anything God has told us through his Word is true?

The only honest answer to that question is that we can't. Like it or not, it is simply impossible to prove, one way or the other, that God created the world in six days or that Jesus actually turned water into wine. Our faith is centered around the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe it because God said so. That's what faith is, trusting what you cannot see (Hebrews 11:1).

We don't like having to just trust someone. Like Thomas, we always want proof.

Fortunately it isn't having undeniable physical proof that saves us. In fact, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Jesus knows that it's hard to trust him when we don't have proof. Yet he tells us that we are blessed for believing without proof of seeing him, his miracles, his death, and his resurrection.

While this may be difficult to accept, it is important to remember that we are not saved by such proof.

When Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus, he said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke

16:31). Proof, even if someone rises from the death before our eyes, won't change anything. We believe what God says. It isn't proof that will give us faith. It's his Word.

Throughout life, it's pretty much inevitable that we will experience doubt. We, like Thomas, will want to demand proof before we believe. Despite this, we should know that we are forgiven for our doubt and that it is through Jesus that we are saved, just as Jesus said and as we read in the Bible. We are saved by God's grace in sending Jesus. We believe the words of Jesus that tell us what God has done.

It may be difficult to accept that, and it won't get any easier as time goes on, but we can take comfort in knowing that God will keep us in the faith and will strengthen that faith as we hear his Word and receive his Supper. We may not be able to satisfy scientists and intellectuals with proof of our faith, but with God's help and through his grace, we can be firm in what we believe.

Gilbert Haw, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bitter, Jon, to Crown of Glory, Orlando, Fla.
Bodjanac, Theodore, to Shepherd of the Hills, Fredericksburg, Texas
Burk, Paul, to St. John, Newark, Del.
Ehlke, Brett, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
Knepprath, Roger, to St. Luke, Jackson, Mich.
Meissner, Thomas, to Lamb of God, Columbus, Ohio
Mueller, Timothy, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.
Schroeder, Joel, to retirement
Seelow, Nathanael, to Mount Olive, Overland Park, Kan.

Teachers

Arndt, Stephanie, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.
Aschauer, Molly, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Dais, Andrew, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
Datka, Kate, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Dean, Christopher, to Costa Maya Ministries, Mahahaul, Quintana Roo, Mexico
DeNoyer, Jennifer, to St. John, Lannon, Wis.
Donaldson, Katie, to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.
Dovnik, Aleah, to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.
Duncan, David, to St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.
Enger, Alana, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
George, Kirsten, to The Shepherd's Lambs Child Care Center, New Hope, Minn.
Heuer, Melissa, to St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis.
Jensen, Dyllan, to Mount Olive, Delano, Minn.
Kasten, Brian, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Kleinke, Samuel, to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
Klug, Theodore, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Kramer, Rebecca, to Crown of Life, West Saint Paul, Minn.
Marggraf, Lynn, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.
Metzger, Glenn, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.
Mittelstadt, Melissa, to First Steps Early Learning Center, La Crescent, Minn.
Nemitz, Rachel, to St. John, Manitowoc, Wis.
Rabbers, Derek, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.
Schaefer, Michael, to Zion, Denver, Colo.
Scharrer, Jody, to St. John, Hemlock, Mich.
Schwartz, Kathryn, to St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.
Steenweg, Laura, to Christ, Big Bend, Wis.
Stelter, Thomas, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.

Unke, Daniel, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.

Unke, Leah, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.

Weide, Tammy, to Christ, Big Bend, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Fort Atkinson, Wis.—St. Paul school (150). May 19. Festival service and alumni reunion. Worship, 1:30 P.M.; school open house and cornerstone opening follows. All alumni invited. 920-563-2263. Website, stpaulsfort.org.

Prairie du Chien, Wis.—Grace (40). June 9. Worship, 9 A.M.; meal and fellowship to follow. 608-326-4899. Website, gracepc.net.

Birmingham, Ala.—Our Savior (50). June 23. Worship, 4 P.M.; catered meal to follow. 205-677-8642; pastor@oursaviorbirmingham.com. Website, oursaviorbirmingham.com.

Henry, S.D.—St. Paul's (125). June 30. Worship, 10 A.M.; catered meal, noon; program and socializing to follow. RSVP requested. Cindy, cindyfrederick18806@gmail.com; Terry, terry@datatruck.com.

Martinez, Ga.—Prince of Peace (40). July 14. Special worship, 10 A.M. Website, princeofpeacemartinez.com.

Baxter, Minn.—Christ (50). Sept. 8. Worship, 9 A.M.; program and meal to follow. RSVP requested by Aug. 11. 218-829-4105; office@christbaxter.com.

COMING EVENTS

National staff ministers conference—Apr. 25–27. St. Matthew, Niles, Ill. Website, wels.net/events.

WELS Nurses Association spring conference—Apr. 26–27. Eastside, Madison, Wis. welsnurses@wels.net. Website, welsnurses.net.

WELS Church Librarians' Organization spring conference—Apr. 27. Trinity, Marshfield, Wis. Website, welslibrarians.org.

Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale concerts—Apr. 27. St. John, Maribel, Wis., 3 P.M.; Apr. 28. St. John, Newtonburg, Wis., 3 P.M.

Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee spring concert—May 5. 2 & 4 P.M. St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. Website, lutheranchorale.org.

WELS Campus Ministry staff conference—May 20–21. Holiday Inn, Pewaukee, Wis. Theme: "Defending the faith." Website, wels.net/events.

Apologetics course—June 10–14. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. "Practical Apologetics: The Defense of the Faith" is a one-week course ideal for teachers, evangelists, administrators, students, and motivated laypeople who wish to be better equipped with grace and knowledge

to win souls for Christ. The course can be taken for undergraduate or graduate credit and can be audited. On-campus housing is available. Website, wlc.edu/apologetics.

WELS EdTechLead Summit 2019—June 25–27. Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Registration open. Website, welsedtechlead.com.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 27–30. Des Moines, Iowa. Theme: "Let us ever walk with Jesus in the Heartland." Registration open. Website, lwms.org.

WELS Night at Miller Park—July 12. Brewers vs. Giants. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/event/brewers2019.

WELS Women's Ministry conference—July 18–20. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Theme: "Living stones, positioned to thrive." Registration open. Website, wels.net/wmconference.

WELS 65th Biennial Synod Convention—July 29–Aug. 1. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Theme: "For the generations to come." Website, wels.net/2019synodconvention.

NAMES WANTED

Online adjunct instructors—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is seeking individuals qualified and willing to serve as online, part-time adjuncts in the master's degree programs. Such instructors will teach a course once every few years from their homes. No job change or move is required. Qualified instructors are WELS/ELS members who possess a doctoral degree in the area of education, especially educational technology, early childhood, and special education. Send names to the MLC director of graduate studies, Prof. John Meyer, meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu.

Dean of the College of Adult and Graduate Studies—Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., is seeking candidates for the next dean of the College of Adult and Graduate Studies (AGS), beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year. Nominate a qualified WELS/ELS individual at wlc.edu/nominate. Or contact the Office of the Provost, joni.panitzke@wlc.edu.

New members—for the WELSMEN organization, a lay organization for men in fellowship with WELS. The group meets monthly to provide opportunities for the exercise of Christian fellowship, charity, service, and personal growth. Website, welsmen.com.

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.

Moments with MISSIONARIES

WAUKEGAN, ILLINOIS

Seth P. Haakenson

I often tell people that the first thing they'll say in heaven is not "Wow!"; but "Oh!" In other words, in heaven we'll have a better understanding of the reasons why God did things here on earth. I'm sure I heard that line somewhere along the way by one of my own pastors. It's a line I've used several times with the Martinez family in the wake of their daughter's death.

When the Lord called Susell to heaven in November 2018, there were a lot of why questions. Why did God give her only four years? Why did she have to live three of them battling a brain tumor? Rather than spend our time answering questions God has not given us the answers to, we turned to the questions that he has answered.

Such as . . . is Susell in heaven? That answer is a resounding yes. How do we know? Susell was baptized, and in Baptism the Holy Spirit had graciously clothed her with Christ.

How about: Was God angry with her family? No. All of God's anger toward sin was satisfied by Jesus as he hung on the cross. The good news we can now share with people is that, in Jesus, God has reconciled the world to himself.



Immanuel members reached out in love to Susell Martinez (pictured) and her family when she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. After Susell's death last November, the family took classes and joined Immanuel.

Today that same world continues to come to America. Oftentimes, the immigrants of this vast planet come walking right through our church and school doors. What to do? No doubt the answers vary, but the following is what God's people did at Immanuel in Waukegan, Illinois, when this Spanish-speaking family walked through the church's doors five years ago.

First, they taught the Martinez family English. Second, they visited them in their home. Third, they prayed for the family. When Susell was diagnosed with her brain tumor, our elderly members started a weekly prayer group for her, a group that continues to exist today. Who knew? Who knew that God would use a four-year-old girl to impact the prayer life of an entire congregation?

And then this same congregation used Susell's death to honor Christ by holding a Christian funeral. Don't let that adjective go unnoticed. They gave her a *Christian* funeral. Through it, two hundred people heard in their native language of Spanish that the dead in Christ will rise. They heard that Susell will rise. They heard that the reason she will rise is because Jesus lives victoriously over death. How many of those people came to faith that evening? Only God knows.

What we do know is that in heaven we will better understand why God decided to use this crazy, messy, and mixed-up melting pot of a nation as a staging ground for the hearing of the gospel. Some of those who hear the gospel will join our churches. Others will move on and take the gospel someplace else. You and I don't know how it will all work out. But God does. And when we get to heaven, one of the things we'll find ourselves saying is, "Oh. Now I get it!" And we'll praise God for that.

Seth Haakenson has served as a home missionary at Immanuel, Waukegan, Illinois, since 2017. He works with the congregation to reach out to the Spanish-speaking community.

New *Kids Connection* segment can star your church or school

"My School" is a special new segment of the monthly video news magazine *Kids Connection*. Each month, *Kids Connection* will visit a school or church to share a story of that organization's unique ministry efforts in God's kingdom.

"The idea originated with people saying, 'We would love to have *Kids Connection* come to our school,'" explains Steve Boettcher, producer of *Kids Connection*. "We thought if we create an easy way for people to reach out to us with an e-mail and an idea, we could make it happen."

The first "My School" segment appears in this month's episode and features Zion Lutheran School, Columbus, Wis. Students and staff at Zion raised money for a local Make-A-Wish Foundation child named Lucas, who suffers from leukemia. Collecting donations and hosting raffles, the school raised more than \$1,800 to send Lucas on a vacation to Florida. The amount was revealed at



a pep rally at the school. The Lakeside Lutheran High School marching band played, and the crowd dressed in blue, Lucas' favorite color.

"We wanted to let our light shine and show that we believe in God and be kind to others," said Grace, a sixth grader at Zion.

This story shows the focus of "My School": to celebrate the special ways WELS churches and schools and their young people share God's love and mercy.

Though submissions have only recently begun, *Kids Connection* has already been blessed with several uplifting stories that will be featured in upcoming videos:

- A school in Green Bay, Wis., works on a unique community project each year.
- A school in Citrus Heights, Calif., organizes a local basketball league.
- A school in Tomah, Wis., provides therapy animals to serve in its area.

Kids Connection is a ministry of WELS Discipleship.



Would you like *Kids Connection* to visit your school or church? Send an e-mail invite to kidsconnection@wels.net. To learn more about subscribing to *Kids Connection*, visit wels.net/kidsconnection.

Booknook

A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit nph.net or call 1-800-662-6022.



The very first sentence of the forward perfectly prepares the reader for this book: "This is not an easy book. You, should know, dear reader, what you've gotten yourself into."

Reading *Quick to Listen: Understanding Viewpoints That Challenge Your Faith* demands your ability to put aside your faith lens momentarily and to see the world through the eyes of others. This is not an easy task. While reading the book, you will often feel the knee-jerk reaction that we—as Christians—have when someone questions our faith. However, if you can get past that reaction, you will find that the ability to listen first and to seek understanding is an essential practice that followers of Christ need to learn if we will ever create meaningful relationships and share the truth with those outside our faith family.

Throughout the book, you hear the words of people who take various viewpoints contrary to what WELS believes. The book then offers a view into the thoughts behind their beliefs. It's not a textbook of what to say in response

but an encouragement for all of us to really listen to our neighbors and to understand them before we begin to share our faith. Besides creating clear pictures of what the participants believe, the writers provide the Scripture that supports what we have been taught in our church body. In reading the book, I enjoyed the challenge of trying on another perspective, holding it opposite to my thoughts, and carefully examining the two.



PRICE: \$18.99

The authors illustrate wonderful examples of Christian love and patience as they model through their questions and writing how we can understand and listen in love. The book challenges us to show Christ's love through our ability to connect with others by being quick to listen. This is an excellent book for readers who are strong in their faith and are looking to expand their knowledge of how to reach others with varying faith backgrounds and viewpoints.

Lisa Adams, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

New mentoring program helps congregations reach those in need

What do you do when someone comes knocking on your door asking for help?

That's a question the pastors and several members of St. Paul's, New Ulm, Minn., asked when people would stop at the church looking for a handout. Or when recently released inmates from the nearby county jail would visit because they had nowhere else to go. A gift card to the local gas station or money to help them get by just didn't seem like the right answer. "You're trying to help but what you're doing doesn't really help them," says Nate Scharf, pastor at St. Paul's. "You feel like an enabler. That was what was on our hearts."

So they contacted both WELS Prison Ministry and Institutional Ministries* to find out what else they could do to help both the ex-convicts in the area as well as others in the community in need.

From there, the New Ulm-area congregations created the Minnesota River Valley Mentoring Program, which offers a Bible-based, Christ-centered growth program to those just released from prison as well as others in need. "For our congregation, it went from a system of well-intentioned handouts to a system of how do we engage [people in need] and point them to Christ," says Scharf. "We don't want to ignore their needs, but we want to meet their needs in the right order."

Scharf says the group started by developing boundaries and safeguards for both the mentors and the mentees and compiling a list of community resources and aids to which they could refer people. Workshops were held to train mentors who would be willing to help and support people in need.

Jeff Boyce is one of those mentors. When he attended his first mentoring training session, he wasn't so sure he was cut out for it. "I had a lot of questions and concerns. We were talking about people in prison or getting out of prison. It was dealing with an entirely different slice of life that I knew



nothing about," he says. "It was truly a case of the Scripture verse that says, 'In your weakness, my power is made perfect.'"

Once Boyce decided to become a mentor, it didn't take long for him to jump in. A few weeks after training, Scharf asked him to witness the baptism of a man who was out on parole. Boyce began working with this man, but after only a few weeks, the man broke parole and ended up back in jail. "That's when my ministry changed to ministering to those in prison," says Boyce. He began visiting the man in jail, e-mailing him encouragement, and correcting the Bible study tests he took from the WELS Prison Ministry booklets. When he was released, Boyce helped the man find a place to live and connected him to community services for other helps. Boyce also helped him find a job and then worked with him to get financial aid when he wanted to go back to school.

And all the while, Boyce let Christ shine. "One of my jobs as a mentor is to give them a new way of looking at things, and the best place for that new look to come from is the Scriptures," says Boyce, who shares that he likes to use verses from Proverbs to encourage those he is mentoring. "And whenever I share the Word, I end up being strengthened as well."

Boyce shares that being involved in this program also has changed his outlook. "It made those words of Jesus about loving those who are in great need very real to me," he says.

Currently the Minnesota River Valley Mentoring Program has about 8 active mentors. More than 30 more people have gone through training. The mentors support and encourage people who have gone through a crisis, ex-convicts who are trying to re-establish themselves in society, those struggling with alcoholism, and even members who just need help dealing with life issues. Monthly meetings allow the mentors to encourage and offer advice to one another.

The group also is sharing resources and information with other area congregations that are interested in getting involved.

"As Christians, we have something to offer," says Scharf. "We have the Bread of Life to give."

If you are interested in exploring a mentoring program like this for yourself, your congregation, or another group, visit wels.net/pm or contact Dave Hochmuth, director of WELS Prison Ministry, at prisonministry@wels.net; 414-256-3243.

* Institutional Ministries is a WELS parasynodical based in Wisconsin that partners with WELS Prison Ministry.

Novotny takes over for Jeske at Time of Grace

“Pastor Jeske leaves a legacy of teaching the Bible in a way that is accessible, interesting, and grace-centered,” says Mike Novotny, pastor at The CORE, Appleton, Wis. “The most frequent feedback heard at Time of Grace is that Pastor Jeske always teaches you something new while still coming back to the old story of Jesus’ love.”

Mark Jeske, pastor at St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis., helped launch Time of Grace in 2001. Since then, he has served as the lead speaker for the half-hour weekly television program as well as the writer of many Bible studies, devotions, and books for Time of

Grace’s international outreach media ministry. Jeske will appear for the last time as the main speaker of the program on April 21. Mike Novotny will then take over as the lead speaker.

“Pastor Mike knows his Bible well, is a great storyteller, has a terrific smile and sense of humor, and really seems to grasp the power and delight of mass media ministry,” says Jeske. “He has a deep passion for people and gospel outreach.”

Novotny developed a rapport with Time of Grace’s audience when he became one of the presenters of Time of

Grace’s video devotions “Your Time of Grace” (now known as “Grace Talks”). Launched in 2016, these short video devotions are followed by more than 270,000 people on Facebook and YouTube. So Novotny’s face is a familiar one to many in Time of Grace’s audience. In addition, Novotny has been serving as a guest speaker on the Time of Grace television program as he transitions to taking over full time for Jeske.

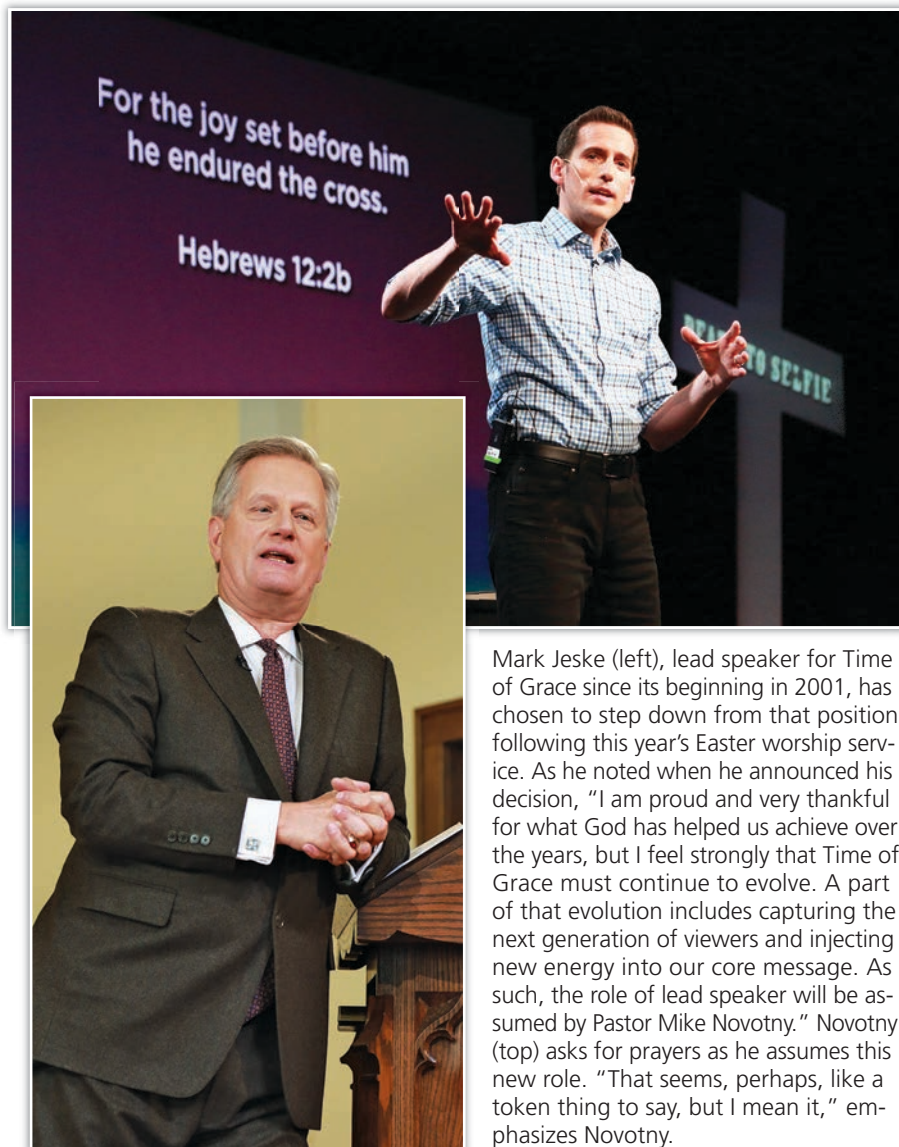
What interested Novotny in taking on this role?

As he explains, “Time of Grace takes the gospel you hear locally and shares it globally. When I preach about Jesus to my congregation, there may only be a few hundred faces in front of me, but through the lens of the camera is a crowd that no stadium on earth could contain. These are real people with real stories and real souls who get to hear about a real Savior. That fires me up in a big way!”

Tim Lehman, president and CEO of Time of Grace, reports that the Time of Grace television program averaged 438,000 viewers each week in 2018. “Based on research, we know that 15 percent of the television audience states their religious affiliation as atheist/agnostic/none,” says Lehman. “So each week 65,000 people who are not connected to Jesus hear the gospel message. In addition, Time of Grace can be a resource for those unable to make it to church and as a supplement to those who can.”

Lehman adds, “Time of Grace would not be in the position it is today without Pastor Jeske’s tireless efforts. He stayed grounded at all times and knew this was about telling people of Jesus. It was not about Pastor Jeske. His messages connected people to Jesus so they knew they were loved and forgiven because of what Jesus did.”

To learn more about Time of Grace, visit timeofgrace.org.



Mark Jeske (left), lead speaker for Time of Grace since its beginning in 2001, has chosen to step down from that position following this year’s Easter worship service. As he noted when he announced his decision, “I am proud and very thankful for what God has helped us achieve over the years, but I feel strongly that Time of Grace must continue to evolve. A part of that evolution includes capturing the next generation of viewers and injecting new energy into our core message. As such, the role of lead speaker will be assumed by Pastor Mike Novotny.” Novotny (top) asks for prayers as he assumes this new role. “That seems, perhaps, like a token thing to say, but I mean it,” emphasizes Novotny.

WELS news briefs

COMMISSION ON LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

414-256-3220; jim.rademan@wels.net

A new **20-member Special Education Task Force** has been formed to provide special education resources and support to teachers and students. “Our goal is to lay out a common, reliable, and researched path for identifying and supporting learners who struggle in academics and behavior,” says Kelli Green, a special education professor at Martin Luther College (MLC). The task force will be researching the special education services already happening in WELS schools as well as the needs. It will also be exploring how to educate current students as well as administrators and teachers already in WELS schools about the resources available to support those with special needs, including ways to collaborate with one another and with public schools. The group includes representatives from the Commission on Lutheran Schools, MLC, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Bethany Lutheran College, Jesus Cares Ministries, and Christian Educators for

Special Education, along with special education teachers in WELS area Lutheran high schools and Lutheran elementary schools. For more information, contact Jim Rademan, director of WELS Lutheran Schools, at jim.rademan@wels.net.

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

carla.martin@wels.net

The **65th Biennial Convention for the synod** will be held July 29–Aug. 1 at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., under the theme “For the Generations to Come.” “The theme reflects



our synod’s commitment not only to proclaiming God’s Word now, but to look forward and continue to reach those who will follow us—both younger generations now and generations in the future,” says Mark Schroeder, WELS president. About 400 pastor, teacher,

and lay delegates and 50 advisors will meet to help set the priorities and chart the direction for the work that will take place over the next biennium. Jon Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling, will present the convention essay. Learn more at wels.net/2019synodconvention.

WELS HYMNAL PROJECT

414-615-5774; contact@welshymnal.com

The development of the **new WELS hymnal and its supplementary products is making significant progress** this year. “It’s really wrapping up,” said Michael Schultz, hymnal project director. “Almost every aspect of the main content is going to be finished at the end of the calendar year.” Release of the new hymnal is scheduled for Advent 2021. Plans are in the works for a 64-page preview edition to be produced and made available by the 2020 district conventions. Each congregation will receive copies as well. WELS Hymnal Project committees have been at work on the project since 2013. Learn more at welshymnal.com.

Obituaries

Roger W. Falk, 1939–2018

Roger Falk was born July 4, 1939, in Shawano, Wis. He died Nov. 8, 2018, in Green Bay, Wis.

He served as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod before serving WELS as a missionary in Japan.

He is survived by one sister and two brothers. He was preceded in death by his wife, Kiyoko, and one brother.

Don W. Fastenau, 1938–2018

Don Fastenau was born March 30, 1938, in St. James, Minn. He died Nov. 17, 2018, in St. James, Minn.

A 1965 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Platteville, Wis.; Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.; and Bethlehem, Lakeville, Minn. He also was a missionary to Zambia.

He is survived by his wife, Clarice; 3 daughters; 13 grandchildren; and 1 great-grandchild. He was preceded in death by a grandchild.

Judith A. Tillman, 1943–2018

Judith Tillman (née Frauenkron) was born Oct. 1, 1943, in La Crosse, Wis. She died Nov. 20, 2018, in La Crosse, Wis.

She taught at St. John, Princeton, Wis., and First, La Crosse, Wis.

She is survived by one son and one daughter. She was preceded in death by her husband, John.

Janice L. Goodger, 1950–2018

Janice Goodger (née Breitenfeld) was born Dec. 21, 1950, in Tomah, Wis. She died Nov. 4, 2018, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1974 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught

at Salem, Owosso, Mich.; Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.; Trinity, Jenera, Ohio; St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. James, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Loving Shepherd, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Arnie; 1 son; 5 daughters; and 23 grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her parents and one brother.

Michael M. Sebald, 1957–2018

Michael Sebald was born Nov. 2, 1957, in Tawas, Mich. He died Nov. 21, 2018, in Franklin, Wis.

He taught at Evergreen Lutheran High School, Tacoma, Wash., and Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Natalie; one son; one daughter; his father; five brothers; and two sisters. He was preceded in death by his mother.

District news

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

NW—On Jan. 27, Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis., celebrated the pastoral ministry anniversaries of **Robert Kujawski** (35 years) and **Beck Goldbeck** (40 years).

MINNESOTA

St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West St. Paul, Minn., welcomed about 220 guests with special needs, ages 14 and older, to its Night to Shine event on Feb. 8. Night to Shine is a national event sponsored by the Tim Tebow

Foundation that includes dancing and VIP treatments for those with special needs.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On Feb. 8, **Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.**, hosted its Night to Shine event for those with special needs. As a family member of one guest commented, “Every year we are blown away by the compassion and acceptance that the Shoreland Lutheran students show to all the attendees.”

WESTERN WISCONSIN

Students at **Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.**, created and delivered tie blankets to the residents of Onalaska Care Center.

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

WESTERN WISCONSIN



Sunday school students at St. Paul, Marshall, Wis., made valentines for Hmong students studying God's Word in Vietnam. The cards were created to encourage the students in their studies and to show Christian support for their efforts. Learn more about mission efforts in Vietnam at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.

NEBRASKA



Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colo., dedicated its new worship facility on Feb. 10. This home mission congregation purchased a former auto repair garage and converted it into a worship space with a loan and grant from WELS Church Extension Fund. Pictured is Jared Oldenburg, pastor at Eternal Rock, at the ribbon cutting ceremony on Nov. 30, 2018.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



In February, the first grade Girl Pioneers at Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls/Germantown, Wis., made Angel Kisses treat bags to share with patients at Children's Hospital in Milwaukee. The bags included a note letting the recipients know that they were being prayed for and that God loved them.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



In February, fourth graders at St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis., made cards filled with messages of faith for Milwaukee police officers to offer support after the loss of their fellow officer, Matthew Rittner.



TROPHIES OF *grace*

A heart attack opens the door for the gospel to win a soul for Jesus.

Eric S. Hartzell

In 1919, a white man stepped into the Apache reservation in Arizona to share God's message of grace and forgiveness in Jesus. He was Pastor H.C. Nitz, and over the years he witnessed the miracle of the gospel winning the hearts of many people. He wrote about these "trophy of grace" among the Apache nation.

His experiences are like so many oth-

ers in many other settings. The gospel wins the hearts of people; they become trophies of grace. Each one of us is also a trophy of God's grace because he has called us by the gospel and made us disciples of Jesus.

I have a story of two trophies of grace to share. I met them in Georgetown, Texas. I'm going to call them the husband and the wife, because what their

names are is not as important as who they are. It is only important that Jesus knows their names. And he does.

The husband is a Vietnam veteran who was severely wounded in the war. His awful wartime wounds were not as painful, however, as the wounds he suffered at home from an unappreciative and uncaring public. The best thing he did—and he will

tell you this today—was to marry his wife, who is a strong believer in Jesus and who tried to get her husband to believe like she did. It was to no avail though. He loved her dearly, but he just couldn't believe in Jesus. Maybe he was talking like a soldier, but one time he said, "I think it is a real bad idea if someone would have to die for my sins. If someone needs to die for my sins, it should be me."

One day his wife and I were working together with other members of the congregation at a booth for the church in Georgetown. We were trying to get some publicity for the little Lutheran church and invite people to come. My cell phone rang with a call from the neighbor lady who lived across the street from the couple.

The lady on the phone said, "They are working on him right now. Apparently, he has had a bad heart attack." The wife left right away to be with her husband at the hospital, and I promised to come to the hospital as soon as the event was over that evening.

When I arrived at the hospital later that evening, things had stabilized. The husband was in the hospital bed. His wife was there, and I offered a devotion as I tried to talk about Jesus. The husband was polite, and he listened. What choice did he have?

Then a doctor came into the room to tell the couple where things stood. I stood off to the side to let the doctor speak to the couple. The doctor was from one of the countries of the former Soviet Union, and he spoke with a very heavy accent. He told the husband the bad news and what he would have to do now.

When he left the room, the husband looked at his wife and said, "We have to do what this doctor says. We have to believe what he has told us." Whether those were exactly the words or not, it doesn't matter. That was the gist of it.

I stepped up to the bed at that point and said to the husband, "This doctor came into your room and you could hardly understand him. He's from an-

other country. You are just a patient of his, and you believed everything he told you. People who love you are here, and they are telling you to believe in Jesus and have life and you won't believe them." And then I left the couple and went home.

Early the next morning my cell phone rang. The wife announced, "Pastor, he's ready to talk to you now. Can you come?"

And now it would be possible to say, "And the rest is history." The gospel had begun to claim another trophy, and it was handsome! From "I can't believe in Jesus," it was now "I want to believe in Jesus."

Each one of us is also a trophy of God's grace because he has called us by the gospel and made us disciples of Jesus.

The gospel continued to work, and, after some time of rehabilitation, the husband asked if he could be baptized. It happened with water from a white Dixie cup in another hospital room. The words of promise were from the Word that says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

It still wasn't easy. The husband's health was shaky. He went home, but there were questions and some doubts expressed along the way. His wife was there every second for her husband. He steadily became stronger.

But it was not over yet! After some time, the husband and wife were away at a gathering, and another heart attack came. My cell phone brought the news. The EMTs were a half an hour away, taking the husband to the hospital. His wife was going in another vehicle and would get there as soon as she could.

Inside the emergency room, a small group of believers in Jesus gathered and waited for the wife. The EMTs were working frantically on the husband. Under their breath, we heard the EMTs say, "How long are we going to keep this up?" The pounding on his chest and the other measures weren't helping. They packed him in ice to keep the swelling down in his brain. It had been a half an hour, and his heart was stopped. "Please wait until his wife gets here before you stop trying to revive him," the forlorn little group pleaded.

And then we prayed. The prayer of this hopeful but helpless group was, "Jesus, please help this man. He knows you and he loves you. Save him. Please." Our prayers continued when the wife arrived.

Then there was a blip on the screen . . . and then another. The husband started fighting the respirator and the breathing apparatus and began to breathe on his own. "Get that ice off of him," and they did. "I'm holding your hand now," the wife told her husband. "If you can hear me, squeeze my hand." His hand squeezed hers! Then he opened his eyes. After a while someone said, "What was the score of the football game yesterday?" and he answered . . . correctly.

Everyone who was there is still convinced that they saw a miracle that day. But actually, the real miracle had already happened when the husband said, "I want to believe in Jesus."

Today it is also a wonderful thing to hear the husband's confession, "Jesus has saved me." He's not afraid to tell anyone. In fact, he tells everyone. He and his wife are now charter members of Redeemer, St. George, Utah.

Together with the other members, they are all God's trophies of grace!

Eric Hartzell is pastor at St. Peter, Globe, Arizona.



AMBASSADORS

LET THEM SEE JESUS



Speaking the truth in love

Justin C. Cloute

"The Bible is just a bunch of made-up stories written by dead, power-hungry men!"

These words echoed in my mind as I tried to think of what to say next. I was a young pastor serving at a mission congregation and had been canvassing our neighborhood with the help of a mission team from another congregation. While most of the people I had talked to that day were friendly, I most recently experienced a cold reception at a couple of houses.

The young woman standing in the doorway continued, "It's nothing more than a bunch of myths made up to give comfort to those who are too weak to deal with life's realities!" I physically felt my pulse begin to rise as blood rushed to my head.

I knew I had a more informed answer, but I just couldn't think of it. In a tone that was anything but gentle, I asked, "Have you ever *even read* the Bible?"

She hesitantly said, "No . . . not really." Sadly, I responded, "That's ridiculous!" The door quickly shut in my face.

DON'T RESPOND IN ANGER

While what I said was true—her accusations were ridiculous—I failed to re-

spond to the objection with gentleness and respect. I cared more about my own emotions and putting the other person down than patiently dealing with the objection. I suppose the Holy Spirit could use even my sharp response to lead this woman to rethink her accusations and perhaps open the Bible. God has often used human failure for his good. But that's no excuse. I could have done better.

As you lovingly respond to an objection, look for ways to turn the conversation back to Jesus.

The apostle Paul encourages believers to "[speak] the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), and Solomon reminds us that "a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). One of the goals of apologetics is to extend the conversation in order to share the gospel. We can show that we care about someone by addressing the concerns they may have. However, when we respond with anger to an objection, not only does it stir up anger in the other person but it also often ends the conversation. It cuts off the

discourse before we get to what is most important—Jesus.

UNDERSTAND YOUR FRUSTRATION

In order to help us better respond in the future, it may be helpful to address some reasons we might become frustrated when responding to objections.

We make it about us, instead of Jesus.

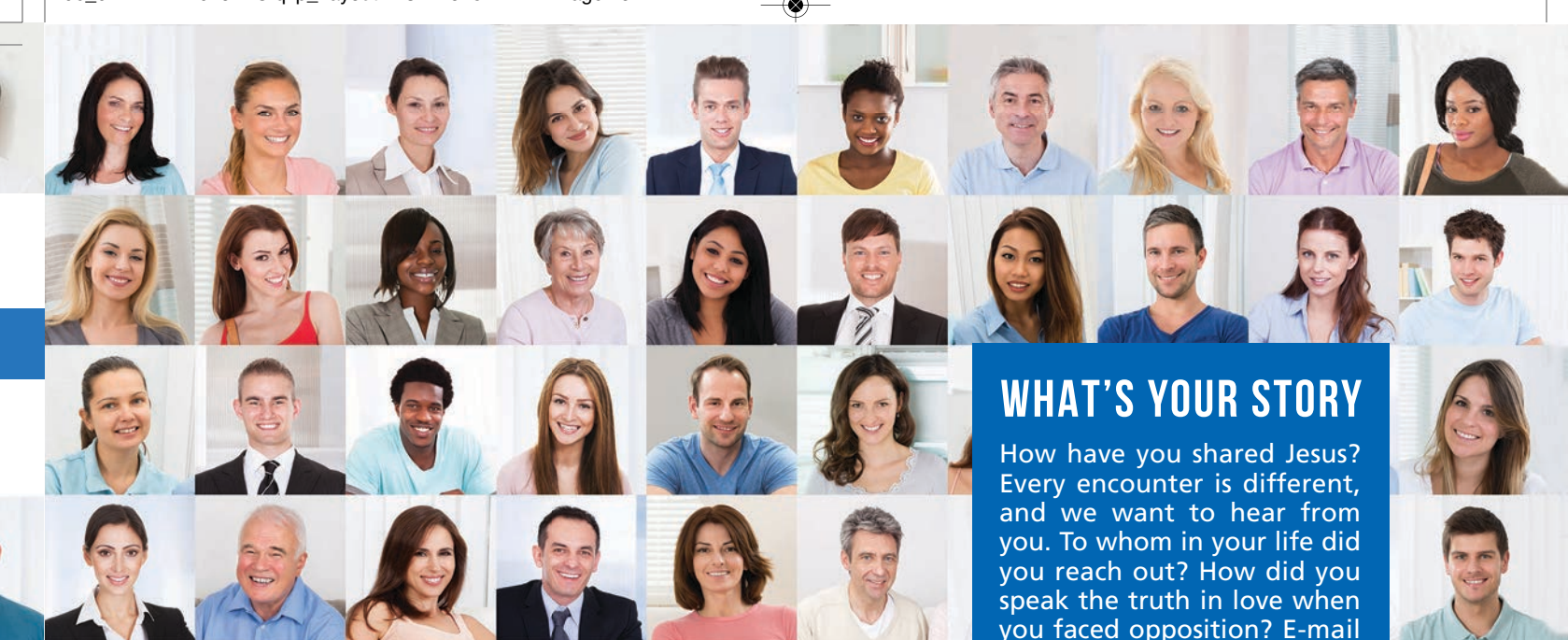
Sometimes we respond in anger because we are personally offended. We feel like the person we are talking to is challenging our intelligence. That may be. But remember what your Savior says, "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man" (Luke 6:22).

Memorize these words or write them on a notecard and put it in your pocket before you go into a situation where your faith may be challenged. Remember that even if you feel stupid and all alone, Jesus says that you are "blessed" because this is proof you are connected to him. There is no reason to get angry.

We care more about winning the argument than we care about the person standing in front of us.

We all like to be right, especially when it comes to the big questions in life. But it's not just about being right. It's about sharing the gospel with some-





WHAT'S YOUR STORY

How have you shared Jesus? Every encounter is different, and we want to hear from you. To whom in your life did you reach out? How did you speak the truth in love when you faced opposition? E-mail responses to fic@wels.net with the subject line: "How I shared Jesus." Include your name, congregation, and contact information. Questions? Call 414-256-3231.

one who desperately needs it. Sadly, it is possible to win an argument but to lose a person. If you are tempted to feel proud about being right, remember that you didn't come to accept the gospel by your own intellectual powers. Even your acceptance of the gospel is a gift. It's a gift that God has given you and a gift that he wants to share with all people.

There's nothing to be proud of, except your Savior.

We are unprepared to respond to the objection.

Sometimes we may respond to an objection with frustration simply because we don't have a good response. I believe that this was at least part of the reason I responded the way that I did. I had spent four years in college and another four at the seminary studying to take the gospel to people like this. I had learned Greek and Hebrew and translated large portions of Scripture. I had daily been in God's Word, yet I wasn't prepared to immediately respond to this objection. Perhaps I was more upset at myself than at the person who had the objection.

Remember that you don't need to have an immediate answer to every objection. I could have said, "You know what? I've heard that before. Would you mind if I look into it and get back to you?"

From everything that I've studied, the texts of Scripture are very early and reliable, and I am more than happy to sit down in the future to discuss what the Bible says." This type of response shows that you care about the person and her objection.

You need not fear, because you have Jesus. Ultimately you want to lead others to him as well. Many of the objections that people raise are just a distraction from the deeper issues of sin, guilt, and the need for salvation. As you lovingly respond to an objection, look for ways to turn the conversation back to Jesus. Whether they admit it or not, everyone you talk to needs him.

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Why would we go through all this trouble? It's not easy to keep your cool when facing objections. When Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, he faced one objection after another from his opponents. First, they asked him how he knew so much about God without having studied. Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me" (John 7:16). After this, they called him demon-possessed. Can you imagine—God himself being called a demon? But never once did our Savior blow up in anger or send out a fiery retort. John tells us, "On the last and

greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them' " (John 7:37,38). He speaks in a loud voice, but it's not to hurt or destroy. It's to invite. It's to invite even his opponents to drink the living water.

There will be times when people object to the teaching of Jesus. They may even aim their insults at you. But there's no need to get angry or frustrated. By a miracle of the Holy Spirit, you have been led to drink from the living water of Jesus. This water forgives our sins of anger and our failures in speaking the truth. It calms and refreshes our souls and gives us the desire to lead others to Jesus as well.

Keep on speaking the truth in love.

Justin Cloute is pastor at St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin.

This is the sixth article in a 12-part series on sharing your faith.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small, dark, mechanical object, possibly a door handle or a small robot, against a wooden door. The object has a circular lens or sensor on its front. The background is a wooden door with vertical panels.

BECOMING “THOSE PEOPLE”

A knock on the door brings tragic news and a need for Christian comfort.

Bryan D. Guhr

During my career as a deputy sheriff and detective for a local sheriff's department, I found that making death notifications was the most distasteful of all my duties. Often times this notification was received from another jurisdiction where the death occurred. The information we received usually only contained the names of the deceased and the next of kin. We never delivered the information alone, and officers told the surviving family to contact the other agency for any additional information.

It was difficult. We would arrive at a stranger's home, wake them in the early morning hours, and deliver the worst of all news: A loved one had passed away. We would stay for a short time, offer condolences and any services we could

provide, and then leave. We were not to be clergy or counselors, just messengers.

I always wondered what became of “those people.”

THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR

On Feb. 13, 2017, my wife and I were awakened by a pounding on our front door at about two in the morning. Two officers told us that our oldest daughter had passed away. Since all deaths are investigated, they told us to contact the department that was handling the investigation. Along with offering condolences and any services they could provide, they offered us the services of their department chaplain. We thanked them and told them that their chaplain was one of our pastors. They stayed for a short time and left. Ironically, we had just become “those people.”

At my daughter's funeral, when receiving condolences from family and friends, a good friend from our church's

Saturday morning men's Bible study gave me a hug and whispered something in my ear. I was a physical and emotional wreck so I had to ask him to repeat it. He whispered, "Romans 8:28."

I had read and meditated on that passage many times before: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This time, because of my emotional state, I wasn't feeling "the good," but those words stayed with me.

For the funeral service, our pastor chose Jeremiah 29:11 as the text for his message: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" Pastor told us that in all the years of his ministry, he had never selected this text as a basis for a funeral message, but he felt that it would be a comfort to us.

Months earlier, my wife and I had booked our winter vacation to Punta Cana. We were scheduled to leave on Feb. 23, ten days after the knock on the door. The days between our daughter's death and our departure were spent wavering between going or staying. With the encouragement of our family and friends, we decided to go. Our winter vacation history is that of "planting" ourselves at the resort. We don't stray but keep close to our room, the beach, the groomed grounds, the beach, the dining room, and the beach. We would have ample time with our thoughts.

Once airborne, I remember thinking that the weather and our vacation routine would probably be good, but then we would have to return home. Nothing would have changed. Our daughter would still be gone, and my grieving would go on. The sorrow I was feeling for my loss overwhelmed the joy of knowing that our daughter was with our Lord and Savior, Jesus, in heaven.

OUR MEDITATION

My wife and I spent countless hours in prayer and meditating on God's Word and his promises as we lounged on the beach. My prayers were for God to send his Holy Spirit for comfort and peace. My meditations focused on some of these important verses and readings:

- Exodus 14:14: "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."
- Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
- Matthew 8, Mark 4, and Luke 8: The account of Jesus calming the storm. "Quiet! Be still!" was an important verse to remember.
- Deuteronomy 31:6: "Be strong and courageous. Do not

be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

- Joshua 1:5: "No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." I treasured the promise that I will never be alone in my storm.
- Romans 8, especially verses 26-28.
- Hebrews 11: By faith.
- Jeremiah 29:11: The verse the pastor preached on at my daughter's funeral.

With my focus now on God's truths, the scales began to tip in the favor of joy. The return home was not as dreadful as I had imagined.

CONTINUED COMFORT

Over the years, our daughter had become a not-so-frequent church attendee. My wife and I had some concerns, as we had modeled and expressed the importance of regular worship to all of our children. After we returned home, our daughter's brothers and sister were cleaning

out her apartment. Among her possessions they found her Bible and a small plaque that she had purchased. On it were the words of Jeremiah 29:11.

As the grieving process continued, I realized that I had never experienced anger. My wife and I went through this process together as well as individually. My wife also

never experienced anger. The only conclusion I could come to was that deep in our hearts we have the blessed assurance of knowing that one day we all will be reunited in heaven. God, through his Holy Spirit, has strengthened my faith using his Word in Isaiah 57:1, "The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil," and James 4:8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you."

My wife and I continue our worship, small group participation, and individual Bible studies at home. The peace and comfort we receive from God's Word and promises, our daughter's plaque on our mantle as a daily reminder, and the fellowship we share with our Christian brothers and sisters bolster our faith. I now better appreciate the words: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

As two of "those people," we thank God for all of you, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bryan Guhr is a member at St. Paul's, Muskego, Wisconsin.

As two of "those people,"
we thank God for all
of you, our brothers and
sisters in Christ.

Before God
there is no
such thing as
a judgment-
free zone.

Judgment-free zone

Andrew C. Schroer

On July 22, 2018, a 34-year-old man named Eric Stagno walked into a Planet Fitness gym in New Hampshire. He stopped at the front counter, took off all his clothes, and then proceeded to do yoga in the buff. Those exercising at the time were both shocked and disgusted. The police were called immediately.

Upon his arrest, Stagno claimed he thought he was in a “Judgement Free Zone,” referencing the company’s long-time slogan.

With 1,500 locations and over 10 million members, Planet Fitness is one of the most successful gym franchises in the world. Its claim to be a “Judgement Free Zone” resonates with many people. The pressure of exercising with sculpted body builders and the embarrassment over their own bodies often keep people from going to the gym.

They feel like they are being judged.

Planet Fitness has found a way to create a comfortable and welcoming environment for the casual gym user. But, as Eric Stagno found out, there is no such place as a completely judgment-free zone.

One of the things our world today fails to distinguish is the difference between judging and being judgmental. Being judgmental means being quick to judge or harsh in your judgment. It means setting yourself above other people or thinking you are better than them.

God doesn’t want us to be judgmental. We have no right to set ourselves up as judge and jury for someone else. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks strong words about those who pridefully judge others (Matthew 7:1-5).

God, however, does judge. He is the Supreme Court of all creation. His moral code will be the standard by which we will all be judged one day. Every single person will be judged by God for what they do in this life. Before God there is no such thing as a judgment-free zone.

When we as Christians lovingly and humbly share God’s moral code with the world—when we call sin “sin”—we aren’t being judgmental. We are simply sharing the decrees of the Judge of all creation.

Our world, however, calls that judgmental. It doesn’t want you or me to say that certain actions or attitudes are wrong. That is considered unloving and intolerant. For our world, love is living judgment free.

But then when a guy gets naked in a gym or a pedophile molests a young boy or a terrorist massacres the innocent, suddenly the world sees the importance of judges and juries. Then there is a higher moral code by which people should be judged.

Deep down we all know there is a higher moral code. We know we haven’t lived up to that moral code. We deserve to be declared guilty by God the Judge.

And yet because Jesus lived and died in our place—because he suffered our guilty verdict in our place—God declares all those who believe in him to be innocent of all charges. Through faith in Jesus, we don’t have to be afraid of judgment day.

But that doesn’t change the fact that judgment day is coming. Even here on earth there are no judgment-free zones, as Eric Stagno discovered. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that all judging is judgmental. God wants us boldly and lovingly to proclaim his moral code and his judgments even when people don’t want to hear them. Only then will they be able to see how desperately they need Jesus as their Savior.

There is no such thing as a judgment-free zone.

Contributing editor Andrew Schroer is pastor at Redeemer, Edna, Texas.



A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

Revelation vs. speculation

Jeffrey D. Enderle

Getting and staying healthy is a major concern for millions of people. In recent years you may have heard a confusing array of advice on how to achieve your health goals. The growing number of health experts making unconventional recommendations may surprise you.

The Mayo Clinic, a leading voice in the health arena, advocates the benefits of meditation. Authors suggest practicing meditation may reduce stress. Improved emotional health, they claim, may assist in alleviating some symptoms of physical ailments.

LOOKING INSIDE OUR HEARTS

Christians might be happy to learn that medical experts consider prayer as one possible way to practice meditation. We might even wonder if there is much of a difference between what Jesus invites us to do and what counselors, doctors, and mental health professionals are advocating. Sounds like a win-win to us: Follow God's encouragement to pray, and additional health benefits get thrown in as a bonus.

We can leave it to the medical community to continue researching the potential health benefits of prayer. But Christians want to be aware that there can be vast differences between what most people consider meditation and the way the Bible teaches us to pray. Unfortunately, even some resources

encouraging Christian spirituality are just as confusing. Some suggest finding inner quietude or emptying our minds of all thoughts and worries. Then we should turn our attention to the voices inside us.

But when Christians pray "in Jesus' name," we do it calling to mind the person and work of Jesus. His life and his sacrifice give us the personal relationship of faith to approach our Father. Looking inside our hearts for spiritual peace and direction might actually be counterproductive to healthy spiritual habits. After all, Jesus warns us, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19). Prayers flowing from the natural impulses of our hearts could by default be very self-centered.

LOOKING INSIDE GOD'S WORD

Do you see the disconnect from the way Christians have taught prayer throughout the ages? Prayer is a response to what God tells us. Prayer begins with God's revelation to us through his Word.

That's why it might be a little shocking to hear Martin Luther instructing us to do something we might hear from mental health literature. When he offered advice about personal devotions to his friend Peter, he advised: "If in the midst of such thoughts the Holy Spirit begins to preach in your heart with rich, enlightening thoughts, honor him. . . . Be still and listen to him who can do better

than you can" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 43, pp. 201–202).

But do you notice the difference between Luther and the advocates of contemporary meditation? Luther told his friend he should start his devotions by meditating on familiar portions from God's Word, like the Ten Commandments or the Lord's Prayer. Devotions and meditation begin with God's Word. Luther was telling Peter that devotions don't have to focus on obscure or difficult parts of the Bible. Keep it simple, but start with God's Word.

In fact, this is a major point of emphasis for the Reformer throughout his career: "Therefore, we must constantly maintain this point: God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments" (*Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Art. VIII:10). So Christian meditation or prayer always finds its starting point in what God is saying to us, not from voices inside us.

Meditating on God's Word is definitely good for our souls. Prayer based on Scripture flows from a heart filled with God's blessings. We can't promise it will lower our blood pressure, but we know God's revelation is always good for us.

Contributing editor Jeffrey Enderle is pastor at Christ the Rock, Farmington, New Mexico.

This is the third article in a ten-part series on ways to enrich your personal devotional life.



The shroud Jesus
wore is worthless
now. . . . He doesn't
need it to cover
his dead body.
He's not dead.

The shroud

On more than one occasion we have been delayed by a serious accident on the freeway. At some of those scenes, emergency personnel erect canvas tarps to prevent us from seeing the damaged vehicles and, in some cases, the dead. The tarps also prevent gawkers from causing additional accidents. But, of course, it is customary to cover the dead, even at accident scenes. Those who are covered need no medical help. The living—those still uncovered—are rushed to hospitals.

Battlefields are different. I walked the “Bloody Lane” at the Civil War battleground in Antietam. The dead were long gone, but pictures of the scene had been taken when the bloody bodies were still there, uncovered. The pictures are difficult to forget. I remember some of photographer Mathew Brady’s other pictures: one of an uncovered, dead sharpshooter at Gettysburg and another of the dead at Vicksburg who were covered with shrouds, awaiting burial.

I walked the graveyard at Gettysburg and have seen photos of Civil War graveyards made in haste with stones, crooked and leaning. I also walked the neat rows of white gravestones marking the Americans dead in Luxembourg. The dead are not visible in those places—only stones mark their remains. At the burials, the coffins wore American flags as shrouds on the final steps to their final resting places.

The war dead continue to come home to rest, draped with American flags—their returning shrouds. From before the Civil War to long after the most recent war, the dead do not stop coming.

But death does not take lives only in war. Closer to our personal lives, our families are not immune to death’s infection. We have laid to rest many we have called dear. Their bodies were covered and, out of sight, transported to the funeral home to be prepared

for burial. We saw their lifeless bodies again as we said good-bye and consoled one another with family and friends.

We have all been infected. I have known some who are in the habit of reading obituaries so they don’t miss the passing of a friend or relative.

This is not the way God intended things to be. He created us to live. When death became our heritage because of sin, he stepped in and provided an alternative. He sent Jesus to die for us. Jesus’ body was wrapped in a shroud and laid to rest like most of the dead, but Jesus promised he would not remain in the tomb. On Easter morning he arose. The grief and sorrow that still come with death are not permanent. Life has triumphed. Jesus has triumphed, and he promised, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25).

The shroud Jesus wore is worthless now. If it exists, it’s only a curiosity. He doesn’t need it to cover his dead body. He’s not dead.

When I hear that the body of Jesus was “wrapped in linen,” I remember a beautiful passage from Isaiah that pictures what happened on the raised ground of Golgotha and the adjacent tomb in Joseph’s garden. Isaiah wrote, “On this mountain [the LORD Almighty] will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25:7,8).

Death has been swallowed up in victory as Paul wrote, as Christians throughout the centuries have confessed, and as we sing, “I know that my Redeemer lives; what comfort this sweet sentence gives!” (*Christian Worship* 152:1). We don’t need shrouds. We will live.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 8 TO 11

Timothy J. Westendorf

Most are aware that this world is fraught with peril. People strive to protect themselves and their loved ones from physical harm. But how many live with an awareness of the ultimate threat to humanity?

The Lamb opens the seventh seal to reveal it . . . tick, tick, tick . . . 30 silent minutes pass, as if to say, “This is important! Pay attention!”

THE FIRST FIVE TRUMPETS

The final seal lifts the curtain on a new scene—a vision of seven angels with trumpets. The details are difficult, but the main message becomes clear if we keep some things in mind: Remember the words of Jesus about the coming end of the world (Matthew 24). It is worth noting that the most important parts of his speech, which speak of false teaching (false prophets and messiahs) and its devastating effects (spiritual deception, increase of wickedness, love growing cold), are missing from the first six opened seals.

The vision of the trumpets is ushered in by the opening of the final seal—another view of the future. Reading Matthew 24 and these chapters can show the connection. The seals and trumpets cover the same time frame, both ending with the last judgment, showing that these trumpet activities are happening alongside the physical calamities.

Many faithful Christians before us have seen in this vision a picture of false teach-

ing and ungodly living from the time of Jesus’ ascension until his return. As you read about the first five trumpets (Revelation 8:6–9:12), focus on the truth that change or denial of God’s life-giving, light-giving Word causes the ultimate damage and destruction to people in our world.

THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH TRUMPETS

The sixth trumpet is rather extensive, covering multiple chapters (Revelation 9:13–11:14). We first hear of a vast and vicious army bent on destruction. Then John sees an angel whose description fits Jesus himself. Giving a scroll to eat depicts the receiving of God’s Word (cf. Ezekiel 3). The message of salvation in Christ brings sweet comfort to the believer’s soul. It also becomes the source of sour discomfort when the gospel and its messengers are ridiculed and rejected. Even so, John and all believers are called to speak the Word of Christ to the nations.

Important symbolic numbers are introduced in chapter 11 (1,260 days = 42 months = 3 and a half times/years). Being half of the covenant number 7, these numbers seem to represent the full New Testament age where the truth of God’s Word is continually challenged by false teaching, false believers, and a hostile unbelieving world. Believers who share the truth will be few in number in comparison with the unbelieving world. But their surprising influence and effectiveness is because they speak the powerful Word of God.

Many times throughout history, God’s Word is all but muted, even in the visible church. The two witnesses, who represent this ongoing reality, remind us of God’s faithfulness. Their deaths seem to show that, toward the end, Satan will be allowed to virtually silence God’s truth altogether. But by God’s grace, it will be a short time.

In the very end, God’s Word and its faithful witnesses are vindicated, a comfort to which we cling. The seventh trumpet sounds, and the end comes.

REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 8 TO 11

1. Why is fighting for the truth of God’s Word so difficult, yet so important?
2. Although the plagues are dreadful, what does Revelation 9:20,21 reveal about part of God’s intent?
3. Where will we find strength, encouragement, and comfort in that battle?

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This is the fifth article in a 12-part series on the book of Revelation. Find the article and answers online after April 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

The sights and sounds and the subdued quietness of the 9/11 Memorial on the southside of Manhattan told a story that left a sobering mark on us. From there my wife and I headed a few blocks east and stumbled across a historic church with a cemetery filled with markers dating back to the late 1600s.

Cemeteries tell stories, and this one was no exception.

"Here lies the body of . . ." was inscribed on stones all around us. The oldest stone belonged to a five-year-old boy; not far from there a 37-year-old doctor. Next to it a small stone read, "In memory of eight children of . . ." and "Of such is the Kingdom of God." Heartbreak at every turn. Walk a little further, and there lies the body of Alexander Hamilton.

Cemeteries tell the same story, stone after stone: young and old, rich and poor, famous and infamous and insignificant, this unwelcome intrusion into God's good and perfect world called death plays no favorites. Same story, death wins.

A DIFFERENT STORY

Death wins, the women must have thought that first Easter, with their burial spices in hand. Did they kick the dirt and did tears sting their eyes as they went to anoint the dead body of the one whom they loved, the One who loved them? Could this really be the end of his story?

Cemeteries tell stories, and that one was no exception. Except on that

Easter morning, that cemetery told a different story! A holy angel had moved the stone away so that he could tell the story that Job would have inscribed in stone forever.

"Don't be alarmed," [the angel] said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'" (Mark 16:6,7).

Those who die in Christ, live in Christ.

Did you catch it? The turn in this story? He's alive! Jesus the Nazarene, the one crucified for your sins and the sins of the whole world, the one who did not cry out "it is finished" until it really was. He is an answer for death's unwelcome intrusion into this world—an answer for sin—for the women, for Peter (and have you had any Peter moments lately?), and for you. Most important this Easter—for you.

A VICTORIOUS STORY

Cemeteries tell stories, and this one was no exception.

I think of cemeteries far removed from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan (with the street vendors peddling hot dogs and gyros and three "I Love NY" hats for \$9.99). I think of cemeteries I

have stood in next to knee-high corn or in bitter January winds. I recall cemeteries I've muddied shoes in as pastor, family member, and friend. I think of stones with names of those I love. Yet every one of those stones marks a victory, because in every one the angel's message still rings true: "He has risen! He is not here."

It's a new story. A beautiful story. Death loses, Jesus wins. Those who die in Christ, live in Christ. Here's the story: He lives for the women and Mary and the disciples and Peter and you.

"Here lies the body of . . ." Not forever, Easter says, not forever. "I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

Cemeteries tell a story, but none greater than the empty one on Easter morning. For the Lamb once slain is resurrected. Victorious. Alive.

That's not just the end of the story. It is your story!

John Bortulin is pastor at St. John, Mukwonago, Wisconsin.

A NEW story

**Stones mark the places of those who died.
But one cemetery tells a different story.**

John P. Bortulin

PHOTO: iSTOCK

