

God of endless mercy, God of unrelenting love
Rescue every daughter, bring us back the wayward son
And by Your Spirit, breathe upon them,
Show the world that You alone can save
You alone can save

As we call out to dry bones, come alive, come alive
We call out to dead hearts, come alive, come alive
Up out of the ashes, let us see an army rise
We call out to dry bones, come alive

Songwriters: Lauren Daigle / Michael Farren

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In the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
Mark 1:1 (ESV)

Who Is Jesus?

The word “gospel” comes from the Greek word euangelion, which means “good news”. Originally, this word was more of a political word than a religious word. For example, when there was a new ruler or a victory in a large battle, this announcement, or good news, was shared. Nowadays, the word gospel is synonymous with the accounts of Jesus, which is fitting because he is the greatest news there is. In my Bible each of the first four books of the New Testament has the title “The Gospel According to _____”, but it is Mark that actually starts his book with the word “gospel”.

Mark also does something literally not seen very often: He gives away the ending. He says that this book is the good news about Jesus, who is the Son of God. Everything in Mark is about answering the question: Who is Jesus? But he actually tells us the answer from the opening sentence. The people ask who is this? The disciples ask who is this? Herod wonders who Jesus is. Even Jesus asks his disciples (specifically Peter), “But who do you say that I am?” The Chief Priest asks Jesus who he is, and when Jesus answers truthfully, he is accused of blasphemy.

Mark makes the claim that Jesus is the Son of God. He then fills his book with evidence showing that Jesus is the Son of God. When we get to the end of the book, it is a Roman centurion who proclaims, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” It is on the cross where we truly see the Son of God. Everything in the Gospel of Mark points to the cross and shows Jesus as the Son of God completing his redemptive work.

If your beloved Son, O God,
had not to earth descended
and in our mortal flesh and blood
had not sin's power ended,
then this poor, wretched soul of mine
in hell eternally would pine
because of my transgression.

The Lutheran Hymnal 375:1

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:4 (ESV)

Where to Begin

“Start at the waterfall.” I didn’t come up with the phrase, but I have used it many times while teaching writing. A student has an amazing story idea with hundreds of different details, but they can’t get started because they don’t know where to begin. So I tell them, “Start at the waterfall,” meaning start at the part of the story where the action begins.

So, after telling us Jesus is the Son of God, where does Mark begin? He “starts at the waterfall”—the action—the reason Jesus came. He doesn’t start with Christmas, the angels, Jesus’ childhood, or even genealogies. He starts with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. He connects Jesus to the Old Testament, showing how the prophecies were fulfilled. He quotes Isaiah, which says that a messenger will come to prepare the way for the Lord. Then he goes on in verse four telling how “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

Mark spends a total of five verses talking about John the Baptist, and he spends a whole verse talking about John’s clothing and diet. This establishes John as the complete opposite of the religious leaders of the day, who were from Jerusalem, rich, well-dressed, and civilized. But it also connects John to another prophet of the Old Testament, Elijah, who was recognizable by his “garment of hair, with a belt of leather around his waist” (2 Kings 1:8). And God had told the people in Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”

Mark’s Gospel is fast-moving. He has a lot to get through, so he begins with John’s coming, the fulfillment of prophecies, and Jesus’ baptism, beginning Jesus’ public ministry.

Saint John the Baptist points to Thee
And bids me cast my sin on Thee;
For Thou hast left Thy throne on high
To suffer for the world and die.

The Lutheran Hymnal 328:3

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. Mark 1:10 (ESV)

God Is Pleased

After Mark introduces John the Baptist, he tells of John baptizing Jesus in verses 9-11, continuing to give credence to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. The Triune God is present: Jesus as the Son of God; the Holy Spirit descending on him; and God the Father speaking to Jesus, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” God the Father, himself, is proclaiming Jesus is his Son—that he was pleased with his Son, knowing that Jesus was beginning his work of redemption, which he would finish on the cross.

When Jesus comes up out of the water, Mark tells us that the heavens were torn open. If you open something, like a door or jar, you can close it. If you rip something, it cannot be undone. (A similar picture was used in Isaiah 64:1, where Isaiah is writing a Prayer for Mercy and asks God to “rend the heavens and come down.”) God had come. Jesus’ work would transform the world. He was going to make things right between God and man, giving us salvation and a direct connection to God. This is shown near the end of Mark when Jesus had completed his work by dying on the cross and “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38). This was the huge, extremely heavy and thick curtain separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. It was torn from top to bottom. It did not need to be closed again. It was no longer needed. The Old Testament offerings pointing to Christ had served their purpose. Because of Jesus, we have direct access to our Father in Heaven, who now says to us, “This is my beloved son (daughter), with him (her) I am well pleased.”

Blessed are the sons of God,
They are bo’t with Christ’s own blood;
They are ransomed from the grave,
Life eternal they shall have;
With them numbered may we be
Here and in eternity!

The Lutheran Hymnal 391:1

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts?” Mark 2:8 (ESV)

We Never Saw Anything Like This

“Did you like the movie?” “Yeah, but the book is better.” “Really? I thought the movie was better.” How many times have you had this type of conversation? It can be fun discussing whether a movie is better than the book and vice versa; some people have strong opinions on the matter. But the fact is: books and movies are stories told in different mediums—each with its own strengths and weaknesses. One strength of a book is that you get to see inside a character’s mind. Some writers have described writing as getting to “play a god” because they get to create their characters and go inside their heads. This is something not easily done in movies, and it certainly isn’t something we can do in real life. We can never truly read someone else’s mind. But Jesus is the Son of God. He is our Creator.

In Mark 2, when the scribes questioned Jesus in their hearts after Jesus told a paralytic his sins were forgiven, Jesus read their hearts and knew what they were thinking. How was Jesus able to do this? The scribes hadn’t said anything; there were no subtitles. He could do it because of who he is—the Son of God. There is no limit to his power. He can see inside our hearts and minds. In Mark 2, he showed the people that he is the Son of God. He forgave the paralytic’s sins; he healed the man, allowing the man to get up and carry his bed; he let the scribes know that he knew exactly what they were thinking. We too can be amazed and glorify God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:12b)

Thank you, Lord Jesus, even knowing our thoughts—every last sinful one—you chose to save us. You took all the sinful thoughts and paid for them on the cross. Amen.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Mark 15:37-39 (ESV)

Truly

The cross is where we truly see the Son of God, proclaimed by a centurion after Jesus had breathed his last. This is when the curtain of the temple was torn in two, symbolizing that Jesus' work was complete. The Son of God had become human to pay for the sins of the world, completing his work of reconciliation.

Mark laid out in his Gospel that it was this Jesus Christ who truly was the Son of God, not Caesar or anybody else who might try to make that claim. Mark's very first words stated that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and then he proceeded to fill his Gospel with all the evidence. He then ends his Gospel with the resurrection; Jesus died on the cross, but the grave did not keep him, for he had conquered death. Mark recounts how Jesus appeared to the women and his disciples, giving them the Great Commission—to proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. That same Great Commission is given to us. We, too, are called to go out into all creation, telling others that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, truly.

My guilt, O Father, Thou hast laid
On Christ, Thy Son, my Savior.
Lord Jesus, Thou my debt hast paid
And gained for me God's favor.
O Holy Ghost, Thou Fount of grace,
The good in me to Thee I trace;
In faith do Thou preserve me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 375:5

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Anyone can claim authority, but Jesus exudes authority. Read Mark 9:14-29. How does Jesus show his authority?
2. Read Mark 12:1-12. How does Jesus show his authority?
3. Read Mark 12:13-27. How does Jesus show his authority?

And [Jesus] said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. Luke 2:49-51a (ESV)

The Submission of Jesus to His Parents

In the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, Jesus is called “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Paul remarks that “by Him all things were created . . . all things were created through Him and for Him,” and “He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

Yet in this account from Luke, the Firstborn over all creation was rebuked by His two sinful, mortal parents. The absurdity of the situation is striking. Surely Jesus would respond by asserting His divine authority and humbling His parents. Yet, that’s not what He does. Instead, we read these remarkable words: “He went down with them . . . and was submissive to them.”

In that humble act, Jesus shows the life He came to live. He was not here to conquer in power and reign in strength—at least, not the power and strength we’re accustomed to. Rather, the Image of the invisible God humbled Himself not only to become a human, but a human child. He subjected Himself to the wisdom and care of His parents, and deferred to their judgment. Why?

Jesus came to do what we could not. He was to live a perfect life of submission to the will of His Father. Part of the Father’s will is that a child should obey his parents. And so we see this seemingly absurd situation, where the Son of God submits to the will of His sinful, mortal, human parents.

What a profound love our Savior has shown to us!
Thou art a mighty Monarch, as by Thy Word is told,
Yet carest Thou but little for earthly goods or gold;
On no proud steed Thou ridest, Thou wear’st no jeweled crown
Nor dwell’st in lordly castle, but bearest scoff and frown.

The Lutheran Hymnal 130: 3

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:1-4 (ESV)

The Submission of Jesus to Humanity

The temptation in this section is far from obvious. There is no commandment that, “Thou shalt not transform rocks into bread.” Jesus is, after all, the Son of God. It would be well within His power to do this. Yet He refuses. Why?

Jesus did not come to change reality to suit His will. Nor did He come to live in divinely assured luxury. Rather, Jesus came as a true human to live the life that we could not—one of constant perfect submission to the Father’s will. Jesus was to endure the same hardships, hungers, trials, and temptations that we do.

By refusing to exert divine power to sate His own hunger, Jesus demonstrated His commitment to this plan of salvation. He showed His commitment to live like us—even when pushed to the brink of starvation.

In keeping with His humanity, He did not banish the devil with His own divine might. Rather, He used the same tool that God has provided for you and me: God’s mighty word. Jesus summoned forth Scripture as His defense. He did not reference it like a dusty academic winning an argument on morality. Instead, when Jesus says that man shall live by the words of God, He is giving the rule by which He lives.

Jesus has shown us the path to resisting temptation. God has equipped us with His Word. Know it, live by it, and the devil will flee from you.

My Jesus, as Thou wilt. If needy here and poor,
Give me Thy people’s bread, Thy Word, so rich and sure.
This manna from above, let my soul feed upon;
And if all else should fail, My Lord, Thy will be done.

The Lutheran Hymnal 420:2

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” Matthew 4:5-7

The Submission of Jesus to Rejection

Jesus was about to begin His public ministry. The next three years were going to hurt. Jesus would be rejected by His hometown and the religious leaders of His people. People would accuse Jesus of inciting rebellions, channeling demonic power, and committing blasphemy. Thousands of people would follow Him, but many simply wanted to see His miracles.

Let us not neglect how heavily that weighed on Jesus's heart. We see Him weep over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44 and Matthew 23:37-39. We see Him grieved at the hard hearts of the Pharisees in Mark 3:5. We sometimes portray Jesus and the Pharisees as enemies—but Jesus loved them. He yearned for them to abandon their sinful blindness and to return to Him in love.

Here, Satan offers Jesus a potential way out of this painful rejection. “Prove yourself to the Pharisees! Show them that God has sent you. Show them in a way that cannot be ignored.” But this was not the plan. Jesus was to be despised and rejected by men. He was to be betrayed by His people and sent to the shameful execution of the cross.

And while this spectacle might have politically forced the support of the Pharisees, it wouldn't have softened their hard hearts any more than the other countless miracles Jesus performed.

Jesus refused this false solution and submitted Himself to the coming rejection to save the souls of sinners like us.

Hail, Thou once despised Jesus! Hail Thou Galilean King!
Thou didst suffer to release us; Thou didst free salvation bring.
Hail, Thou universal Savior, who hast borne our sin and shame,
By whose merits we find favor! Life is given thro' Thy name.

The Lutheran Hymnal 367:1

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” Matthew 4:8-10 (ESV)

The Submission of Jesus to the Hard Road

“Thy Kingdom come.” How many times have we prayed those words? Few requests have God’s children made as frequently as that one. God’s people long for the day when flawed earthly governments cease as all creation melts away, and the new creation is revealed. We look forward to the day when God reigns from His throne with Jesus at His right hand.

Satan, in this third temptation, whispers in Jesus’s ear: “Thy kingdom come, but let it come right now. Forget your cross—take up your sword and chariot. Conquer, and reign!”

How many injustices could Jesus have ended if, instead of marching to the cross, He had reclaimed His divine power and overthrown the pagan Roman government? He could have restored the kingdom to Israel, crushed its oppressors, gathered all the nations of the earth under one empire that would have made Alexander the Great look like a petty king. As God-King, Jesus could provide for all mankind. Hunger, poverty, and disease could all cease. It would be a utopia.

This utopia, however, would be flawed. Underneath that physical paradise, spiritual corruption would still be rotting the hearts of men. Sin would still hurt relationships, destroy trust, and ultimately lead each citizen of this nation to eternal damnation.

Jesus knew this. That was why He was here—to deal with that underlying corruption once and for all and deliver us forever from the kingdom of darkness. Jesus rejected this false “shortcut”, submitting Himself to the long, painful road that would lead to Calvary.

O Jesus, King of Glory, both David’s Lord and Son!
Thy realm endures forever, in heaven is fixed Thy throne.
Help that in earth’s dominions, thro’out from pole to pole,
Thy reign may spread salvation to each benighted soul.

The Lutheran Hymnal 130: 1

Then [Jesus] said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Matthew 26:38-39, 42 (ESV)

The Submission of Jesus to the Cross

What's the worst physical pain you have ever experienced? What would you have given to make that pain stop? Most of us, when faced with extreme pain, would pursue every avenue to remove that pain. We would take any drug or undergo any procedure to alleviate our suffering. If you knew that pain was coming, what would you give to avoid having to experience it again?

The night of His betrayal, the night before He bears the weight of God's wrath and faces brutal execution, we see Jesus wrestling with one final submission. Jesus knows full well what is about to happen. He knows His back will be shredded to ribbons by the Roman flagrum. He knows the crown of thorns that He will wear, the beatings He will suffer, the public mockery and rejection, the weight of guilt that He will bear, the isolation from the Father, and the excruciating death He will finally undergo.

Yet despite this foreknowledge, despite the breaking down of His physical body, we see Jesus submitting His will to that of the Father. We see Jesus submitting, one last time, to the plan of salvation. To escape, all Jesus had to do was walk down the other side of the hill. Instead, we see Him turn and walk towards the coming torture. “Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.” (46)

“Yea, Father, yea, most willingly I'll bear what Thou commandest;
My will conforms to Thy decree, I do what Thou demandest.”
O wondrous Love, what hast Thou done!
The Father offers up His Son!
The Son, content, descendeth! O Love, how strong Thou art to save!
Thou beddest Him within the grave
Whose word the mountains rendeth.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Colossians 1:15-17 followed by Philippians 2:1-11. Reflect on the contrast in these two passages.
2. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus draws a distinction between what He wills, and what the Father wills. This leads into all manner of questions on how the Trinity functions. Research the following passages and consider what they reveal about the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Keep in mind that Jesus came to Earth as a humble human.
 1. John 1:1-3
 2. John 1:18
 3. John 8: 28-29
 4. John 10:30
 5. John 17:20-21

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. Ezekiel 1:1

You Shall Know that I Am the LORD

The book of Ezekiel is a very visual book with fantastic visions, parables, and object lessons acted out by Ezekiel himself. The overarching message was, “Then you shall know that I am the LORD;” a phrase repeated over 100 times in different variations.

Ezekiel the priest was “among the captives by the River Chebar in Babylon. He was one of 10,000 nobles, priests, soldiers and craftsmen taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar in the year 597 BC. Daniel and his three friends were taken earlier in 605 BC. Jerusalem and Judah were still intact, but not for long because the people had forgotten that the LORD was their God and were worshiping heathen idols.

Psalm 137 tells us that the captives in Babylon sat down by the rivers and wept when they remembered Zion. God called Ezekiel to prophesy to the captives in Babylon about the utter destruction of Jerusalem. When that judgment was fulfilled, they would know that the LORD is the only true God. “For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass.” (Ezekiel 12:25)

The Lord also gave promises of restoration and salvation, calling the people to return to Him in repentance. Jerusalem and the Temple were restored, providing even greater proof that the Lord is God.

Ezekiel’s message needs to be heard and proclaimed today as much as ever. Our only hope to escape God’s judgement is to receive His mercy and grace through His Son, Jesus Christ. Over the next two weeks we will touch on some of the highlights of God’s message of hope through Ezekiel.

Gracious Father, may we never forget that you are the LORD. May we always turn to you for forgiveness and proclaim your name so that all the world may know that You are the LORD. Amen.

Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Ezekiel 1:4

The Glory of the LORD

Out of this fire storm flew strange creatures with four faces (a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle). They each had four wings, human hands, and feet like a calf. These beings looked like burning coals of fire as flames danced between them with flashes of lightning. The creatures darted about as fast as lightning. Beside each of them was a wheel within a wheel full of eyes all around. They moved together in perfect harmony, guided by the Spirit.

Above these frightening creatures was a magnificent expanse shining like a crystal. A sapphire throne sat upon it. The one sitting upon the throne looked like a man made with glowing metal from the waist up and pure fire from the waist down. This picture of the Glory of the LORD was both beautiful and terrifying. So also was God's message through Ezekiel, proclaiming fearful judgment against God's rebellious people and also beauty in its promise of mercy and hope of reconciliation and restoration.

The vision of chapter one sets the stage for the next eight chapters where God foretells the total destruction of Jerusalem. The fearsome creatures were no doubt God's messengers to carry out His fiery judgment upon the wickedness of impenitent Judah which had become even worse than the heathen nations.

Yet above that fiery message of judgment lies the beautiful throne of God's grace and mercy giving hope. Even this fiery judgment came from God's amazing grace—a last ditch effort to rescue His lost children and restore His people. This is the glory of the LORD, glorious in His holiness and judgement against sin and even more glorious in His grace and salvation.

Gracious LORD, thank you for showing me the glory of your holiness that I may turn from my sin in repentance and receive your full forgiving grace and see the beauty of your glory forever. Amen

“The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the Lord. Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries. Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them.” Ezekiel 6:7-10

Judgement with Mercy

People today say, “God would never punish people in hell. He is much too loving to do such a thing.” Did they never read the Scriptures? Ezekiel prophesied the widespread death and destruction that God would bring upon His rebellious people. The people of his day didn’t believe it either. “God would never allow His house to be destroyed,” they said.

When His word was fulfilled and they saw the dead lying beside their idols who were powerless to save them, then God says, “they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them.”

Therein lies the love in God’s judgment. God had tried everything to draw His people back to Him to no avail. But when His promised judgment came upon the rebels, God spared a remnant. Then they recognized their own wickedness and foolishness. They saw how God was crushed because of their rebellious heart and they “loathed themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations” and returned to the Lord in repentance. The LORD then graciously forgave and blessed them once again.

“Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.” (Hebrews 12:6) May we come in humble repentance and receive the blessing of His love and forgiveness.

O God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Grant me your peace and joy in your forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.” Ezekiel 10:18-19

The Glory of the LORD Departs

In chapter ten we learn that the fierce and fiery creatures of chapter one are cherubim angels. These were not cute little cherubs as people like to picture them. God is often referred to as “the One who dwells between the cherubim.” The Temple in Jerusalem was adorned with cherubim all around. They even spread their wings over the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. Psalm 18 describes how God “rode upon a cherub, and flew.”

Ezekiel sees this as the Cherubim form a sort of chariot with the wheels full of eyes to carry God’s sapphire throne up and away from the Temple in Jerusalem. The glory of the LORD has departed.

The priests had utterly defiled God’s temple by worshipping all the false gods of the heathen right inside the temple sanctuary. (See chapter eight) Since God was no longer honored in the temple, it was no longer His house. He departed, or more accurately, was driven out. What was left was ripe for destruction.

God’s presence dwells where He is honored and where His word is believed. God’s grace is received where sin is acknowledged and confessed, and where God’s forgiveness in Christ is treasured. The glory of the Lord will likewise be driven out of any church where His Word is rejected and the sacrifice of Christ is despised. May we cling even more firmly to His grace in Christ Jesus and sing forth the glory of His Holy name.

O LORD, forgive me for Jesus’ sake and preserve me from ever driving you out of my heart. Dwell with me and let me see your glory in your word. Amen.

Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." Ezekiel 9:3-4

The Glory of God's Protection

As the glory of the LORD was departing, He gave the command to the executioners, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women...and begin at My sanctuary." (Ezekiel 9:5-6) Truly "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31) The judgment began at God's sanctuary with the priests and elders who were leading the people away from God.

But first God sent the man clothed with linen with a writer's inkhorn at his side to go throughout the city and put a mark on the foreheads of everyone who lamented about the wickedness and unbelief of the city. The executioners were commanded not to touch anyone who had the mark. God protects His own!

The fulfillment was truly remarkable. Remember this was a vision. There was no visible mark on anyone. The Babylonian soldiers were the executioners. They ran through the streets of Jerusalem doing what God described, killing all in their path, not having pity on any. Yet, miraculously, those who feared the LORD were spared. God protected them. Truly "The LORD knows them that are His." (2 Timothy 2:19) He is able to protect His own even in the midst of the most fearful judgment.

Gracious Father, we know your judgment upon the earth is imminent. Yet we will not fear, for our lives are in your hands. Your Son has cleansed us of all our sins and put His mark upon us as your own. Thank you. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Ezekiel chapter 7 where God warns the end has come, the time of judgment is upon them. God also warns us today that the time of His final judgment is surely coming. Why is this message necessary today?
2. John 14:27 says, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Do a word search in your Bible on the word "peace." How would you understand this peace which Christ is promising and how is it different from the peace the world gives?

“Therefore say, ‘Thus says the LORD God: “I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.”

‘And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.” Ezekiel 11:17-20

God’s Restoration Plan

Just before God’s glory departed, before the destruction came, God made a promise of restoration. He promised to gather them from all the countries and bring them back to the land of Israel.

As wicked and corrupt as Judah had become, God would not give up. Their hearts had become stone cold against God but God promised to give them a new spirit and a living heart that would love God and show it by keeping His commands and statutes.

God kept His promise! With their new, God given spirit and living heart they did loathe the evil of their former ways and returned to the Lord in repentance. Once again they were truly His people and the LORD was their God. He delivered them, brought them back to the promised land and blessed them as their God. They in turn were truly His people who walked in His statutes and kept His commandments.

We too are recipients of this amazing heart transplant. In spite of our rebellious nature, God has given us a new heart. He has put His own spirit within us. He is now our God. May we show the world with our lives that we are His people and give all glory to Him.

Dear Father, I thank you for giving me a new heart and spirit. I truly sorrow over my sins and rejoice to be able to walk in your statutes and judgments. May I live as your child and trust in you as my God. Amen

'For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel." Ezekiel 34:11-14

The LORD is My Shepherd

Few pictures in Scripture are more endearing than the LORD as our Good Shepherd. Sheep would be utterly lost without a shepherd. Likewise we are spiritually lost without our shepherd to guide and feed us. There were many false shepherds who were feeding themselves, getting fat off the sheep, but not feeding the flock. As a result the people of Israel were scattered and became food for the wild beasts. They turned to false gods and finally were scattered among the nations. (verses 1-10)

In His enduring love, God did search for His sheep, bring them back to their land and feed them on the best pastures. Through prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel, the people did come to know the LORD as the one true God.

He promised, "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd." That, of course, is talking about David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. He leads us and feeds us, protects and keeps us. May we always listen to His voice and follow Him alone.

Dear Savior and Shepherd, thank you for guiding and feeding me with your word. May I always listen only to You and never be led astray. Amen.

The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” Ezekiel 37:1-3

Hope for Dry Bones

That seems like an absurd question! Talk about a hopeless situation! That's how the remnant of Israel in captivity felt. Their homes were destroyed, their loved ones were slaughtered, their land was desolate. All that was left of the once great nation was a small remnant now living in a foreign land, surrounded by heathen. They said, “Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!” (Ezekiel 37:11) Boy, did God have a message for them!

What could be more hopeless than a valley full of dry, sun-bleached bones? Yet, in one of the most dramatic demonstrations of God's power, He showed that with the LORD our situation is never hopeless. (If you don't remember the account, read Ezekiel 37 and try to imagine seeing all those bones rattling around and coming together, then coming to life.)

All of our “hopeless situations” are caused by sin, either our own or someone else's. Jesus alone has overcome all sin and gives life to our dry dead bones. So instead of moping around feeling sorry for ourselves for all our problems; instead of being agitated and fearful or angered by all the news of evil in the world, let us focus our attention on our gracious LORD who promises to make everything work out for our good. Look to our Savior who has cleansed us from all sin and filled us with His grace and love. Our situation is never hopeless when we have the LORD as our God and Savior.

Dear Father, we thank you for always lifting us up from our dark and hopeless moments and giving us true peace and hope in You. Amen.

Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw—like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Ezekiel 43:1-5

God's Glory Returns!

Ezekiel prophesied the glory of the LORD departing and the temple being destroyed. When it happened, the people knew the LORD truly is God who knows all things and controls all things. Now Ezekiel foretold the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. He saw the Glory of the LORD return to the temple in the same way it left—God with His Sapphire throne riding on the flaming chariot of the Cherubim.

What amazing grace, that God should return after such stubborn rebellion! It was unheard of that a nation that had been utterly destroyed and its people scattered, should be reestablished. That was God's promise through Ezekiel. When it happened it was proof that the LORD truly is God and He had received His people back into His grace.

What comfort and peace when we see ourselves as “the people of Israel”. We too have been stubborn and rebellious. The LORD our God draws us back to Him in repentance. Jesus Christ has cleansed us of all our sins. Now God says “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you.” (1 Corinthians 6:19) The Glory of the LORD has returned to us, may we worship and serve Him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

We thank you, LORD. Truly Your mercy endures forever. May You dwell in my heart forever. Amen.

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. Ezekiel 47:1

The River of the Water of Life Flows for Me

If you saw water flowing under the threshold of your house, your heart would sink with the thought of all the damage it had done. But this water flowing from the temple was a most glorious picture of the grace of God in Christ flowing out to the world. It is the water of life, the gospel of Christ's redeeming sacrifice on the cross. "And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live." This water of life flowing from the temple causes trees and plants to grow and flourish just as the gospel gives life and causes hearts to flourish.

The interesting thing about this river flowing from the temple is that it keeps increasing the farther it flows, without any new tributaries flowing into it. It grows of itself.

The gospel began as a trickle, taught by one man, Jesus Christ Himself. It grew as the twelve apostles were sent out proclaiming the message of salvation in Christ wherever they went, giving life, grace and peace. As the Spirit entered hearts through the gospel, "rivers of living water" began to flow from their hearts and they proclaimed the gospel to their friends and neighbours. Today the river of life flows to every nation under heaven. Think about the path this river of life took to reach you. As you flourish under the gospel may you keep the river flowing for others. Proclaim the Good News of Salvation to all and support the spread of the gospel in distant lands.

Dear Father, we thank you for Your amazing grace that has refreshed our hearts with the water of life. May we continue to spread your gospel that it may bring life to those who hear. Amen

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Ezekiel 36:22-28 In what ways might we be guilty of profaning God's name among the nations?
2. How did God show the holiness of His name by restoring Israel? How does He do the same through our lives?
3. Think about how Ezekiel 36:25-28 are a beautiful picture of baptism. Consider what God has done for you in your baptism. How can you show the world that you are one of God's people?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

2 Corinthians 13:14

Four-leaf or Three-leaf?

Wearing green on March 17th, leprechauns, “luck of the Irish,” and four-leaf clovers— all of these form a list of superstitious festivities surrounding Saint Patrick’s Day. Though many of these superstitious traditions have been moved from good-luck charms to nothing more than seasonal graphic t-shirts at Walmart and marshmallows in Lucky Charms cereal, an admonition should still be given concerning superstitions. It makes no sense, and it goes against God’s Word, for us to put our trust in small weeds that you can find on your lawn—four-leaf clovers. Believing that entire ethnic groups, such as the Irish, have good luck in their genetic code, when God has not said this, is wrong. No blessing can be found in these superstitions.

St. Patrick’s use of the clover was not meant to set up superstition for us to make use of. Besides, He didn’t even use a four-leaf clover; He used a three-leaf clover to teach us about the One from Whom all blessings flow. St. Patrick used the three-leaf clover to try to explain the concept of the Trinity to the Celtic people of Ireland. Of course, this attempt fell short because no one can truly understand how three persons in one God can be. Yet, in this attempt to teach the Trinity, Patrick points the Celts and all Christians to the source of every blessing, the person in whom we should put our trust. This Triune God has made you and He protects you. He has redeemed you with His perfect life and innocent death, and He has given you new life through faith in Jesus. He keeps that new life of yours alive through the Gospel. This God is all you’ll ever need to pray to and trust in.

My guilt, O Father, Thou has laid On Christ, Thy Son, my Savior.

Lord Jesus, Thou my debt hast paid
and gained for me God’s favor.

O Holy Ghost, Thou Fount of grace,
The good in me to Thee I trace;
In faith do Thou preserve me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 375:5

So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” Genesis 3:14-15 (ESV)

Chaser of Snakes

According to a seventeenth-century account by the priest John Colgan, Patrick was on a hill, being threatened by snakes. He began beating a drum to draw them all toward the sea. When his drum broke, an angel showed up to fix it. In the end, Saint Patrick made the soil of Ireland deadly to snakes—so they never came back. The truth is that there were never snakes on the island of Ireland.

Many believe that this legend originally had a symbolic meaning. The meaning of this is that when the Holy Spirit used Patrick and others to preach the Gospel to the medieval Celts, the sword of the Spirit drove away the forces of darkness. The serpents in this picture are the devil and his cohorts, and the Gospel drove them out by calling many of the people to faith in Jesus.

As amusing as the legend is, I believe that Patrick would rather give the glory to Jesus—our Prophet, Priest, and King. When Jesus suffered and died on the hill of Calvary, He crushed the head of the venomous serpent, just as His Father promised from the very beginning. This victory at the hill of Calvary would resonate like Gospel drumbeats, reverberating to the hills of Ireland and elsewhere. This Good news of Christ Crucified and Risen is the snake repellent every nation needs.

Tho' devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us,
We tremble not we fear no ill, they shall not over power us.
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

The Lutheran Hymnal 262.3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... Hebrews 12:1

Patrick: Not a Patron Saint

In the Roman Catholic tradition, Patrick, after his death, was granted the status of “Patron Saint of Ireland.” According to Catholic teaching, the term patron saint refers to a saint who is recognized as a particular protector and intercessor for an individual, group, profession, location, or activity. In fact, in St. Paul’s Cathedral of Minnesota, behind the chancel, you will find the “shrine of the nations”: a hall of saint statues, each one designed for one of the major, original ethnic groups of the Twin Cities region of Minnesota. One of those groups was the Irish, and Patrick was seen as their “patron saint.”

However, according to the teachings and practices of Patrick, if he were to see this today, he would most certainly redirect the people’s prayers away from himself, toward the only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Patrick may have been the tool to bring many to faith, but the reason any of them came to faith was the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We today are not to put our trust in humankind, living or dead, for our blessing and salvation. The true protector and intercessor for all individuals, groups, professions, locations, and activities would be the Son of God—Jesus Christ our LORD. He is our source of all blessings and salvation. As Jesus led Patrick, so He will lead us through His glorious life, innocent death, and uplifting resurrection.

O blest communion, fellowship divine,
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Lutheran Hymnal 463:4

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Mark 16:15 (ESV)

Missionary to the Celts

Patrick was the son of an upper-class Roman citizen. He was born and raised in Britania (modern-day Britain), near the end of the Roman Empire. In the later days of the empire, Rome was losing its strength, and the empire's fringes were, in turn, easy targets to raiders and pirates. As a young man, Patrick was captured by Celtic raiders from Ireland and sailed across the sea to the Green Isle. After several years of slavery, Patrick, risking the prospect of being put to death, escaped his master and went back to England.

Shockingly, after this turbulent journey, Patrick voluntarily went back to Ireland to preach the Gospel to the pagans there. Patrick had an evangelical heart for these people, for he took pity on them. At the time, the Irish were under the sway of paganism. These people were led down the wicked rabbit hole of the religion of the druids: a group of mystic, pagan priests in Celtic Ireland. And so, the LORD blessed Patrick's efforts and the Gospel spread on the Green Isle.

There are many today who are blinded by the mist of pagan mysticism. Shamans, Imams, witch doctors, all sorts of false prophets are out there misleading the heritage of the LORD, the people He created. But, as Christ died on the cross, a light shone forth from the cross to proclaim the captives free from sin and error. This light is still reaching other lands: India, Africa, Nepal, and more. Let us pray to the Holy Spirit that He may, through His Word, reveal to more people the true and only Savior, as He did so long ago on the Green Isle.

From Greenland's icy mountains, From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains Roll down their golden sand;
From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver their land from error's chain

The Lutheran Hymnal 495:1

*“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD,
“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white
as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as
wool.” Isaiah 1:18*

Patrick was a Sinner-saint

Patrick's theology was not Lutheran, but it seems that it wasn't Catholic either, at least not in his latter years. As he was preaching in Ireland, the Catholic church in Britain had ill will toward Patrick's work in Ireland. They even tried to frame him in a desperate attempt to stop his work in Ireland. In the Roman church, confession to a priest was a must in their religious life. Patrick, in his youth, confessed a particularly great sin, the nature of which we do not know. The priest to whom Patrick confessed shared this sin with the church to try and stop his work in Ireland.

Though Patrick was betrayed, the LORD knew the truth. He took Patrick's sin away through the work of Christ Jesus, and He redeemed him as His own special member of His kingdom. Patrick continued to be zealous for the kingdom of God and its spread throughout the world.

As Patrick was betrayed by gossip and slander, so we too may have this happen to us. A sin may be behind us, forgotten as the LORD has forgotten it, but your neighbor and their sinful flesh may try to bring it up again to bring you down. If this happens, know that the LORD shares the truth with you. Though that sin be brought up again, it doesn't define you, for you've been forgiven. When Jesus said, “It is finished,” He meant it. Your sin has been removed forever. God has freed you of that guilt. He has freed you to serve Him in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Just as I am, without one plea
but that Thy blood was shed for me

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

The Lutheran Hymnal 388:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. It is said that St. Patrick used the shamrock, or three-leaved clover, to teach the Trinity. Take some time to think about that. Explain how that could be helpful in explaining the Trinity.
2. Pray for mission work. What foreign places come to mind? Have you recall hearing in the news any unrest in other nations? Persecution of Christians? You can look up information on sites like <https://lutheranmissions.org/> and <https://www.persecution.com/> Pray also for our missionaries that the Gospel would prevail and they would be kept safe.
3. Patrick is called a saint. We can understand that correctly by how saint is defined. Read Hebrews chapter 11. Each of the characters listed throughout this chapter can be called saints. They are not so because of what they have done. A saint also doesn't have to be dead. Saints can be found among the living and the dead. So, how does a person qualify as a saint?

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Acts 1:21-22, 26 (ESV)

Matthias: Judas’ Replacement

We are generally familiar with Jesus’ disciples...at least some of them. A half a dozen quickly come to mind: Peter and Andrew, James and John, Thomas and Matthew...and then there is Judas Iscariot. We probably have to think a little harder to come up with the other five.

There was a still larger group of disciples who sometimes traveled with Jesus (Acts 1:15). We are much less familiar with these men, in part because they are rarely mentioned or singled out. In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear about some of these lesser-known students of Jesus.

We begin with Judas’ replacement, Matthias.

Matthias wasn’t a ‘Johnny-come-lately.’ In fact, he was one of the men who accompanied Jesus from the baptism of John until Jesus’ ascension. No doubt they stood among the crowds as Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons. They witnessed Jesus’ miracles and listened to His Word. When it came time to replace Judas Iscariot, the Spirit of God chose Matthias.

We know very little about Matthias, little more than his name. What can we say about him? He was chosen by God to be a witness, to proclaim the Good News of what Jesus had accomplished for humankind through His life, death, and glorious resurrection. In many ways we are like Matthias...unknown by men but chosen by God to speak.

Almighty God, who into the place of the traitor Judas did choose Your faithful servant Matthias, grant that Your Church, being preserved from false apostles, may continually abide in the teaching of Your true Apostles; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

The Prayer for Saint Matthias The Apostle’s Day, The Lutheran Hymnal

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Acts 4:36-37 (ESV)

Barnabas: Son of Encouragement

The Acts of the Apostles tells us about a man named Joseph and his travels with the Apostle Paul. They called him Barnabas, which means ‘son of encouragement.’ It seems clear that he was a man who often encouraged his fellow believers.

Barnabas was also an Israelite, from the family of Levi, a son of Jacob. Levites were responsible for the maintenance of the tabernacle and the temple, and some served with the priests in the temple. As a result of the scattering of tribes, Joseph was born a native of Cyprus, an island off the coast of Syria in the eastern Mediterranean.

It was Barnabas who brought Saul of Tarsus to the fearful Apostles who, knowing about his past, were skeptical of Saul’s conversion. It was Barnabas who explained to them how Jesus had appeared to him on the road outside of Damascus (Acts 9:27). It was also Barnabas who, some years later, traveled to Tarsus to find Paul, bringing him back to Antioch in Syria. For a whole year the two of them met and taught a great many people. It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called ‘Christians.’ (Acts 11:26)

We will always need men like Barnabas, who encourage us with the Word of God and dedicate themselves to teaching people about Jesus. May God raise up and call them to serve.

O Almighty God, who has built Your Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone, grant us to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

The Collect for Apostles' Days. The Lutheran Hymnal

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers.

Acts 15:22 (ESV)

Silas/Silvanus

We first hear about Silas (or Silvanus) for the first time at a pivotal point in the history of the Early Church. There were some who came from Judea and were teaching Gentile Christians in Jerusalem that it was necessary that they be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1). Their arguments also persuaded some believers who had been part of the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5).

The Apostles and elders of the young church gathered to discuss the matter, and the Gospel of Jesus won the day over the legalistic requirements. The Apostle Peter and James, leaders in the church in Jerusalem, urged that circumcision not be required. They decided to send a letter to Gentile believers, especially those in Antioch in Syria. They chose men from the assembly in Jerusalem to accompany Paul and Barnabas to encourage the believers in Antioch...and among them was a man named Silas.

We know very little about Silas other than that he was called one of the 'leading men among the brothers.' In time, Silas continued to be a travel companion and evangelist with the Apostle Paul. He sang hymns with Paul while their feet were fastened in the stocks in the inner prison in Philippi.

We may not know much about Silas, but the Lord Jesus knew him and used him to proclaim the Gospel throughout the ancient world. May God embolden us to do the same wherever we go.

Grant, we pray, Almighty God to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom from above, that Your Word, may not be bound but be proclaimed to the joy and strengthening of Christ's holy people, that in faith we may serve You and in the confession of Your name continue until the end; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Collect for the Church (ed.), The Lutheran Hymnal

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. Acts 12:25 (ESV)

John Mark: Behind the Scenes

Barnabas and Saul had a disagreement. We can read a bunch into that statement. We can imagine a spectrum between a civil conversation and a ‘knockdown, drag-out’ shouting match. The Spirit of God doesn’t give us all the details, but simply reveals that a disagreement about John Mark led to Paul and Silas going one way and Barnabas and his cousin (John Mark) going another.

This doesn’t mean that Paul and Barnabas never spoke again. It doesn’t insinuate that Paul no longer considered John useful for the ministry. In fact, when the Spirit of God later moved Paul to write to the Colossians, John Mark was with him and had been a comfort to him (Colossians 4:10-11).

John Mark was a believer from Jerusalem, a son of a woman named Mary. (Acts 12:12) It’s believed that John Mark had a close relationship with Simon Peter. When Peter was released from prison, he went to Mary’s home, where they were gathered praying.

Many believe that God used John Mark to write the Gospel entitled the Gospel of Mark. This Gospel is sometimes called ‘Peter’s Gospel’ because he plays a prominent role. It’s also a vivid account, as if the one writing was personally present at some of the events described. Finally, in his first letter, the Apostle Peter calls Mark his son, indicating a close personal relationship. (1 Peter 5:13)

Let’s face it, disagreements happen from time to time. We may not always agree about what should be done, but as brothers in fellowship in Christ, we can work together. God has a plan for all of us. Let’s look for His plan and use the gifts He gives to glorify Him.

O Almighty God, who has enriched Your Church with the Gospel written by Your Evangelist Mark, give us grace that we may firmly believe the glad tidings of salvation and daily walk in a way that glorifies the Savior Jesus, through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

The Prayer for St. Mark’s Day. The Lutheran Hymnal

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Acts 16:1-2 (ESV)

Timothy: A Son in the Faith

It was after the ‘disagreement’ mentioned in the previous devotion that Paul and Silas came to the Roman Province of Galatia. In Lystra, Paul met a young Christian by the name of Timothy. Timothy’s father was a Greek man who, it seems, played no role in his religious instruction in the Christian faith; that work was done by his Jewish mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5).

The believers in both Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy, and it seems that Paul and Timothy developed a close relationship as believers, and when Paul continued on his Journey, Timothy went with them. Paul shows his care for Timothy in his letters to him, referring to him as ‘my true child in the faith’ (1 Timothy 1:2) and ‘my beloved child’ (2 Timothy 1:2). While we aren’t told his age, it seems clear that Timothy was a young man (1 Timothy 4:12). The Apostle Paul would leave Timothy behind to do the work of the Lord in different places. While young, he clearly knew that the Lord was his strength, which truly shows spiritual maturity.

We could use a few “Timothys” today and a number of “Pauls” to go with them. Let the story of Timothy also encourage parents among us to take seriously the raising of their child in the Word of the Lord. While you may have certain aspirations for your sons, the Savior may have a different plan for them. He may have them leave home and plant the word in different places. In this way, they will glorify God.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with Your gracious favor and grant us Your constant help, so that in all our works begun, continued and completed in You we may glorify Your holy name and finally, by Your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Prayer for Divine Guidance and Help (ed.), The Lutheran Hymnal

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Acts 6:1-7. How many of the individuals listed here are familiar to you? Did the Lord Jesus know them? Does He know you? YES!
2. Read Romans 16:1-16. How many of these names do you recognize? Did Paul know them? How many people do you have contact with from day to day that need encouragement from God's Word?
3. Read Galatians 2:1-5 Note what we can say about Titus based on these words.
4. Read Colossians 1:7, 4:12 and Philemon 23. What can we say about Epaphras based on these words?
5. Read Romans 12:3-8. What gifts has God given you? How can you use them to His Glory?

And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” And His disciples heard it. Mark 11:13-14

Quiet Monday

Have you ever woken up on a Monday morning, and just thought to yourself, “Boy, what a busy week I have in front of me”? There are so many possible things in the upcoming week to think about. You have got to start somewhere. Breakfast is normally a good place to start.

On Jesus’ way from Bethany to Jerusalem, He was hungry. Jesus is true man. He came upon a fig tree, so He looked for fruit. None was found. After all, Mark says, “it was not the season for figs.” Christ’s response is a little startling: “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” The tree, lush with leaves yet barren of fruit, reflects Israel. They had all the signs of spiritual life, yet their hearts were far from the LORD.

As Jesus made His way towards the cross, He invited us to evaluate our lives. Do we merely look like Christians, or are we living out our faith? Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) The fruit that we bear is not about us, it is about faith in Him. If it were up to us, we wouldn’t bear any fruit. But looking to Jesus as Lord and Savior, we can bear fruits based on His love. When He comes to us, He doesn’t find barren trees. Rather He finds trees with plentiful fruits. His love for us makes us fruitful!

Thou art the Vine,—oh, nourish
The branches graft in Thee
And let them grow and flourish,
A fair and fruitful tree.
Thy Spirit pour within us
And let His gifts of grace
To such good actions win us
As best may show Thy praise.

The Lutheran Hymnal 544:6

And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?” Mark 11:27-28

Busy Tuesday

The day before, Jesus had cleansed the Temple, driving out those who bought and sold there. It was His Father’s house, yet they had turned it into a den of thieves. The very leaders who should have been protecting the holiness of God’s house had allowed and profited from the corruption. So, when Jesus returned the next day, they confronted Him: “By what authority are You doing these things?” In other words, “What gives you the right? Who do you think you are?”

It’s easy to read this and shake our heads at the arrogance of the religious leaders. But if we’re honest, there are moments when we ask Jesus the same question. When His truth confronts our pride, our comfort, or our sin, we are tempted to question His authority also. But why do we do this? He always speaks to us in truth and love. He cleanses for our own good. Yet we have the audacity to question this?

Jesus didn’t act on impulse that day. Everything He did was guided by His Father’s will. His authority was not taken, it was given. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18) Jesus speaks truth even when it is unpopular. He does so because He loves us.

Our “busy Tuesdays” can look very different, but the lesson is the same: Jesus has authority over every part of our lives. We have no right to ever question Him! He desires our greatest good. Even though we were corrupt and rebellious, He still loves us and died for us. May we never question His love and truth. Instead, let us praise Him for His great love with which He loves us!

Speak, O God, and I will hear Thee,
Let Thy will be done indeed;
May I undisturbed draw near Thee
While Thou dost Thy people feed.
Here of life the fountain flows,
Here is balm for all our woes.

The Lutheran Hymnal 1:5

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41

Silent Wednesday

Isn't it true that when we are bored or restless, we are at our weakest? It is strange. You would assume that the busiest, most stressful, most chaotic times, would be our weak point. Rather I have found that during times when not much at all is going on, when it's the easiest to, as Jesus says here, “enter into temptation”. Or, as is often said, “idol hands are the devil's playground.”

Not much is written about the events that occurred on Wednesday of Holy Week. Thus, the title, “Silent Wednesday.” The next night, when Jesus was in the garden, His disciples struggled with the same thing. Not much going on. A lot was about to happen, but at the moment the only thing taking place was Jesus, about a stone's throw away, deep in fervent prayer. When He returned to Peter, James, and John, they were fast asleep. His words to them are still important and prudent for us. “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

We too should watch and pray. When you let your “guard down”, as the phrase implies, you are the most vulnerable. What's the solution? Watch and pray! Keep those spiritual eyes peeled! Perhaps there isn't much going on that we can physically see. All the more reason to pray! Pray for the ability to resist apathy, which can lead to temptation. A lot can happen at any moment. We acknowledge that our flesh is indeed weak. So, put on the new man, that God given spirit, to stay alert, on guard, ready to fly to your Savior at a moment's notice!

But while watching, also pray

To the Lord unceasing.

He will free thee, be thy stay,

Strength and faith increasing.

O Lord, bless, In distress

And let nothing swerve me

From the will to serve Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 446:5

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. John 13:3-5

Maundy Thursday

It was the night before the cross — the night when Jesus would be betrayed, denied, and abandoned. John tells us that Jesus knew all of this. He knew His power, His purpose, and His road to the cross. What did He do in light of all of that? The King of Kings took up a towel...

The One who spoke the world into being knelt before His creation, washing dirt from their feet. What a picture and display of humble love! Jesus did not have to lower Himself like this. But He did this to show us what kind of love He has for us. And to motivate us to have this kind of love for one another.

As He washed their feet, Jesus said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:14-15) Jesus doesn’t just love us in general. He also gives us examples of this love in practice. His love is to be our love. “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master.” (John 13:16)

With just mere hours before going to the cross, Jesus took the time to instruct and serve His disciples. The perfect Lord of life demonstrated His love for us perfectly. May He enable us to ever show that same love to each other, as He shows and instructs us.

Never so alone and lonely, Longing with tormented heart
To be with Your dear ones only For a quiet hour apart:
Sinless Lamb and fallen creature, One last paschal meal to eat,
One last lesson as their teacher, Washing Your disciples' feet.

Lutheran Service Book 445:2

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:30

Good Friday

The cross stood tall on a hill called Golgotha — rough, splintered wood holding the Savior of the world. He was mocked and ridiculed. The disciples who once swore loyalty now hid in fear. The sky itself grew dark. He suffered abandoned and alone. It looked like God had forsaken Him: “We thought it was because of God that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted.” (Isaiah 53:4 EHV)

And in that moment of agony, Jesus spoke one final word—“Finished.” The work the Father had given Him to do—to bear our sin, to take our punishment, to make the way for forgiveness—was all complete. What looked like defeat was actually victory. What seemed like the end was the beginning of redemption. What seemed bad was actually good.

Good Friday reminds us that salvation was not cheap. Every lash, thorn, and nail carried the weight of our sin. Jesus endured it willingly. He took all the bad: our sin, God’s holy wrath, even hell itself. He did this to win our good: our forgiveness, our reconciliation with God, our eternal life in heaven. “But it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4 EHV)

On this solemn day, we remember: this was for me! My price has been paid. The work is done. He takes away the bad to bring about my ultimate good. Praise be to Jesus, our Good Shepherd, the One who makes this day truly good!

The load Thou takest on Thee,
That pressed so sorely on me,
It crushed me to the ground.
The cross for me enduring,
The crown for me securing,
My healing in Thy wounds is found.

The Lutheran Hymnal 171:6

Weekend Rest Journal

1. What a week it has been! Reflect on the week that has been. How have you challenged Jesus' authority this week?
2. Jesus went about winning the salvation of the world, even though the world despised Him. What lessons can we take away from that example?
3. Sometimes, we harmonize Christ's passion. This is good because it gives us an overall impression of everything Jesus went through as we go through the season of Lent. But it is also good to simply sit down and read through an entire passion account in a single Gospel. Read Matthew 26:57-27:66. As you read, mark down: How was Jesus denied and betrayed? What does Matthew list as some of the things which fulfilled prophecies? List the things that were slanderously said about Him? What does Jesus allow to happen to Him in order to pay for my sin?

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 (ESV)

The Joke is on the Devil

There is an old church tradition that on the day after Easter the pastor and church members would gather in the church yard to tell jokes. They felt that they were imitating the ultimate joke that God pulled on Satan when He resurrected Jesus from the dead.

Can you imagine the delight of the devil when Jesus finally breathed His last? God died and Satan surely thought he had won. If that were true, then “we are of all people most to be pitied.” For if Christ were still dead, then our sins would still condemn us, and our future would be hopeless.

But here comes the punchline: “Christ has been raised from the dead!” The last laugh belongs to the Lord of the living. No matter how bad things might seem to our eyes of flesh, our eyes of faith reveal the truth: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and Satan is defeated forever. No matter how unworthy our sins make us feel, Christ’s triumph through the cross and the empty tomb declares that we are forgiven and redeemed for eternal life. No matter how defeated, lost, and helpless we might sometimes feel while fighting the good fight of faith, we know that when Christ rose from the dead, we won, and we too will rise!

The idea that Satan and his second-rate band of traitors could ever defeat our Lord Jesus and those who follow Him... now that really is a joke!

The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
In Satan’s domain did the hosts shout and jeer,
For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.
But short was their triumph, the Savior arose,
And Death, hell, and Satan He vanquished, His foes;
The conquering Lord lifts His banner on high.
He lives, yes, He lives, and will nevermore die.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:57 (ESV)

When You Think Jesus, Think Victory

Let's play a game of word association. What pops into your head when you think of "pizza"? What about "music"? "Easter"? "Sunday"? How about this one, "Jesus"? There are a lot of words a person could associate with the name Jesus: Savior, God, Lord, Redeemer, Good Shepherd... The list goes on and on. But during the Easter season, there's one word we can connect with Jesus more than any other: "victory."

Imagine trying to tell this to His disciples on Good Friday. On the cross the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth hung motionless. The once popular Rabbi was dead. Where was the kingdom of which He often spoke? Where was the victory He promised?

Death never looks like victory. It looks like total defeat. Death leaves behind grieving hearts and sorrowful souls. Such was the situation on Good Friday, but with the dawning sun of Easter Sunday came the good news of victory. The tomb was empty. He had risen just as He said! The resurrection proves that everything Jesus accomplished on earth—His sinless life and sacrificial death—was accepted by the Father and is granted to us by faith.

The resurrection wasn't just Jesus' victory; it was our victory too! When we close our eyes for the last time, it will appear as if death has won, but it will only be an illusion. In reality, for believers like us, death is just the door to life where Jesus and all the saints are waiting for us in the paradise of eternal life. When you think of Jesus, think of victory!

Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won!
Death no longer can appall me;
Jesus lives! Death's reign is done!
From the grave Christ will recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.

Lutheran Service Book 490:1

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. Mark 16:2 (ESV)

Easter Joy in the Little Things: The Rising Sun

The rising of the sun is a titanic event which happens at a speed of just over 1000mph. Yet we're so accustomed to it every morning that we don't usually notice it. Don't feel bad if you take it for granted, the women of that first Easter morning likely didn't think twice about it either.

But consider this: had Jesus not risen from the dead that morning, the sun might as well not have either. For "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:57) Like the deep dark of a moonless night, human existence has been drowning in sin ever since Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit. Our sin is the cause of all hatred, violence, and evil in the world. Our sin breaks promises, ruins relationships, hurts friends and loved ones, and often leaves us feeling alone and desperate for deliverance. For our sin, God demanded payment. For our salvation, God supplied it.

He sent His own Son to deliver us once and for all from our sin and its wages of eternal death. On Good Friday, Jesus Christ the Innocent was slayed and buried in a garden grave. And then, exactly as it was planned, very early on the first day of the week, the Son rose.

What a delightful little thing that if you replace the letter U in our verse with the letter O, it still reads true. Dear friends, did any of us doubt that the sun would rise this morning? Not a chance! Then let us have no doubt that the Son rose that morning. Take it as Gospel truth; because it is.

Find Easter joy in the little things: the rising sun reminds us of the rising Son of God.

Scatter the darkness, break the gloom;
sun, reveal an empty tomb
Shining with joy for all our sorrows,
hope and peace for all tomorrows,
Life uneclipsed by doubt and dread:
Christ has risen from the dead!

And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. Mark 16:3-4 (ESV)

Easter Joy in the Little Things: A Rolling Rock

Did the risen Christ require a doorway to get out of the garden grave? No! In fact, Matthew’s account indicates that Jesus had already bodily exited the tomb when “there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.” (Matthew 28:2)

Since Jesus had already risen and left the tomb empty, God could have decided to let the disciples or the guards or someone else roll away the rock. But no, He sent an angel to do it. We’re not left to wonder why. The angel tells us in Mark 16:6: “He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

The rolling rock—a small detail in the big story of the resurrection—declares an inarguable, undeniable, indisputable truth: the tomb was empty! The impossible had happened. The resurrection which Jesus Himself had so often predicted had taken place. God did not leave this truth to be discovered by men, He declared it by rolling away the heavy stone!

Because our Lord Jesus was not there in the garden grave, we know that He is here—just as He promised, “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20) Because He is not there, we know that He is here. Whenever the storms of life overtake us, He will not forsake us. Because He is not there, we know that He is here with us always to the end of the age.

Find Easter joy in the little things: the rolling rock reveals the empty tomb.

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ hath burst the gates of hell.
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened Paradise.

Lutheran Service Book 469:3

“But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.”

Mark 16:7 ESV

Easter Joy in the Little Things: A Dear Disciple

Did you catch it? If you’re not looking for it, it’s easy to miss. “But go, tell his disciples and Peter...” Almost as an afterthought, the angel throws in that little conjunctival phrase: “and Peter.” But, of course, with the Lord there are no afterthoughts. The Lord does everything with intention.

So why single out Peter among all the disciples? Why not, “and John” or “and Bartholomew” or “and Philip.” The answer is simple and yet profound: God loved Peter, and God wanted him to know it.

Sinful, stubborn, self-willed Peter. Who denied Jesus three times on the night of His betrayal. Who wept tears of bitter regret at his failure to faithfully follow His Savior. A dear disciple, who needed to hear personally, that the resurrection—the biggest, grandest, most significant thing to ever happen in human history—happened for him.

And do you know what else, my friends? It also happened for you. It’s simple, yet profound: God loves you too and He wants you to know it. Sinful, stubborn, self-willed you. How many sins are you carrying today? How many bitter tears have you wept over the troubles of this life? You need to hear this personally: Jesus didn’t just die and rise to save others; He did it to save you.

“For God so loved the world [and Peter and you] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) My friends, today you can drop your sin, guilt, and shame at the entrance of the empty tomb. He is Risen! You don’t have to carry that heavy burden anymore. He is Risen! Your sins are forgiven and you are declared not guilty, just like Peter. He is Risen! You too will one day rise to eternal life! You too are a dear disciple whom God singled out in love.

Jesus lives! And now is death But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense; Jesus is my confidence!

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The first two devotions this week focused on Jesus' resurrection victory. Through faith, Jesus' victory has become your victory. Look up the following Bible verses and write down the enemies which have been defeated by Jesus' victory over death:

Romans 6:9-11 – Jesus gives me victory over _____.

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 – Jesus gives me victory over

1 John 3:8 – Jesus gives me victory over _____.

2. The devotions for Wednesday–Friday focused on some of the little details of the resurrection. It’s a marvelous thing that God reveals such Easter joy in such small Scripture specifics as these. Read through the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18). What other small details do you notice which help to declare the certainty of Christ’s rising?

Now when she [Mary] had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” John 20:14-16

Even Calls Me by My Name!

We learn from a number of Bible passages that the risen Lord was first seen by Mary Magdalene. She had a long and close relationship with Jesus. She had been possessed by seven demons. Jesus cast them out. She was among the women who “provided for Him from their substance.” (Luke 8:1-3) She looked on with grief at the foot of Jesus’ cross, and sat weeping at His tomb early on Easter morning. A Man whom she supposed to be the gardener asked her, “Why are you weeping?” She replied, «Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.»

Then, with a single word, Jesus revealed Himself. That word was her name, “Mary!” Overcome with instant recognition and surprised joy, she reached out to grasp Him, and was given the mission of taking the news of His resurrection to the disciples.

Have you been delivered from the devil’s power by Jesus? Have you followed Him, supported His work, and been a witness of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection? Have you, at times, succumbed to grief and gloom as though Jesus had not risen? Take heart, because our risen Lord Jesus knows you by your name, too! He has promised that He will call you from the grave to glorious life, for He declared, “Because I live, you will live also.” (John 14:19) All these blessings have been given to you by faith through the powerful Word of God, along with the assurance that your faith will someday turn to sight.

I am Jesus’ little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my need, and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same, Even calls me by my name.

The Lutheran Hymnal 648:1

“The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

Luke 24:34

Pulled from the Sea, Again!

We all know the story of Peter, at first walking on the Sea of Galilee to Jesus, but then sinking like a stone when he saw the wind and waves. We know that Jesus rescued him then, but did you know that Jesus did the same thing for Peter a second time? This time, though, Jesus rescued Peter from the sea of despair.

It was the night before Jesus' death when Peter boasted that even if everyone else were to abandon Jesus, he never would. In spite of Jesus' warning, that same night Peter denied his Lord three times. When the rooster crowed, and Jesus solemnly looked at him, Peter went outside and wept bitterly. He was spiritually defeated, and then had to face the fact of Jesus' cruel death on the cross. As the sun was rising on Easter Sunday morning, no doubt Peter was sinking fast into a black night of despair.

Miraculously, Peter once again felt the firm grip of Jesus' power and love when the risen Lord appeared to him personally, soon after He appeared to Mary Magdalene. We have no record of the words which were spoken; we only know that Jesus "...appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:5) We do know that, following Jesus' resurrection, Peter was assured that Jesus had never abandoned him, but had lifted him up to forgiveness, peace, triumph, and joy.

When we look honestly at the many ways we have failed Jesus in our lives, we sometimes feel the weight of our own guilt and hypocrisy dragging us down into the sea of despair. It is then that we feel the firm grip of our risen Lord, as He gives to us the same assurance, "Yes, you failed me, but I did not fail you. Yes, you abandoned me, but I have sought you out. Rise with me to life eternal!"

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile,
And though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee.
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 552:5

“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” Luke 24:32

He Opened the Scriptures to Us!

On Easter Sunday afternoon, two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. In a number of ways, their vision had failed them. Oh, their eyes were working just fine, but in their grief there were things they simply could not see. They were unable to comprehend why their Teacher and Master, Jesus of Nazareth, had been cruelly put to death. They considered the reports about Jesus' resurrection to be mysterious rumors. And when a stranger began walking and talking with them, their eyes were “restrained” so that they did not recognize Jesus.

It was then that the stranger opened their eyes. “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have been present at that Bible class! When they reached their destination, the two disciples urged their fellow traveler to stay with them, and during the meal “their eyes were opened and they knew Him.” What joy, and what eager steps they took, as they hurried back to Jerusalem to share their news with the other disciples!

Please note carefully the exact moment when their eyes were opened. It was not when they recognized Jesus in person. No, it was on the way, when the friendly stranger opened their eyes through the powerful Word of God. “Did not our heart burn within us,” they said, “while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?»

Your eyes have been opened in just the same way: “Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.” (1 Pet. 1:8-9) Since the Holy Spirit has revealed this resurrection truth to you in God’s Word, you can be certain that “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” (Col. 3:4).

Where wilt Thou go since night draws near,
O Jesus Christ, Thou Pilgrim dear?
Lord, make me happy, be my Guest,
And in my heart, oh, deign to rest.

The Lutheran Hymnal 197:1

“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Luke 24:39

We Shall Be Like Him

Thomas Jefferson lives! We can all understand what is meant by such a saying. Our second President is dead, of course, but as the principal author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, his ideals live on among us. Unfortunately, many people have the same misguided understanding when they hear that “Jesus lives!” They suppose that Jesus was a good and wise man who died and stayed in the grave, but that His wise words and fine example somehow live on among us.

Jesus’ appearance to His disciples on Easter evening tells the true story. Yes, He had truly died, but He actually appeared to them alive, in the flesh. “A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have,” He said then ate in their presence to prove it.

This is of vital importance to each of us who place our trust in the risen Savior, for the same thing that happened to Him is what will take place for us. As the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20) Jesus has gone before us, bodily, into heaven and promised to return to raise us up in the same way. We will not be angels or disembodied spirits, but rather real, living people made glorious and immortal. That’s why we have the same certainty that Job expressed: “I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another.” (Job 19:25-27)

Yes, Jesus lives! Not just His words that remain with us, not just the ideals that He inspires, but the living, breathing Son of God and Son of Man. And this risen Savior, who always keeps His promises, will call us forth, with glorified bodies, to take us home.

Glorified, I shall anew
With this flesh then be enshrouded;
In this body I shall view
God, my Lord, with eyes unclouded;
In this flesh I then shall see
Jesus Christ eternally.

The Lutheran Hymnal 206:5

*“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed.
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*
John 20:29

Sight Unseen

On the first Easter evening, Jesus appeared to His apostles, but only 10 were present. Judas Iscariot had hanged himself, and Thomas was absent. When the other disciples told him about Jesus' appearance, Thomas refused to believe it unless he saw Jesus with his own eyes and touched Him with his hands. Eight days later Jesus appeared to Thomas also, and said, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Lots of things take a certain measure of faith. For example, more and more often in our day people are making purchases sight unseen. We read the online reviews, point and click, and the package arrives at our door. If there is a reliable return policy, there isn't a great risk in buying something this way. But what about a major purchase? Is there anyone, for instance, who would buy a home without inspecting it in person first? Who would be that short sighted?

According to Jesus, your greatest commitment, involving the most trust, is one that you need to make sight unseen. That's what faith is all about, the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) In this you are not foolish, but greatly blessed because of the power and grace of the One who offers you forgiveness and life eternal. It is God-given faith that recognizes the fulfillment of all His promises in the past, and is confident that He will make good on every promise for the future. Believers of all ages have found peace in the “certainty of things hoped for,” including Paul who wrote: “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” (2 Timothy 1:12) We ask our Lord to continue to bless us with this confidence!

No longer Thomas then denied;
He saw the feet, the hands, the side;
“Thou art my Lord and God,” he cried: Alleluia!
Blessed are they that have not seen,
and yet whose faith hath constant been,
In life eternal they shall reign: Alleluia!

Weekend Rest Journal

Read Paul's list of "first sightings" in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

1. What are the main features of the Gospel which Paul preached?
2. Why is the large number of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection important?
3. Why is it important that some of these witnesses were still living when Paul wrote this letter?
4. In what way was Paul an apostle "born out of due time"? (See verses 9-10, also Galatians 1:11-24)

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” John 10:14 (NIV)

The Shepherd Who Knows His Sheep

When young children have a hard day at school, they come home looking for comfort from their parents. When they get a skinned knee or sliver, they come running to their parents for healing. Facing a difficult task, they look to their parents for encouragement and advice. Young children feel comfortable going to their parents because they know that no one knows them better than their father and mother and that their parents will provide what they need. If there are multiple children in the family, the parents know each child's individual weaknesses, fears and hopes, and can comfort or encourage each child in the way that is most appropriate for them.

This doesn't compare to the comfort and assurance that comes from being known by Jesus. Even a trusting child doesn't tell their parents everything. We, as adults, hide many of our fears, frustrations, and dreams from even our closest friends. But, we cannot hide these from Jesus—He can see into our hearts and minds and knows us well. He intimately knows our strengths, our weaknesses, our fears, and our dreams. Because of this, even when all we can offer up to God is a groan of frustration, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26 ESV).

This encourages us as we face the difficulties of life. What comfort we have in knowing that the Spirit “makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:27-28 NKJV).

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer
Oh what peace we often forfeit
Oh what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer.

The Lutheran Hymnal 457:1

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing”. . . “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” Luke 15:4-5, 7

The Good Shepherd: The Shepherd Who Seeks the Lost

Many of us grieve over loved ones who have turned from their faith and are leading lives separate from God’s Word. We can be assured that the Lord has not written them off. Our Savior pursues His sheep when they wander, desiring to bring them back to safety. St. Peter reiterates this: “The Lord . . . is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

At one time, these loved ones knew and trusted in God’s promises for them. Through Satan’s deceit they were turned away from God’s Word. It is both the Lord’s and our desire that the Holy Spirit reminds them of God’s promises they knew in their youth.

We are an important part of God’s plan to bring them back into His flock. Although we may fear that our words may alienate them or destroy any relationship we currently have, God gives us this promise: “(My Word) shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Jesus also warns us “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Dear Lord, please have Your Holy Spirit remind our loved ones of Your promises. We ask that (1) You give us opportunities to witness to them, (2) we recognize those opportunities, (3) You give us the courage to speak, and (4) You give us the wisdom and words to bring them closer to You and not push them away. In Jesus’ name, Amen

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John 10:11

The Good Shepherd: The Shepherd Who Lays Down His Life

If there is any doubt that Jesus loves us, this verse puts our minds at ease. Jesus’ love was so deep that He gave His life for us. Even more comforting is knowing that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The guilt and shame of our sin are washed away by His blood. We stand forgiven, not because we are good, but because He is gracious.

Unfortunately, in this materialistic world, we are faced with many temptations to take God’s grace for granted. Satan is working diligently to take away the faith we have in God’s promises and to have us base our future on earthly goals. Jesus warned: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-20). The apostle Paul also reminds us: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

As we saw in yesterday’s devotion, the Lord never gives up in His efforts to reclaim His wandering sheep. How sad it is when these wandering sheep continually reject His saving grace in their misguided race for earthly treasures. May God preserve us and our loved ones from this danger!

Should some lust or sharp temptation
Prove too strong for flesh and blood,
Let me think upon Thy Passion
And the breach is soon made good.
Or should Satan press me hard,
Let me then be on my guard,
Saying, “Christ for me was wounded,”
That the Tempter flee confounded.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your
staff, they comfort me.* Psalm 23:4

The Good Shepherd: The Shepherd Who Guides and Protects

My parents raised sheep on our farm. The pasture was right next to a wooded area, in which a lynx (small mountain lion) spent several months before my dad was able to kill it. The lynx learned quickly not to jump the fence into the pasture because my dad would hear the commotion and chase it off with a blast from a shotgun.

The sheep were foolish, however. Despite being well fed, the grass looked much greener on the other side of the pasture fence, and one would occasionally find its way out of the pasture only to be quickly killed and dragged away by the lynx. When this happened, I thought of St. Peter's warning to Christians: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9). Just like the lynx wandered the fence line waiting for a lamb to escape its security, Satan is waiting outside of the secure "pasture" of God's Word to drag people away who are tempted to turn away from God's Word by the "greener grass" of this world. Satan and the temptations of this world are dangerous—their goal is to destroy our faith and eternal salvation.

However, when we remain in the "pasture" of God's Word—that is, continue reading and hearing it—we are safe, we are secure. With God's Word, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

Tho' devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They cannot overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

The Lutheran Hymnal 262:3

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. Psalm 23:2-3

The Good Shepherd: He Leads us to Rest

In Monday's devotion, we rejoiced that our Good Shepherd knows us. Jesus knows exactly what His sheep need and will provide it. In Psalm 23:2, David paints a beautiful picture of peace and provision. Rather than allow the sheep to wander aimlessly in a wasteland, He leads them to green pastures where their hunger is satisfied and to still waters where they can safely drink.

Do you sometimes feel like you are wandering aimlessly in a wasteland, overwhelmed with the pressures of life? Do worry, fear, and other temptations surround you on every side? Our Good Shepherd invites you to stop striving and to rest in His care. Spend some time in His Holy Word (green pastures and still waters). Let this Word comfort and quiet your heart while the noise, frustrations, and spiritual danger remain outside this green pasture (think of the "roaring lion" in a previous devotion). In this pasture filled with the promises and comfort of God's Word, you will find peace.

Today, trust your Good Shepherd. Let Him lead you to rest. Lay your burdens down and drink deeply from the peace found in His Word.

The Lord my Shepherd is, I shall be well supplied.
Since He is mine and I am His, what can I want beside?

He leads me to the place where heav'ly pasture grows,
Where living waters gently pass, and full salvation flows.

If e'er I go astray, He doth my soul reclaim,
and guides me in His own right way, for His most holy name.

While He affords His aid, I cannot yield to fear; though I should walk through death's dark shade, my Shepherd's with me there.

Amid surrounding foes thou dost my table spread;
my cup with blessing overflows, and joy exalts my head.

The bounties of Thy love shall crown my following days, nor from Thy house will I remove nor cease to speak Thy praise.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. There is a saying: "Fear is 'what if?', Faith is 'even if!'". What does this mean to you in connection with God's Word and promises?
2. Read each verse of the 23rd Psalm (below), and after each verse consider how it relates to your life this past week.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness
for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they
comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You
anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” 2 Timothy 3:16

All and Nothing

Human beings often speak with hyperbole, many times not even recognizing it. When we use hyperbole in disagreements, it tends to escalate the situation. Picture using the following phrases in a disagreement: “You never listen to me,” or “You do this all the time.” In those cases, we don’t mean to be taken literally. There is exaggeration involved. This can happen frequently enough to the point where we rarely take all encompassing statements seriously.

We are missing out on great riches and personal comfort if we don’t take God literally when He uses terms such as all or nothing. He doesn’t carelessly throw around words and phrases. Our Lord does not exaggerate. In fact, we do well to pay special attention to words such as all, nothing, everything, and everyone.

Take to heart these inclusive words that include you: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24). “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,” (Hebrews 10:10). What a great blessing that we can take our Lord at His Word!

Holy Spirit, grant me a strong faith to believe every single word you have given us in the Bible. Erase all doubt within me that I am included in God’s plan of salvation. Amen.

“For with God nothing will be impossible.” Luke 1:37

There Are No Limits for God

The question of how the Messiah could be born of a virgin is not limited to Mary. Even the angel Gabriel's answer leaves us perplexed to a degree. He said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.” (Luke 1:35) Rather than going down a theological wormhole by dissecting Gabriel's statement, we can be content in simply believing that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. It is beyond our imagination and reason.

The remedy for sin and death is also beyond our imagination. No human being could come up with God's plan to pay for sins through Jesus as true God and true Man. How can God be born? How could God die? Only the Lord Himself could have figured this out.

While we cannot fully understand the dual nature of Christ, we can and should focus on the why. Love moved our Triune God to initiate and complete the plan of salvation. Such love is beyond our imagination, especially considering the recipients are rebellious sinners with souls only the Lord could love.

If we could understand everything about our God, He wouldn't be much of a God at all. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit gives faith to accept the impossible as fact.

O Holy Spirit, give us faith to unquestioningly believe all things are possible with God. Amen.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6

Be Anxious for Nothing

There is virtually no limit to the causes of anxiety. Everyone is plagued in a different way. Anxiety can be caused by large-scale events such as the threat of war or an approaching hurricane. It is also caused on a micro-scale with events such as the first day on the job or in a new school. The devil wants us to be anxious. He uses even the smallest crack to infiltrate our spiritual defense system. He will do anything to take our focus off of our Almighty God and onto our frail selves.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us not to worry. He makes the argument from the lesser to the greater, citing His benevolence in nature compared to His love for human beings. “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26-27)

When God says be anxious for nothing, He means it. As we focus on God’s love, we are also encouraged to take everything to God in prayer. There is no problem so large He cannot solve. There is no problem too small to make Him disinterested. We have a wonderful invitation to approach God’s throne of grace. The love of God in the sacrifice of His Son is not limited to the forgiveness of sins. He also desires for us to have a worry-free life with no anxiety and a solid solution to have confidence in the future.

Lord, teach us to call upon You in the day of trouble, confident in Your deliverance. Amen.

“For all things work together for good to those who loved God.” Romans 8:28

All Things Work Together for Good

We view tragedy every day, and we experience it more than we'd like to. Like Job, who questioned God's wisdom, Christians are also prone to doubt the goodness of God in the face of evil and grief.

In hindsight, we can see how God worked for good situations we did not desire. Other times we scratch our heads, unable to see how an event or circumstance could be for our benefit. We may never know this side of eternity.

In faith we have confidence when God uses the word “all.” This is not an exaggeration. The verses that follow Romans 8:28 lay out the doctrine of election. God works in love from eternity to eternity as He elects, calls, justifies and glorifies His children. We can trust in our loving God who works all things for the benefit of believers as a group and as individuals. Our Lord sees the big picture and knows what it will take to keep us on the narrow path whether it is discipline or bounty.

Trust your Father until faith becomes sight.

Lord, in the middle of hard times, give us confidence in Your wisdom, which is intertwined with love. Amen.

“In everything give thanks.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18

In Everything Give Thanks

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch clockmaker who hid Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Eventually she and her sister were arrested and taken to a concentration camp in Germany. She contemplated how she could give thanks for everything considering the deplorable, life-threatening conditions of the camp and the abusive treatment by the guards.

An invasion of fleas and lice in their barracks made a horrible situation even worse. In faith, Corrie Ten Boom told her sister, “Let us give thanks for the lice.” They did. It turned out that the Nazi guards feared catching lice themselves. Because of this, they did not enter the barracks, and the women could live, worship, and pray without interference.

Christians can find themselves in circumstances they wouldn’t wish on even an enemy. Parents bury their children. Disease and pain can afflict to a breaking point. Can we truly give thanks in everything? The Lord assures us we can. Not that we give thanks for the tragedy, but that we are grateful for God’s faithful love and promises through it all. When we pray for relief from suffering, we also can include a prayer of thanksgiving. Jesus did not go to the lengths of redeeming us only to abandon us in our time of need.

O Holy Spirit, increase my faith that I may thank you in every circumstance whether good or bad. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Take a few moments to read Job 38-42. Ponder the examples the Lord gives concerning His control over His creation. What lesson did Job learn? How could these chapters be a source of comfort in your own time of trouble?
2. Use a Bible search engine or concordance for additional verses using the words “nothing” and “all”. What can be gained from believing God’s all-encompassing language?
3. Read the account of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. Consider that God’s goal for Joseph and the Children of Israel was initiated with Joseph being sold into slavery. How might we live differently when we confidently believe that God has our spiritual good in mind?

And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Joshua 2:11

Rahab: A Woman of Blind Faith

Imagine hearing the unsettling news that an army is approaching your home. Now imagine that the approaching army had been a nation of slaves, delivered from their oppressors through a miraculous opening of the sea before travelling through the wilderness. Since then, you've heard that this approaching army has thoroughly routed all opposition as it carved a path toward your home.

That is where we meet Rahab in chapter 2 of Joshua. However, where her fellow countrymen saw an approaching enemy, she instead saw salvation. In her words above, she confessed her faith to the Israelite spies that she hid in her house. What an amazing example of the kind of faith that Jesus commends in John 20:29 "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Rahab would go on to witness the miraculous defeat of the Canaanites at Jericho, but her faith was founded on hearing about the great works of God. We may, at times, dearly wish to witness firsthand evidence of God's power, but "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

Rahab's faith, evident in both her confession and her actions of protecting the Israelite spies , saved her from both the destruction of Jericho and from eternal torment in hell. She was adopted into the family of God, through faith, and was blessed to be an ancestor of Christ (she was David's great-great-grandmother). May God grant us a trusting faith like Rahab's.

We walk by faith and not by sight,
No gracious words we hear
From Him who spoke as none e'er spoke,
But we believe Him near.
We may not touch His hands and side,
Nor follow where He trod;
But in His promise we rejoice
And cry "My Lord and God!"

Lutheran Service Book 720:1-2

But Ruth said: “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.” Ruth 1:16

Ruth: A Woman of Faithfulness

Ruth's early life was marked by family tragedy. Her husband's family had moved to Midian to escape famine in Israel. Over the course of the ten years that they lived there, Ruth's father-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband all died. The tragedy weighed hard on her mother-in-law Naomi who told the people of Israel to call her Mara ("bitter") when she returned home to Israel.

Lord willing, our own family tragedies are not as weighty and bitter as those of Ruth and Naomi, but tragedy is a reality that we live with in our sinful world. By faith, Ruth understood that earthly sadness is not evidence that God is not real or powerful. On the contrary, she understood that the true God of Israel still had a plan for her when Naomi urged her to return to her family. Ruth clung to Naomi and Naomi's God.

God did indeed have a plan that beautifully unfolds in Ruth chapters 2-4. Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David and one of the Gentile women mentioned by name in Jesus's genealogy in Matthew 1.

We pray in the Lord's Prayer "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), but we often question and doubt God's plan when we run into difficulties. When those times come, we should remember that God's will is always good and gracious toward His people. The heroes of faith throughout Scripture were faced with great difficulties and grief, but we can see in them how God is always active and powerful, guiding His people toward eternal salvation.

What God ordains is always good:
Though I the cup am drinking
Which savors now of bitterness, I take it without shrinking.
For after grief God gives relief,
My heart with comfort filling and all my sorrow stilling.

Lutheran Service Book 760:5

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5b ESV

Hannah and Mary: Women of Humility

Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were both blessed with miracle children. Hannah was bothered by her inability to conceive, not only because she longed to become a mother but also because her husband Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, “provoked her severely” (1 Samuel 1:6). She brought her problem to the Lord in prayer and went home confident in His plan for her. The Lord answered her prayer with the gift of her son, Samuel. She was also blessed with more children (1 Samuel 2:21). Mary, on the other hand, was shocked by the announcement that she was the “highly favored one” who would give birth to the Savior. “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:34)

Though they were separated by over a thousand years, the reactions of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and Mary (Luke 1:46-55) to becoming mothers are remarkably similar. (Mary was likely familiar with the account of Hannah and Samuel and recognized the similarity of the situation.) Much can be learned from the humility shown by both women. Hannah began, “My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies because I rejoice in Your salvation” (1 Samuel 2:1). Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord. . . for He has regarded the lowly state of His maid servant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:46, 48). Both beautifully express godly humility: a desire to place oneself lower than others and a recognition that our loving and omnipotent God is our ultimate authority.

Humility, while not always prized in modern society, is a good thing for all Christians to exhibit. Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” May we, too, boast only in the Lord, who raises us poor sinners up from the dust (1 Samuel 2:8) to be His chosen generation.

Lord, grant me godly humility. Amen.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your
staff, they comfort me.* Psalm 23:4

Deborah and Jael: Women of Action

In Deborah's time, Israel had done evil in the Lord's sight and was conquered by King Jabin of Canaan. Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge. Throughout that time, God used judges to deliver His people from their oppressors, often in unexpected or miraculous ways.

By God's direction, Deborah called on Barak to lead the troops against King Jabin's commander, Sisera. "And Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!' So she said, 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman'" (Judges 4:8-9). A woman named Jael drove a tent peg through the sleeping Commander Sisera's head (Judges 4:21), and God delivered His people from the Canaanites through these women whom He called to action.

God has called all Christians to action: Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach (Matthew 28:19-20). Like Barak, we are often sluggish in our response to God's call to action. But we need not request accompaniment on our mission. Rather, we can go forth with confidence in God's promises: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20) and "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses" (Romans 8:26). May God forgive us for our failings in our callings, give us confidence in His gracious presence, and fill us with courage to share His saving word with all we meet.

Let none hear you idly saying, "There is nothing I can do,"
While the multitudes are dying And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly, Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when He calleth, "Here am I, send me, send me!"

Lutheran Service Book 826.4

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another. Romans 12:10

Dorcas (Tabitha): A Woman of Kindness

It's common at funerals to see examples of the deceased's work, lovingly gathered by the loved ones. Such was the case of Tabitha, also called Dorcas, when some of the faithful from the church in Joppa asked the Apostle Peter to come with them. "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" (Acts 9:39). A few verses earlier, Dorcas is described as "full of good works and charitable deeds" (Acts 9:36). What a loving celebration of a dear sister in Christ!

Christians know that physical death is not the end, only an end to an earthly pilgrimage and the beginning of our eternal life in heaven. Yet, it is sad to say farewell (for a time) to a dying loved one. Even "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) when He reached Lazarus's tomb. Like Lazarus, Dorcas was raised back to life as a witness to the power of Christ that was being preached by the Apostles.

How blessed we are by the fellowship and kindness of our fellow believers, who like Dorcas, are full of good works and charity! God's love flows to us in myriad ways, including through the kindness of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When they are brought by God's grace to their heavenly home, we can both celebrate their crown of life and mourn the loss of their fellowship on earth.

Lord, hear our thanks for Dorcas,
Who served the sick and poor.
Her hands were cups of kindness,
Her heart an open door.
Send us, O Christ, Your Body,
Where people cry in pain,
And touch them with compassion
To make them whole again.

Lutheran Service Book 855:12

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Study some of Jesus's interactions with women: Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42), Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18), and the Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17).
2. Identify and record the Bible references to the accounts of other women of faith.
3. Read and compare Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and the Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55.
4. Pray for the women in your life. Consider how you can give them encouragement in their faith and how they have encouraged you in your faith.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is, and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18-19 (EHV)

Powered by the Ascension

“Powered by ____.” The website is “Powered by WordPress.” The computer is “Powered by Intel.” The Christian is powered by _____?

You could say, “I am powered by Christ,” or “grace,” or “the Gospel.” Maybe you should say, “I am powered by Jesus’ Ascension.” Why?

The Christian hope is to spend eternity in heaven. This hope is not wishful thinking that may or may not come true. This hope is certain. It is based on real, historical facts. Jesus entered our world at Christmas, paid for our sins on Calvary, and rose again on Easter morning. Jesus completed the circle when He returned to His throne at the Ascension. Together, these facts mean that your sins and mine have been paid for. The payment has been accepted. Ascension hope is certain hope.

Then, there is the inheritance. You can’t put a numeric value on this inheritance because nothing in our world compares. Numbers have not been invented to accurately describe the riches of our inheritance.

Finally, there is power. Sheer, immeasurable power belongs to our ascended Savior and is used for our benefit. There will never be a problem in your life that is greater than the power He has. Has the hospice team been called in? Medical treatments fail, but Jesus doesn’t. And won’t. His solution to our final problem on earth is to deliver us safely to heaven. His surpassingly great power is used “for us who believe.”

Certain hope, immeasurable riches, almighty protection, and blessing—they are life-changers, fruits of the Ascension Gospel that power our lives.

Lord, help me to better understand what Your Ascension means for my life. Enable me to trust You, no matter what problems may arise. Amen.

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Luke 24:50

His Last Impression is a Lasting Impression

In less time than it takes to read this sentence, a person you meet for the first time will have formed certain conclusions about you. If it's a potential employer, the decision to hire you is often formed in the first thirty seconds. Such is the power of first impressions.

What about last impressions? They often become lasting impressions.

Jesus made both a first and a last impression. He arrived in humility, was born to peasants, and was cradled in a feeding trough. His humble beginnings led to a humble life and ended with a humble and seemingly helpless death. But death was not the final word. The Ascension is. This same Jesus will return just as the first disciples had seen Him go.

The last impression? "He lifted His hands and blessed them." These are the hands that reached a disciple, whose faltering faith would sink him in the stormy sea. These hands healed a servant's ear, raised the widow's son, and multiplied bread and fish into a meal for thousands. There was no illness or handicap, no dilemma or problem beyond the power of these hands. These hands created all things.

Embedded in these hands is the reason we can place our cares into them: they bear the marks of our salvation. Scarred by nails, they ever remind us of His love that came to our earth, bore our sins, and paid our price. The same hands that healed the sick and raised the dead also carried our burden to Calvary so that we could be blessed with forgiveness and life. The lasting impression of these hands, raised in blessing, sustains us in life and comforts us in death.

Lord Jesus, Your nail-scarred hands speak to Your humility and love. You left behind Your glory so that I might be saved. Help me to share this lasting impression with all the people in my life. Amen.

God has gone up with a shout, The Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. Psalm 47:5-6, 8

Makes Me Want to Shout

Many believe that Psalm 47 describes what happened when the Ark of the Covenant was relocated to Jerusalem. As it ascended Mt. Zion, David danced with all his might. The people sang and shouted. Musicians blew on trumpets and cornets. The Ark was a powerful symbol of God's presence. Where the Ark went, good things happened.

A thousand years after King David, the One whom the Ark represented was ascending—not to the temple mount in Jerusalem—but to His throne in heaven. There probably were no shouts of joy on the Mt. of Olives as a cloud received Jesus from their sight, but He certainly arrived in heaven to outbursts of delight and the reverberations of trumpet blasts. Every believer who had died trusting in Him was there when He returned from His mission of saving sinners.

Those in heaven hadn't seen the cross or empty tomb, but they trusted that what God had promised, He would fulfill. How the crowd must have erupted when the Conqueror returned from His mission just as He said!

It's not often that we shout for joy in our daily lives, but we could and should. We know that God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. He rules over all. He controls the events of world history, the rise and fall of nations. He is also intimately concerned about the smallest details of your life. If we could see that with our eyes, we'd do a lot less worrying and a lot more shouting for joy.

Dearest Jesus, we rejoice that You rule over all things for the sake of Your people and make all things work together for our eternal good. All praise and thanks to You. Amen.

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20b

Why Did He Leave?

For 40 days after Easter, Jesus popped in and out of the lives of His followers. When He ascended, they were to know that such appearances should no longer be expected. They saw Him go. This is how He would return at the end of time.

Jesus left because His mission was accomplished. If God wanted to save mankind, He had to come to our earth and take our place. Once Adam and Eve sinned, the entire human race was so corrupted that “There is none righteous, not even one.” No sinner could ever live the kind of life that could change God’s mind. But what is impossible for us is possible for Jesus. Jesus does the impossible.

While He was here, Jesus was visibly present only at one place at one time. If Jesus were still visibly present on earth, what would it be like to be a Christian? Everyone with an illness would be competing with each other, trying to get noticed and healed. We’d have to be like the men who used a hole in the roof to lower the paralytic in front of Him. What are the odds we’d even get to see Jesus? With 217 million Christians in the United States alone, we might die just waiting in line.

How much better it is that He visibly departed, with the promise, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Not a moment passes where He is not with you to hear your prayers, quiet your fears, and touch you with His love. He does that through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Jesus, our Ascended Lord, thank You for promising that, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Thank you for coming to us personally in the Lord’s Supper. Thank you for your constant love and companionship through this life. Amen.

He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Ephesians 1:20-21

Where Did He Go?

Where is heaven? The Bible only gives us a direction for heaven, and that's up. There are three heavens in Scripture: one where the birds fly, another where the stars are, and the third is the paradise of God. The apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven. (2 Corinthians 12:2) The apostle John saw a door standing open in heaven and was told, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." (Revelation 4:1)

Christians go to heaven immediately when they die. The body returns to the dust and the soul returns to God. One day, the Lord will create a new heaven and a new earth where we will live in our resurrected, physical bodies. Until then, heaven is simply described as up—the place where God's people dwell with Him in glory.

The Bible describes heaven as a place where sin and its consequences no longer exist. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4) We will be in the presence of the One who lived, died, and rose again for our salvation. Imagine the thunderous joy that will sound forth as we join all Christians in the song of heaven: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelations 5:12)

Lord, thank You for the promise of eternal life that rests on all that You did to save me. I long for the Day when You return in glory. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The words of Psalm 68:1 were spoken when they prepared to move the Ark of the Covenant. How are these words especially comforting when they are applied to our Ascended Lord?
2. List ways that the Ascension is a life-changer for Christians in this world.
3. What does the fact that Jesus rules all things mean for you personally?
4. Think of ways you can make the Ascension part of your daily routine.

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor. A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left. Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool. Ecclesiastes 10:1-3

Godly Wisdom

Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge in a proper and beneficial way. It is not knowledge, but rather the use of knowledge that marks the difference between the wise man and the fool.

Throughout chapter 10, we see the damage a fool can do. It doesn't matter if he is a king or a commoner ... if he is at home or cruising down the road. Whatever he does is going to end up in a mess. Foolishness accompanies him every step of the way. "Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool."

Even the wisest of men can make a mess of things in a moment of foolishness. In that moment, he can undo a lifetime of wisdom, and people remember him only for his foolishness. "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor."

Foolishness plagues us. Therefore, we appeal to God for wisdom, and He will give it (see James 1:5,6). And how does this begin? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov. 9:10) It begins at the baptismal font, where the fear of God (reverent faith) is instilled. By the Spirit, we embraced the redemption that Christ gained for us. Then, like a tree planted in the soil of the Gospel, wisdom grows as we hear and learn God's Word. Always, at the heart of it, is Jesus, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Get to know Him better, and your wisdom will increase.

Wisdom's highest, noblest treasure,
Jesus, lies concealed in Thee;
Grant that this may still the measure
Of my will and actions be.

The Lutheran Hymnal 366:5

If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. Ecclesiastes 10:4 (ESV)

Godly Meekness

On the surface, this passage is speaking to someone assigned to a certain position in the government. At times, the ruler may lash out at such a servant, whether deserved or not. The servant is told to remain calmly in his place, and submit to the ruler. In this way, great offenses can be avoided.

It is far easier for the offended servant to resign and walk away, but that would further infuriate the ruler. However, taking his abuse with quiet acceptance will calm the ruler. The NLT tries to adjust this to modern circumstances: “If your boss is angry at you, don’t quit! A quiet spirit can overcome even great mistakes.” Or, as Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

We can see a similar admonition when we apply this to the spiritual realm. Instead of a ruler, consider someone in authority in our church or synod. When we position ourselves firmly upon some truth of Scripture, a wayward leader’s anger might rise up against us. At such a time, do not forsake your position, but remain calm and stand fast. If we abandon our position, it results in greater offenses: our antagonist is encouraged in his errors ... personally, we will proceed from one error to another ... also, we will cast a stumbling block before the weak.

Jesus is our example, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23). Behold, the outcome of His meekness. Peter goes on: “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed” (v. 24).

God promises:

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never, forsake!

The Lutheran Hymnal 427:7

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, And the end of his talk is raving madness. A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; Who can tell him what will be after him? Ecclesiastes 10:12-14

Godly Graciousness

Literally, this reads: “The words of the mouth of the wise grace.” When the Bible says, “grace” (or “gracious”), it is directly tied to Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

The lips of the fool, however, swallow him up. His words are self-destructive and of no help to others. Such is the truth about anyone who proclaims salvation by works. In the end, he consumes himself.

Likewise, every false teacher is a fool. He fools himself into believing the leaven of his errors. Left unchecked, his lips become the mouth of hell, which will swallow him and his followers.

The wise man speaks words of grace. True, he does speak kindly to his neighbors. More importantly, however, he proclaims the grace of God. His words give the ultimate help to others in strengthening the believer and converting the unbeliever.

Thank You, Lord, for surrounding us with wise men who bring us Your life-giving words of grace. Amen

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, And your princes feast in the morning! Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, And your princes feast at the proper time—For strength and not for drunkenness! Because of laziness the [a]building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything. Ecclesiastes 10:16-19

Godly Ambition

There are different kinds of building projects: building a family, a house, a kingdom. If a fool is in charge of the project, it will be a disaster. The fool spends his time and energy on selfish things: feasting (gluttony and drunkenness), putting off his duties until tomorrow, and other childish behaviors.

“Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, And your princes feast in the morning! Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, And your princes feast at the proper time -- For strength and not for drunkenness!” The son of nobles is one who is serious about the project, in this instance, building a kingdom. He puts his hand to this task right away. For him, feasting takes place at the end of the day and his purpose is not drunkenness and debauchery, but to gain strength for the next day of labor.

So it is for any wise person who is engaged in a project, especially in the realm of the Church. When the Lord places a Church-related project into our hands, the nobility of wisdom leads us to rise up early and dedicate our time, skills, and knowledge to the Lord. Our pastors and teachers do this. Every Christian will do this because we are sons of God, who possess the highest nobility.

Therefore, instead of being lazy, be industrious. Instead of feasting to satisfy fleshly pleasures, let your feast be to strengthen you for a new day. Then dedicate the new day to the glory of God, who paid the full price for your eternal redemption.

Direct, control, suggest, this day
All I design or do or say
That all my powers, with all their might,
In Thy sole glory may unite.

The Lutheran Hymnal 536:5

Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

Ecclesiastes 10:20

Godly Truthfulness

“A little bird told me” is an age-old saying that finds its roots in this Bible passage. The meaning of the modern idiom is this: “I learned something, but I won’t reveal the source.” This is a meaning that has developed over time.

In our text, it is a bit different. Here, the “little bird” is portrayed as hearing you in the most private of places. There, you may feel free to “curse the king.” However, the “little bird” may report this to the king. Of course, this means trouble for you.

Our Lord tells us to honor those in authority, but we sometimes dishonor them. He tells us to pray for them, but we sometimes curse them, i.e., we wish bad things would happen to them. The Spirit is warning us that it is hard to keep this from leaking out. The “little bird” may be some stranger who overheard you, or a companion who repeats your words to someone else.

The website, “Twitter,” refers to a message as a “tweet.” Sometimes, people think that they can hide or delete their tweets, but all too often, the “little bird” tweets their message all over the Internet. Thus, your foolishness comes back to “peck” at you.

We should speak the truth, not only in the quiet of the bedroom, but also in public. While millions blaspheme, we will praise King Jesus, even in our private thoughts, for He has redeemed us from all evil. He has prepared a place for us in His eternal throne room.

O Father in heaven, help me to speak of excellent things; then from the opening of my lips will come right things, for my mouth will speak truth and wickedness will be an abomination to my lips. (Cf. Prov. 8:6,7) “O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.” (Ps. 51:15) Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. What are some ways I can show these godly qualities in my church?
2. What are some ways I can show these godly qualities in my home?
3. What are some ways I can show these godly qualities at my job?

Breathe, oh, breath of God

Now breathe, oh, breath of God

Breathe, oh, breath of God, now breathe

As we call out to dry bones, come alive, come alive

We call out to dead hearts, come alive, come alive

Up out of the ashes, let us see an army rise

We call out to dry bones, come alive

Songwriters: Lauren Daigle / Michael Farren

Come Alive (Dry Bones) lyrics © Capitol CMG Publishing,
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