

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!  
Be all Thy graces now out poured  
On each believer's mind and heart;  
Thy fervent love to them impart.  
Lord, by the brightness of Thy light,  
Thou in the faith dost men unite  
Of every land and every tongue;  
This to Thy praise, O Lord, our God, be sung.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Martin Luther, 1483-1546  
The Lutheran Hymnal 224



*“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you.”*

Deuteronomy 16:9-10

## Harvest Time

Before there was Pentecost there was the Feast of Weeks. Before the Feast of Weeks was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Both were celebrations of a harvest that was about to begin. Both required firstfruits (barley and wheat respectively) from the harvest that would follow.

The Jewish Passover fell on Abib 14. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began the very next day. On Abib 16, the first-to-ripen sheaves of barley were waved before the altar to signify that the upcoming crop was dedicated to the Lord. (It was on Abib 16 that the Manna stopped and the Israelites ate the produce of Canaan.) A Week of weeks (sevens) after Abib 16, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were presented. Leavened bread and new wine were brought to the Temple.

Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples on Abib 14. The day began at sunset Thursday evening. He celebrated the meal that evening, then died as the Passover Lamb on Friday afternoon. His body rested in the grave on the Sabbath, Abib 15. He rose from the dead as the “Firstfruits of those who slept,” on Abib 16.

Fifty days after the sickle was first put to the grain, Pentecost was celebrated. Similarly, a spiritual harvest began fifty days after the Promised Seed was placed in the grave and came back to life. The harvest of Christians continues until the end of time. When the last believer is brought to faith, the end will come.

You are a part of that harvest. Not only did the Lord redeem you, He sanctified you by the Spirit’s power. God also calls you to work in the harvest by sharing the Gospel with others.

**Now, O Lord, fulfill Thy pleasure, Breathe upon Thy chosen band,  
And with Pentecostal measure Send forth reapers o’er our land,  
Faithful reapers, faithful reapers, Gath’ring sheaves for Thy right hand.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 502:2

*“After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”*

Joel 2:28,32 (EHV)

## Faith that Saves

Joel did not mince words. Judgment was coming. Unless there was repentance, locust swarms would arrive with a scorched-earth agenda. What the large locust did not consume, the small locust would. Judgment would be universal, unstoppable, well-deserved.

Peter minced no words either. In the very city where it happened, he condemned his countrymen for rejecting and murdering God’s Son. With laser-like precision the Law hit home. “They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)

The message of Pentecost is still a call to repentance. It’s so easy to look at the immorality of our culture or the apostasy in today’s churches and see why others need to repent. Shouldn’t we rather condemn the selfishness, arrogance, lust, and discontentment that we find in our own lives? God hates those sins, doesn’t He? God hates all sin; great or small; secret or well-known; lust, jealousy, laziness, greed. No one needs to tell us that if God hates them, His punishment must follow. That knowledge is etched into our hearts.

What is not etched in, is the news that God’s punishment has already fallen. It fell with all of its devastating power on the “scorched-earth” of Calvary’s cross. God judged the sins of this entire world in the One Who became the Substitute for all people. What Jesus leaves behind is not destruction, but a crucial verdict that was declared on Easter morning: “Your sins are gone. You are no longer guilty before God in heaven!” Hard to believe? It is impossible to believe until the Spirit is poured out and produces faith in our hearts.

**Come, Holy Spirit, come! Let Thy bright beams arise;  
Dispel the sorrow from our minds, The darkness from our eyes.  
Convince us of our sin, Then lead to Jesus’ blood,  
And to our wond’ring view reveal  
The mercies of our God.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 225:1, 3

*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.* Genesis 11:1-2 (NIV)

## The Curse of Babel

The words seem harmless enough, at least on the surface. If you were looking for a place to settle, why not a fertile valley that lay between two major rivers?

Beneath the surface, however, lurked a blatant defiance of God's will. One hundred years earlier, God had commanded the sons of Noah to spread out and populate the earth. Generations later, a tower project in Shinar would keep mankind together. God said, "Go!" he tower was mankind's "No!"

The Lord did not destroy the people as He had done in the Flood. He merely said, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7).

The effect was immediate. Construction was halted. Clarity became confusion. Suspicion led to fear. Fear resulted in distrust. Luther suggested that God's action at Babel was worse than the Flood. The Flood wiped out only a single generation. The confusing of languages would cause issues until the end of time.

Jerusalem must have sounded a bit like Babel that Pentecost weekend. Jews had come from all parts of the empire. Clusters of people were separated by language. But when the Spirit was poured out, heads began to turn. Untrained disciples were speaking in tongues they had never learned. The Good News of salvation was heard, understood, and taken to heart. By the Spirit's power, souls were saved and Babel's curse was overcome. The Gospel is not meant for one nation or one dialect. Jesus is the Savior of all people.

Today, the Gospel has been translated into nearly every known language in the world. Wherever it is used, the Holy Spirit continues to create, sustain, and build faith.

**Tell how the Father sent His Son to save us.  
Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us.  
Tell how the Spirit calls from ev'ry nation His new creation.**

Worship Supplement 773:4

*“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” John 15:26*

## The Helper

“Paraclete” is the English rendering of the Greek word, “parakletos.” It is usually translated as “Counselor, Comforter, Helper, or Advocate.” No single word in English can fully cover its meaning. Literally, “parakletos” is, “One who is called to the side of another.” Think of a friend who comes to your side and puts a hand on your shoulder. Think of a parent embracing a hurting child or comforting a heartbroken teenager. Think of a teacher who cares enough to admonish and correct because he or she cares about your future. That’s what Paraclete means.

The Spirit’s comfort does not come from keeping problems away from us. Trouble was brewing for the first disciples, not in spite of the fact that they were Christians, but because of that fact. Jesus forewarned, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). They would incur the world’s wrath because the world hated their Master. And yet, they would be comforted by the Spirit.

How does that work? Think of the most comforting things you’ve ever heard. Was it the familiar sound of your parent’s voice when you were lost? Was it the surgeon who stopped by to say that everything went well? Was it the late-night call or text saying that your family member made it home safely? Each is an assurance that all is now okay. This is what the Spirit does when testifying of Jesus.

Every time your faith is shaken, the Spirit is at your side and points you to Christ. Life’s circumstances change quickly. But God’s love for you is unchangeable. His forgiveness is always greater than our sin. His faithfulness never fails. That’s the comfort the Paraclete brings.

Come, tend’rest Friend and best,  
 Our most delightful Guest, With soothing pow’r.  
 Rest which the weary know;  
 Shade mid the noon-tide glow,  
 Peace when deep griefs o’erflow,  
 Cheer us this hour.

The Lutheran Hymnal 227:2

*“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.” Acts 2:2*

## Those Whom God Will Bring

If the sound of Christmas is the cry of a newborn, the sound of Pentecost is the roar of a jet engine. Whatever the sound was like, it served at least two purposes. The first was probably something only the disciples would understand. After Easter, Jesus breathed on them, saying, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost .whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them” (John 20:22-23). This has been called the little Pentecost. Now, from the majesty of God’s right-hand, Jesus breathed on all of His disciples, His entire church. It is the Lord’s big Pentecost.

The second purpose? God used the noise to draw a crowd. When the disciples couldn’t go to all the people, God brought the people to the disciples.

God still does that in different ways today. Sometimes Christians fall away from the faith and become unbelievers. They have no interest in Church or the Gospel, even when they should know better. But then one day, God uses something in their lives to wake them up. He sends bad news from the doctor; He permits a close brush with death; whatever it is, they are confronted with the life to come. God uses those moments, not to convert people, but to give them another chance to hear the Gospel and be saved.

The dramatic signs, the sound, the tongues of fire, the ability to speak fluently in other languages—these served the purpose of gathering people to hear what God has done for them in Christ. But they do not create faith. God creates faith through the quiet, gentle voice of the Gospel. Keep that in mind when God brings people into your life so that they, too, can hear the Gospel and be saved.

Let none hear you idly saying, “There is nothing I can do.”

While the souls of men 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.”

The Lutheran Hymnal 496:4



*For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* Romans 10:10 (ESV)

## I Believe...What Does That Mean? More Than Admission

There are those among Christians who have boldly declared, “Deeds . . . not creeds.” They say that what we say matters less than what we do. It is very important that our actions do not conflict with what we confess. However, that doesn’t mean what we confess doesn’t matter. It did to the Apostle Paul, who wrote to the Roman Christians (as directed by the Holy Spirit), “With the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

We begin confessing the faith of our heart by saying, “I believe.” In Latin, the word is “credo,” from which we get the word, creed. When I lived in the state of Texas, people said, “I believe that I’ll go to the grocery store.” It wasn’t a statement of faith; it was an expression of purpose.

When we confess, “I believe” it doesn’t just mean that we think there is a God out there somewhere. We are speaking specifically of the God who reveals Himself to us in the Bible. We are saying that we trust in Him and accept His Word as true.

We don’t know for certain who first put the words on paper (well, leaves or animal skin). It was once suggested that on Pentecost each of the twelve disciples offered a phrase . . . but it doesn’t really work out to twelve statements.

It was an early baptismal creed. It was an expression of faith in the Triune God and what each confessor believed He had done for them.

**We all believe in one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Ever present Help in need, praised by all the heav’nly host,  
By whose mighty pow’r alone  
All is made and wrought and done.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 252:1

*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* Hebrews 11:3 (ESV)

## I Believe...In God the Creator— A Matter of Faith

It's one of my favorite passages in the book of Job. After all that has happened to him, Job complains, and the LORD responds, putting Job in his place with a question (Job 38:4 NKJV): "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding."

I imagine the Almighty asking the same thing of the evolutionist who boastfully declares we are all the result of a cosmic ka-boom. "Excuse me, sir, but where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding." Humankind has two choices, to believe the word of a man who wasn't there . . . or to listen to the Creator - who was there - tell us how He did it.

The Creation of this world is a matter of faith, plain and simple, because none of us were there in the beginning. As Christians we understand that and declare: "I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth."

When we confess these words, we also recognize that all the persons of the Holy Trinity were involved in the Creation because the Scriptures teach it. We find the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2. We also find the Son of God was present in the first chapter of John's Gospel (Verses 3 and 14).

We should marvel at God's Creation and see in it both His wisdom and power.

We all believe in one true God, Who created earth and heaven,  
The Father, who to us in love Hath the right of children given.  
He both soul and body feedeth,  
All we need He doeth provide us;  
He thro' snares and perils leadeth,  
Watching that no harm betide us.  
He careth for us day and night,  
All things are governed by His might.

The Lutheran Hymnal 251:1

*The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.* Psalm 145:15-16 (ESV)

## I Believe...God Still Preserves Me—He Will Never Leave Me

I recently bought a new tool to complete a project. When the cashier rang up the item, he immediately asked me if I wanted to purchase an extended warranty. For an additional amount I could be certain that they would support and replace the tool. The manufacturer would only guarantee the tool for a short time. After that...I'd be out of luck.

The Creator doesn't treat us like a tool manufacturer. He doesn't only make us; He also supports us and all of the creation. Even the smallest and seemingly insignificant of birds is provided for and preserved by the Almighty.

I am not a self-made man. I am a blessing of God. I was created by the Almighty, and He also preserves and protects me. He richly and daily provides my needs. I sometimes lose sight of that fact because He gives me the gifts and health to work to earn the money I use to provide for myself and my family.

We shouldn't take these things for granted. We are all dependent on God for life, breath, and all things. The greatest proof of God's love for us is in the fact that He sent His own Son to redeem us from sin, death, and Satan. He did not spare His own Son to redeem us.

He will not tomorrow cast us away.

Consider how the birds above  
Feed day by day with care-free ease

Does God not keep them in His love?  
Are we not worth much more than these?

See how the lilies do not toil,  
They grow with fair fragility;

If God clothes these which quickly spoil,  
Will He not clothe both you and me?

*...Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV)*

## God Has Redeemed Me— It Wasn't Cheap

In the Apostles' Creed, we confess the work of Redemption, both Jesus' Humiliation (the things done to redeem us) and Jesus' Exaltation (the things that prove we are redeemed). We say nearly every Sunday that Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." While the words are very familiar, may they never become such that we speak them without marveling at the price paid to redeem us.

As a father, I can't imagine sending any of my children to suffer and die. I think I would rather die myself. Nevertheless, God so loved the world that He did exactly that. He sent His Son into human flesh and blood to suffer and die for enemies. Yes, despite my sin—open rebellion against God's commands—God loved me and sent His own innocent Son to bear my sin and guilt and die. He loves you with the same love.

During the Lenten Season, many of our churches read a harmony of the suffering of the Savior. This year, when we hear how Pontius Pilate paraded Barabbas and Jesus before the mob, let's see ourselves in Barabbas. We are the guilty. We deserve to be condemned to hell. But God determined to set the sinner free by laying our sins on His Son.

Our redemption wasn't cheap, so let's not act like it is. Let's never take up the attitude that says, "I can sin today and get forgiveness tomorrow."

**Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains**

**Poured for me the life-blood From His sacred veins!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 158:1

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7 (ESV)*

## God Has Separated Me from Sin and Dedicated Me—He is Working On Me.

When bookstores were still popular, most stores had a ‘self-help’ section. The self-help section suggested: “You can do whatever you put your mind to.”

In the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, we confess that God has spiritually changed us. The Holy Spirit, has through the Word of God, sanctified us; separated us from sin and dedicated us to God.

There is a part of us that always wants to take credit for that work, to claim, “I did it.” But based on Scripture we declare, “I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, nor come to Him. The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” It’s not a statement favored by the writers of ‘self-help’ books.

It is true, though. God is working on me through His Word and Sacrament. I’m not making me better. In fact, left to myself my life would get horribly worse.

The Scripture teaches me that God took the initiative. He determined to save me and He made it a reality...without my consent, input or help. He did it because of a quality in Him, His Grace. He did it so that I should be an heir of eternal life.

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;  
Our works and conduct have no worth.  
God in His love sent our Redeemer,  
Christ Jesus to this sinful earth;  
His death did for our sins atone,  
And we are saved by grace alone.

The Lutheran Hymnal 373:2



*“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”*

Acts 14:15 ESV

## Paul Meets the Misguided: Paul in Lystra

As an apostle of the Lord, Paul had received power to perform miraculous signs for the sake of the Kingdom of God. During his time at Lystra, Paul took an opportunity to use this power, as he saw a crippled man sitting down, unable to use his feet. By the power of the Lord, he restored the man’s ability to use his feet! What happens next will shock you. Two groups reacted to this, but their reactions are misguided. One, the Gentiles, began to praise Paul and Barnabas, nearly sacrificing to them because they thought they were the Greek gods: Zeus and Hermes. And after Paul witnessed the truth to the Gentiles to call them to repentance and faith, the other group, the Jews, tried to stone Paul to death for preaching the Gospel. Thank God, Paul arose from the pain and bludgeoning stones to preach another day.

When sharing the message of Christ’s love with others, you may have those that are so overjoyed that they may even start to praise you! You may, on the other hand, have those who violently react, stoning you with words of hatred and ill treatment. To the first, simply direct their praise to Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, the One who died on the cross to save them. To the second, be still and know that the Lord is God. Jesus can repay from His fullness all that is needed to soothe your pains. Christ was sent from Heaven to save you. So remember, even painful persecution works out for your good.

When all their labor seems in vain,  
revive their sinking hopes again;  
And when success crowns what they do,  
oh, keep them humble, Lord and true  
Until before Your judgment seat  
they lay their trophies at your feet

Worship Supplement 780:3

*Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:30-31 (ESV)*

## Paul Meets the Desperate: Paul in Philippi

In the Roman empire, losing a prisoner was punishable by death. The jailor at Philippi saw the empty cells and assumed the worst. He tried to kill himself, thinking that that would be his future anyway.

“Do yourself no harm!” the jailor heard. Having heard Paul and Silas singing hymns all night, he thought to ask, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul pointed him to Jesus Christ and His forgiveness, which He earned on the cross and gives through Baptism.

Have you ever lost a job? It can be a difficult feeling. Some take being fired as a judgment of who they are as people. Others are simply afraid of the circumstances that will follow. Some have taken their own lives because of it. And not just job loss, but any type of deep and personal loss—of family, of homes, of friends—can bring people to low, desperate places in their hearts and minds. But the solution to this is the same as the jailor’s. The solution is Jesus. We are sinful, and its effects may have led to our job loss, but Jesus has restored us. He has taken away our sin and has set us apart to serve Him in all our callings, even and especially our jobs. Jesus defines our worth and sets our course of service. We are sinful, and, at times, uncertain of the future, but Jesus has redeemed us. He has forgiven us and He shows us the path forward. The circumstances of earthly loss cannot take Jesus’ love away from us. If you encounter someone like the jailor, you know where to point them—the only place that matters: Jesus.

Just as I am, though tossed about  
with many a conflict, many a doubt  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

The Lutheran Hymnal 388:3

*Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Acts 17:11 (ESV)*

## Paul Meets the Well-read: Paul in Berea

Following another nocturnal escape, Paul and Barnabas were sent to the city of Berea. As was their custom, the two of them went to the local synagogue to preach. When they did this, they were pleasantly surprised. Their audience was more noble than that of Thessalonica, the city from which they just came. The Jews in Berea examined the Scriptures to fact check Paul and Silas. This was a proper thing for them to do, because the Scriptures are for all people, the only source of spiritual light. God's Words for us to ponder and learn cannot be found anywhere else except the Holy Scriptures.

If you share God's Word with a fellow Christian and they offer a remark from the Bible that may sound different than what you are saying, make sure to investigate it yourself. They may be right, and if so, we let God's word stand as true. They may be wrong, and if so, we trust that God will use His Word to correct what is wrong.

There are many blind guides in the world today who offer so many different religious truths. God sorts out what is good and casts aside what is evil. He makes plain the good with the shining light of the Bible, and, like when darkness is confronted by light, casts aside the false teachings. When posed with theological thoughts, make sure to check the Bible. And when you're properly corrected with the Bible, rejoice, for now you know the truth!

The Bereans do give us a good example, but what makes it good is the Word upon which they stand. This Word is the Word of our Savior; whose death and resurrection verify every statement and promise to which He has given us. Thank God for His guiding Word.

**Lamp of our feet whereby we trace**

**Our path when wont to stray;**

**Stream from the fount of heav'nly grace,**

**Brook by the trav'ler's way;**

The Lutheran Hymnal 291:1

*So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” Acts 17:22-23 (ESV)*

## Paul Meets the Curious: Paul in Athens

In Paul’s day, Athens was perhaps the top cultural center of the known world. The city was a thriving area of trade and commerce. The quality of living excelled far beyond other areas of the empire. It excelled so much that the people had free time, time which they used it to debate and discuss philosophy. These Greeks wanted answers to the deepest questions known to man: What does it mean to exist? What happens when we die? Is there a God and who is this God? They were religiously curious. Their whole culture reflected this, as they had a different, individual god for every aspect of their life. And, in case they forgot one, they even had a statue made to memorialize the “Unknown God.”

Paul preaches to them about the unknown God. He is the only God, the Maker of all things. He, through His almighty power of creation, leads men to look for Him. However, they can only find Him in His Word. Paul calls them to repentance and to trust in Jesus, the One whom God raised from the dead.

Genuinely curious people can be some of the most exciting with which to share God’s Word. God does not leave us in the dark with these people either. There is an answer for each of our neighbor’s curious inquiries. Law and Gospel and sin and grace are the simple answers to many of their questions. Though the goal is to always point them to their sin first and then to the relief of the cross.

Seek whom ye may to be your stay; none can redeem his brother.  
All helpers failed, this Man prevailed,  
the God-man, and none other.  
Our Servant Lord did help afford; we’re justified for He hath died,  
The Guiltless for the guilty.

The Lutheran Hymnal 383:2

*But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him"*

Acts 20:10 (ESV)

## Paul Meets the Shocked: Paul in Troas

While travelling, Paul stopped in the city of Troas. On Sunday, Paul met with a group of Christians there for meal fellowship. It was evening already, and Paul kept on talking till about midnight. In an upper-story room, filled with candlelight, Paul kept on speaking with the brothers. A young man named Eutychus, sitting in the windowsill, grew tired and fell asleep. As he slept, he fell out the window, to his death. That was shocking and sudden to see a young man taken so quickly and unexpectedly. Yet, Paul, by the power of Jesus, raised the young man from the dead and continued to talk with the group till morning.

Wow... like clockwork! The preaching of the Gospel is not fazed by this sudden emotional death, and it has no reason to be, for the Gospel says, "He who believes in me, though He may die, He shall live." For every Christian life expended in this world, whether they be old or young, the promise is given that they will be raised from the dead by Jesus one day, and on that day, they will have perfect bliss in Heaven.

Many accidents happen in the lives of Christians, including those whom we deem too young. They can catch us unawares, and the grief that ensues from them can be difficult to bear. But even these emotions cannot change the truth that Jesus is risen from the dead, promising to raise the young who have fallen asleep trusting in Him for salvation. A Christ-centered message at a funeral can sometimes feel like the accident of Eutyches, tragic but quick to raise hearts and spirits as we are comforted once more by our Savior.

**Christian, dry your flowing tears, chase your unbelieving fears;  
Look on His deserted grave, doubt no more His pow'r to save.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 203:3



*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* Eph. 6:4 ESV

## Good and Bad Father Role Models

When growing up, our parents advise us to choose good role models to imitate. Our choices can mean the difference between being led down a good path or a bad one. Thankfully, we can pray that those born in a Christian home will be blessed with good father role models. It should be every Christian father's goal to follow God's directives of teaching their children about the Lord, His righteous ways, as well as His saving truths. And when the need arises, exercise Christian discipline.

In Bible history, there are a number of cases where we learn of fathers who were either good or bad role models. We can learn from both either to follow exemplary ways or to guard against pitfalls. During this week, we will give examples of father role models.

One father, who was a bad role model, was Eli. He was a priest in the house of the Lord at Shiloh. Eli had two priestly sons named Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was not only to raise his two sons, but also have spiritual oversight of them as priests. Sadly, these two grew up to be wicked and ungodly. We learn that Hophni and Phinehas disobeyed the Lord by refusing to eat boiled sacrificial meat without its fat. They wanted their meat with fat on it for roasting. (1 Samuel 2:12-27) Also, they took sexual advantage of women who came to worship. While Eli rebuked them, he also indulged the two by not disciplining them or removing them from the priesthood (1 Samuel 2:22-25). In so doing, Eli honored his sons more than God (1 Samuel 2:29). Since Hophni and Phinehas did not correct their worldly ways, they suffered divine judgment by being killed in battle.

Although fathers fail from time to time in their parental duties, nevertheless we have a merciful God who forgives and promises to help fathers be good parents.

**Oh, blest the parents who give heed  
Unto their children's foremost need.  
And weary not of care or cost!  
May none to them and heaven be lost!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 625:3

*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Heb. 11:7 (ESV)*

## Noah, the Lone Father Role Model

Noah was the father of three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Since God determined to destroy the earth's population, with the exception of Noah's family, with a worldwide flood, the only male role model for the three was their father Noah.

Noah was an exemplary role model in the following respects:

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” (6:9) These characteristics made Noah stand out in contrast to the countless wicked unbelievers in that generation, for every intention of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. (6:5)

Noah was a man of faith and obedience. He showed this by obeying the Lord's command to build a massive ark in preparation for the deluge that would cover the earth. He did this even though he was made an object of ridicule for this building project.

Noah had an enduring love for his fellow man who were destined to suffer the righteous wrath of God. Being mission-minded He preached a message of repentance and forgiveness for 120 years.

Noah was a person of worship and devotion to God. After the flood, Noah built an altar to worship the Lord with a thankful heart for preserving him and his family in the flood.

The most important feature of Noah is that as a believer he had faith in the promised Christ who would come to deliver a world of sinners from eternal death and condemnation in hell.

While Noah was a God-fearing believer, he was not sinless. There was an episode in his life when he became drunk. But as a child of God he repented of his sin and was assured by the Lord of His forgiveness. This served as a priceless example for his family.

**Therefore my hope is in the Lord  
And not in mine own merit;  
It rests upon His faithful Word  
To them of contrite spirit  
That He is merciful and just;  
This is my comfort and my trust.  
His help I wait with patience.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 329

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Hebrews 11:8-10 ESV*

## Abraham, the Father of Many Nations

Abraham is a special role model for Christians. He is known as the spiritual father of all believers due to his exemplary faith.

When God instructed Abraham to move to a distant land, he didn't question this even though he didn't know where he was going or what kind of land it would be. This was to be the land that God would give to his descendants. While Abraham never saw the day of its fulfillment, he believed it would be so.

In the days when Abraham was well advanced in years, the Holy Spirit enabled him to believe that he and his aged wife Sarah would have a son from whose descendants a Savior would proceed.

As father of his son Isaac, Abraham showed great love for him. But Jesus declared in Matthew: "Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (10:37) The Lord put Abraham to the test as to whom he loved more. With the help of God, Abraham passed the test. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. Out of love for the Lord Abraham was ready and willing to do this, raising his hand to strike Isaac with a knife when God prevented him from going through with it. This act of devotion not only took tremendous love, but also great faith, for he believed that if he were to kill Isaac, God would raise him back to life so that through Isaac and his many descendants He would bring the Savior of all mankind into this world (Hebrew 11:17-19).

O'er the blest mercy-seat, Pleading for me,  
My feeble faith looks up, Jesus, to Thee.  
Help me my cross to bear, Thy wondrous love declare,  
Some song to raise or prayer, Something for Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 403

*And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"* Job 1:8 ESV

## Job, A Stand-Out Believer

Job was the father of seven sons and three daughters. These offspring had an extraordinary father role model. While Job outlived his children due to them being killed in a violent windstorm, yet during the time they were alive their father showed them loving devotion in the best possible way. What was foremost in Job's mind in regard to his children was their spiritual welfare. Wanting them to walk in the paths of God, he lived a godly life for them to imitate. Another way Job showed concern for his children is found in these words of God, "His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually." (Job 1:4-5)

According to the Word of God Job was a stand out believer who provides all of us with a wonderful example of how to deal with trials and tribulations. In a conversation the LORD had with Satan about Job, He said of him that "there is none like him on the earth." (Job 1:8)

During the severe trials in which Satan tested Job's faith, time and again Job remained true and faithful to the Lord. When during the course of a short period of time Job lost everything, his response was, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

Let us suffer here with Jesus, To His image, e'er conform;  
Heaven's glory soon will please us, Sunshine follow on the storm.  
Though we sow in tears of sorrow, We shall reap with heavenly joy;  
And the fears that now annoy Shall be laughter on the morrow.  
Christ, I suffer here with Thee; There, oh, share Thy joy with me!

The Lutheran Hymnal 409

*(An angel of the Lord said to Joseph) "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. Matt. 2:20-21 ESV*

## Joseph, a Faithful Father Type

Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, is the last of the father role models under study. This adoptive father does not receive much attention in the Bible. But what we learn of him reveals an exemplary Christian father. And while Jesus was perfect in every way and therefore didn't need a father role model to imitate, nevertheless we can still learn from him in regard to fatherhood.

The first thing that comes to our attention is Joseph's unquestioning faith in God and His Word. When he learned from the Lord the most unique and unfathomable way of Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit, he didn't show any hesitation in accepting this and proceeded to take Mary home as his wife.

As an angel warned Joseph of the danger Jesus was in due to King Herod's murderous plans to kill the baby, Joseph didn't waste any time in protecting Mary and Jesus by quickly fleeing with them to Egypt.

With Joseph being the head of the family, he was faithful in providing for them, working very diligently at his trade of carpentry. No doubt, as Jesus was growing up he learned from Joseph the useful skills in this vocation.

During the years Jesus was living with Joseph and Mary, Joseph took the lead in the Christian practice of faithfully attending worship services at the local synagogue and making regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem where the religious festivals were observed.

Even though Joseph was a natural born sinner like all of us, there is no mention made in the Bible of any unfaithfulness on his part as a husband or a father. With all that is reported of Joseph, he is truly worthy of being numbered among the fine Christian father role models found in Holy Scripture.

O Lord God, heavenly Father, grant that fathers would learn from these examples before them of faithful men. Let them see, however imperfectly, through the forgiveness of Christ, to learn humility and grace to grow in their love and leadership. Amen.



*For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.* Hebrews 3:4 (ESV)

## Carlsbad Caverns: A Hidden Treasure

Wherever you go, you leave something uniquely you behind: your fingerprints. No one else has the same prints. God has left His fingerprints on every part of His creation handiwork. This week we will look for God's fingerprints in five of the U.S. national parks.

We begin with one which is easily overlooked. It is located in an isolated part of the Guadalupe Mountains in New Mexico. Many drive by without a glance and have no idea of what they're missing. Others don't want to take time from seemingly far more important pursuits. But those who exit the highway and head down the driveway to Carlsbad Caverns discover one of the most incredible, extensive underground cave systems anywhere in the world.

Similarly, God's Word is a hidden treasure. It's far off the wide, busy freeway on which the world travels. Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14 ESV). On the surface, it doesn't look like much. People view the Bible as outdated, with nothing to offer our world today. But there is so much more than meets the eye! The Word reveals what otherwise would be forever hidden. In it, we come to see the one true God who not only made all things but still preserves them. He is the God of love who sent His Son to take our burdens, including our sins, upon Himself and to make peace for us with God.

If you get the opportunity, explore Carlsbad Caverns. You won't be disappointed. Take time every day to explore the treasures hidden and revealed in Holy Scripture.

**Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.**

Lutheran Service Book 802:1

*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.* Psalm 104:24

## Great Smoky Mountains National Park: Dazzling Diversity

Imagine what it must have been like for Adam in Eden. There was so much to take in with wide-eyed wonder, from the cobalt blue sky above to the vast variety of trees and plants, along with all the animals God paraded before him so he could assign them names.

Tragically, sin destroyed the perfection of Eden, just as it ruined the harmony between humankind and their Maker. Thorns and weeds take over gardens and fields. Countless species of animals which once roamed the earth have become extinct.

Yet God's fingerprints are still evident in the natural world around us and preserved for our enjoyment in our national parks. Great Smoky Mountains National Park lies just outside of Gatlinburg, Tennessee. It is considered the most biologically diverse park in the entire country. Elk, black bears, synchronous fireflies, and old-growth forests shrouded in wispy banks of morning fog are just some of the sights which greet visitors. Streams and waterfalls, mild temperatures, high humidity, and abundant rainfall provide a glimpse of how Eden must have appeared in its pristine state.

We may look forward to visiting the Smokies one day, but we have a destination to plan for with far greater anticipation. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus promised, "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). We can't even begin to imagine the wonders we'll see and the experiences we'll have. But the greatest is that we will see the Savior together with all believers and praise Him for eternity.

**If God hath made this world so fair,  
Where sin and death abound;  
How beautiful beyond compare,  
Will Paradise be found!**

Hymn by James Montgomery

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.* Isaiah 35:1-2 (ESV)

## Saguaro National Park: Endurance in Hostile Surroundings

They are called the giants of the desert. Saguaro cacti can stretch up to 50 feet in height, weigh six tons, and live for 200 years. Saguaro National Park outside of Tucson, AZ is noted for entire forests of saguaro everywhere you look. While striking in size, saguaro are also impressive for thriving in an extremely hot and hostile environment. God created them with spines, a thick outer skin, and folds which store water. The true beauty of the desert is on full display with the spring wildflower bloom. Land which is normally brown and barren bursts with vivid oranges and reds.

We may not live in a physical desert, but we certainly are in a spiritual one. The entire creation suffers under the curse of sin. We came into the world dead in sin. We see its effects in us and everything around us. David confessed his guilt: “For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Psalm 32:4 ESV).

By God’s grace we can still survive and thrive in this time of grace. Isaiah prophesied, “The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus.” Like wildflowers after a life-giving rain, we rejoice in Jesus who has rescued us from death and gives us eternal life. By the Spirit’s indwelling our lives blossom in praise. Like flowers that can’t help but be noticed, let your faith be seen by those around you. Like thirsty desert plants that soak up every drop of rain, turn to the Word often for the water of life.

**Fruitful trees, the Spirit’s sowing,  
May we ripen and increase,  
Fruit to life eternal growing,  
Rich in love and joy and peace**

Lutheran Service Book 691:1

*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* Romans 1:20 (ESV)

## Hawaii Volcanoes National Park: Incredible Power

Much of the time they appear quiet and harmless, but Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is home to two of the world's most active volcanoes, Mauna Loa and Kilauea. Lava rock from past eruptions covers old roads and blankets the ground. In May 2024 2,000 residents were forced to evacuate their homes due to dangerous lava flows.

Scientists can measure seismic activity and make predictions when an eruption may occur, but no one claims that human beings can do anything to control a volcano. The Apostle Paul writes that the things that have been made testify to God's eternal power. The Creator had the power to make volcanoes, and He still controls them, just as Jesus had the power to control violent storms simply by speaking a word.

Standing in a massive, hardened lava lake or gazing out over a volcano, you can't help but be awestruck. But that's nothing compared to Judgment Day when we and all people will stand before the holy God. "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41-42 ESV).

That day will come suddenly without warning. Yet the Lord has ensured that we don't have to dread it. We can look forward to it with great anticipation, for we know that Jesus has paid our debt of sin and has covered us with His perfect righteousness. Trust in Him and God couldn't be happier with you.

**My Savior paid the debt I owe  
And for my sin was smitten;  
Within the Book of Life I know  
My name has now been written.**

**I will not doubt, for I am free,  
And Satan cannot threaten me;  
There is no condemnation!**

Lutheran Service Book 508:5

*But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 2 Peter 3:13-14 (ESV)*

## Grand Canyon National Park: A Wonder to Explore

“Whoa!” was the whispered reaction of a middle school student when he gazed out over the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona for the first time. Taken aback by its size and beauty, President Teddy Roosevelt wrote, “I could not choose words that would convey or that could convey to any outsider what that canyon is” (nps.gov). It’s been called one of the seven wonders of the natural world. Many visitors are content to glance at it from the window of a tour bus or maybe walk the rim trail for an hour before heading out of the park.

But to truly appreciate the canyon, you need to spend time learning about it and exploring it. With the insights of Scripture, we can see how the massive amounts of water God unleashed during the Flood could have formed the canyon in a matter of days, not millions of years as evolutionists claim. It’s not just the canyon’s size which draws visitors but its dramatic beauty.

“Whoa!” will be our reaction when we see our new heavenly home for the first time. It will be bigger and more beautiful than anything we can imagine here on earth. John writes, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” (Revelation 21:1 ESV). It will be a wonder to explore, not just for a lifetime, but for all eternity!

Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear;  
Arise, O Sun so longed for, O'er this benighted sphere.  
With hearts and hands uplifted, We plead, O Lord, to see  
The day of earth's redemption That sets Your people free!

Lutheran Service Book 515:4



*“And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.”* Isaiah 11:10

## We Celebrate with Flying Flags

This July marks the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in the United States of America. There is red, white, and blue bunting in abundance. The Stars and Stripes fly everywhere. Celebrations abound. Among Christ-believers, there will be prayers aplenty. This is right and good, for so Scripture instructs us, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim 2:1-4)

Years ago, one of our CLC churches had both a U.S. and a Christian flag displayed in the front of the sanctuary. One of the members came to the pastor and pointed out that, according to proper flag etiquette, the Stars and Stripes was on the wrong side. Those instructions say the U.S. flag should always be in the primary (right hand) position. The pastor said he was glad the person noticed the placement of the flags, for they were not in the way they were by accident. The Christian flag (white with a red cross on a blue field) was deliberately on the right hand because our primary allegiance is to Christ our Lord. In fact, it is from our loyalty to Jesus and our commitment to the Gospel that we draw the strength to be good and faithful citizens of our nation—even when times are difficult because of serious problems among our citizenry.

Lord God, heavenly Father, unite our hearts and heal the divisions within our nation. Let Your peace in Christ rule in the hearts of more and more Americans. In Jesus’ strong and saving Name. Amen

*And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"* 1 Kings 18:36-39

## We Celebrate with Fireworks

*"It will be celebrated by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance, by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more."* —John Adams on the Declaration of Independence by the 13 Colonies

The "illuminations" that John Adams referred to here were fireworks. By the time of the American Revolution, spectacular displays of fireworks had already become a popular way to celebrate national events.

If you are looking for a reference to gunpowder-type fireworks in the Bible, I know of none. If you are looking for an unforgettable example of fire in the sky, look no further than Elijah and his face-off with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Remember it on your way home from that July 4th fireworks display this week. And remember to pray that God would turn the hearts of many in our nation back to Himself.

When in power He comes, Oh, may our native land  
From all its rending tombs Send forth a glorious band,  
A countless throng, For aye to sing  
To heaven's high King Salvation's song.

The Lutheran Hymnal 575:5

*And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. Leviticus 25:10*

## We Celebrate with the Ringing of Bells

PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND TO ALL THE INHABITANTS THEREOF LEV. XXV X. This inscription from the Liberty Bell is a quote from Leviticus 25. The bell was ordered to commemorate the 50th anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter establishing self-government and religious freedom in Pennsylvania. Originally called the "State House Bell," the bell first became known as the "Liberty Bell" in the 1830s.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy proclaimed July 4 to be "National Bell Ringing Day" through U.S. Congressional Resolution Number 25, which denoted 2:00 p.m. (EDT) for nationwide bell ringing.

There is no doubt that bells are a joyful noise. Since the 5th century, church bells have called Christians to "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD..." and "Serve the LORD with gladness." (Psalm 100:1) How appropriate to make a point this week to use the ringing of bells as a reminder to thank God for His blessings and the freedoms we enjoy today in the United States.

Leviticus 25:8ff describes the Old Testament Year of Jubilee. Instead of a bell, a ram's horn was blown on the tenth day of the seventh month to start each fiftieth year in the land of promise. It was a special year of redemption for land and people. A year of rejoicing (Jubilee!) that was a beautiful picture of Christ the Redeemer who came to set free those who are slaves and prisoners to sin and death. On the cross, Jesus died on our behalf. We are forgiven the debt of our sin-guilt once and for all. No longer slaves to sin, having been freed by Christ, we can truly enter the rest God provides as we cease laboring to make ourselves acceptable to God by our own works.

**Lord Jesus, as we rejoice in the freedoms that are ours as citizens of the U.S., help us even more to rejoice and give thanks to You for the eternal freedoms that are ours through faith in You and what You have done for us. Amen**

*And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David!”* Matthew 21:8-9a

## We Celebrate with Parades

The Statue of Liberty was gifted to the people of the United States by the people of France on July 4, 1884. It was dedicated on October 28, 1886, in New York City. President Grover Cleveland was there—along with over a million Americans. There was a parade that day—over five miles long—soldiers and sailors, policemen, firemen and marching bands from all over. People packed viewing stands and sidewalks, windows and rooftops along the route.

But it’s not like the “parade” was an American invention. The Romans held parades since before the birth of Christ. Parades are described in the Bible. In fact, when the people of Israel went up to Jerusalem in large groups for worship festivals, they sang “Marching Psalms” (Psalms 119-133). There was a parade when the Ark of the Covenant was brought up to Jerusalem—and King David himself led the procession. David’s descendant and LORD fulfilled Scripture prophecy when Jesus rode into Jerusalem in a parade of Passover pilgrims that first Palm Sunday.

As Americans, we use parades with firetrucks and floats to help us joyfully remember events and holidays important to our nation. How much more shouldn’t we, as Christians, use the very same celebrations as a reminder to rejoice in the freedoms our God has secured for us through the founding of our nation upon principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence? And shouldn’t we, with joyful hearts, use these freedoms to spread the good news of the eternal freedoms that are ours in Christ our Lord?

**But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of glory passes on His way. Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**From earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host,  
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Alleluia! Alleluia!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 463:6-7

*Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it...It is the Lord's Passover 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. Exodus 12:8,11,14*

## We Celebrate with Picnics

There are historically deep connections between festival celebrations and food. When God set up the Calendar Year for Old Testament Israel, a primary festival was the Passover and the Passover Meal. Both the event commemorated and the foods associated with it pointed to the Messiah and the sacrifice Christ would make as the world's Redeemer.

The history of the United States is short compared to other nations, but food traditions have quickly developed. We too use special meals to commemorate days such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the 4th of July. One could even argue that the portable picnic is a distinctly American tradition with its hot dogs, potato salad, baked beans, and lemonade.

God instructed Israel to pass down the meaning of the Passover Meal to succeeding generations. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' " Ex 12:26-27

It would be good if we did something similar at our July 4th picnics. That, when we pause to pray before we eat, we say something about the special blessings that God has given to us in the U.S.

Here's a 4th of July picnic prayer that does just that:

Lord God, Heavenly Father, on this Independence Day, our hearts overflow with thanksgiving for the freedoms with which You have blessed our nation. We recognize that every liberty we cherish, every right we hold dear, comes from Your gracious hand. Help us never to take these blessings for granted. As we celebrate today with fireworks and festivities, remind us that our ultimate freedom was purchased by the blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. In Whose Name we pray. Amen.



*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

Genesis 1:26

## Monday's Inheritance: The Distinction of Humanity

Many people take an interest in tracing their family trees in order to seek out common ancestors. If you could trace your genealogy back far enough, you would find that everyone shares the same first parents. This week we explore the things that we have all inherited from Adam and Eve, our "uncommon ancestors."

The first bequest is the distinction of humanity. In six days the LORD created a perfect world, and God saved His highest creation for last. On the sixth day He formed Adam from dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. He fashioned the first woman, Eve, from the man's rib as his perfect complement.

Adam and Eve were distinct from all God's other creatures in two important ways. First, they were created "in the image of God." This means that their rational hearts and souls were tuned to God's holiness in all things. Second, they were given dominion over all creation. All other living things were designed to serve mankind, and it became our privilege to care for God's creation.

Even in this fallen world mankind still has dominion over the world, though we have often failed in our stewardship. We are still gifted with a body and rational soul, even though God's perfect image was lost through the fall into sin. The LORD still reaches out to all with the promise of forgiveness in Christ, and re-creates His holy image in the hearts of believers. Truly, as the Psalmist writes, "You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands." (Psalm 8:5-6)

The Lord, My God be praised, My Light, My Life from heaven.  
My Maker, who to me Hath soul and body given;  
My Father, who doth shield And keep me day by day,  
Doth make each moment yield New blessings on my way.

The Lutheran Hymnal 38:1

*"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."* Genesis 2:18

## Tuesday's Inheritance: The Blessing of Marriage

The first instance in the Bible of something that was "not good" happened when Adam was found to be without a companion. Adam was incomplete until God's special creation of Eve from Adam's rib. God Himself brought the first man and the first woman together, to be united for life. In this way God established the institution of marriage for the blessing of mankind. "Therefore," Moses later wrote, "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) This is a precious inheritance from our "uncommon ancestors."

"God sets the solitary in families," David writes in Psalm 68. The foundation of the family throughout history has been the marriage bond. There are always, of course, many examples of troubles within families, but when it's working as God intended then blessings abound. We find in Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 that a believing husband will, because of God's love in Christ, love his wife as Christ loved the church. A wife who knows Christ as Lord and Savior will love her husband and submit herself to him as to the Lord. An earthly life of peace, love, stability, and satisfaction finds its origin in family life as God intended it to be.

Because of sin that still lives in us, believing husbands and wives often fail to live up to God's standards of love and commitment which they have promised to each other. Yet, hand in hand, they have the privilege of going to Jesus' cross to be assured of God's forgiveness. They then can go forward with the renewed goal of being "...kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Father, You created Adam, Crafted Eve, and made them one;  
Jesus, from their sin You saved us, As God's true incarnate Son;  
Holy Spirit, You forgive us; From our sins we are released.  
Bring us, Lord, at last to heaven, To the endless wedding feast!

Lutheran Service Book 860:3

*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened.* Genesis 3:6-7

## Wednesday's Inheritance: The Curse of Sin

What do Sickle Cell Disease, Cystic Fibrosis, and Huntington's disease have in common? They are life-threatening illnesses that are passed on from parent to child. That's a tragic kind of inheritance, but there is one that is far worse that is found in each of us. The sinful nature in our hearts has been passed down from generation to generation, beginning with our uncommon ancestors, Adam and Eve.

Our first parents gave in to the devil's temptation to become "like God" by eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They began a spiral toward physical and eternal death. David confessed in Psalm 51:5 that he, too, was cursed with this inheritance: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." Jesus summed it up when He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." (John 3:6)

This deadly cycle of inherited sin could only be interrupted by the miracle of the ages, when a virgin mother gave birth to God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. The only fully innocent one then offered Himself as a sacrifice for all sinners when He went to the cross. In this way Christ atoned for the deadly inheritance that began with our first parents, as well as for the many sins we've added. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)

As by one man all mankind fell,  
And, born in sin, was doomed to hell,  
So by one Man, who took our place,  
We all received the gift of grace.  
We thank Thee, Christ; new life is ours,  
New light, new hope, new strength, new powers:  
This grace our every way attend,  
Until we reach our journey's end!

The Lutheran Hymnal 369:5.6

*"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 3:15

## Thursday's Inheritance: The Gospel Promise

After they fell into sin, our first parents failed to come to God honestly with their guilt. They hid themselves from God and, when confronted, tried to cast blame elsewhere. Because of His great love, God was not willing to abandon them to the devil's power and eternal death. Instead He gave them the first Gospel promise of a coming Savior. There would be warfare between the woman and the serpent, and between his descendants and her Descendant. We know that it was one Descendant of the woman in particular because God promised that "HE" would crush the serpent's head, though the serpent would strike His heel.

This promise was fulfilled when Jesus, the descendant of the woman, suffered terribly on Calvary's cross and died there for the sins of the world. This awful wound did not end in defeat, however, because Jesus rose in triumph on the third day. In this way God fulfilled the first Gospel promise to our uncommon ancestors: "that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." (Hebrews 2:14)

Did Adam and Eve trust in this Gospel promise? We have reasons to be confident that they did. When her first child was born, Eve literally said, "I have gotten a man, the LORD." Did she mistakenly think that God had sent the Savior immediately? We can't know for certain, but we do know that the descendants of Seth, their third born son, began to "call upon the name of the LORD." (Genesis 4:26) No doubt the saving Gospel had been passed from generation to generation. When you call upon the name of this same LORD in faith, you are an inheritor of the same Gospel promise, for "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

**I will praise Thy great compassion, Faithful Father, God of grace,  
That with all our fallen race And in our deep degradation  
Thou wast merciful that we Might bring endless praise to Thee.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 384:5

*Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden. Genesis 3:22-23*

## Friday's Inheritance: The Enduring Tree of Life

There were two remarkable trees in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life. After Adam and Eve ate from the first tree, God was not willing to have them live forever in their sinful state, so He barred them from the Garden of Eden by placing an angel with a flaming sword at its gate. They then had to live out their days while enduring the troubles and sorrows of this life. However, by the promise of God's grace, they looked forward to the day when they could finally partake of the Tree of Life in heaven.

The same certain hope of life forever in glory has been passed on to us, from believing generation to believing generation, through the power of the sure Word of God. Yes, we also are inheritors of the curse; we too struggle with the effects of sin in our lives each day. But because the Lord Jesus gave His life on the tree of the cross for us, we will rise to eternal life just as Jesus did. We will then partake freely of the Tree of Life in the paradise that Christ has prepared for His believers: "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:2)

Praise God the Lord, ye sons of men, Before His highest throne;  
Today He opens heaven again And gives us His own Son.  
He opens us again the door Of Paradise today;  
The angel guards the gate no more, To God our thanks we pay.

The Lutheran Hymnal 105:1,5



*“May he (Obed) be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.” Ruth 4:15*

## True Love Involves Understanding and Purpose!

Love... it is an important concept in Scripture. The word is found over five hundred times in our Bibles, although it is used only once in the Book of Ruth, which will serve as the basis for this series of devotions. In this first of twelve devotions, let us seek to define love.

What is love? Love is a feeling—a strong emotional attachment. The Bible tells us, for instance, concerning Jonathan and David: “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” (1 Samuel 18:1) But love is more than a feeling. Love is also an action. Scripture often speaks of “agape” love...a love of both understanding and purpose. This type of love is illustrated in that most familiar Bible passage: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) God understood our need for salvation and in love His purpose was to meet that essential need of every human being by sending Jesus! But love is more than purposeful action. It is also the very essence of God. The Bible says: “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) It further explains: “Love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” (1 John 4:7) True love proceeds from God to us and enables us to love. The Bible says: “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19 NIV)

In this series we will seek to further define the nature of that true love proceeding from God, which is to reveal itself in our lives. May God bless our study!

**Dear heavenly Father, You are the very essence of love. In Your love, You have redeemed our souls through Your precious Son, Jesus. Help us to grow in both our understanding of love and our ability to love, so that Your name is honored and others are blessed by everything we say and do. Amen.**

*Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Ruth 1:8-9a*

## True Love Does Not Seek Control Over but Rather Blessings for Others!

The word love is not used here, but the words and actions of Naomi certainly illustrate a love of understanding and purpose! Naomi was a grieving widow and mother. She had lost both husband and sons. She found herself alone in a foreign land—alone except for the companionship of her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. It would have been easy for this sad woman, perhaps even expected, that she would seek to control these younger women for her own purposes—to keep them close and so to avoid even further isolation. They too, after all, were grieving widows. It would have been natural for them to want to maintain those familiar, familial ties that had become comfortable.

Yet, Naomi understood what that would mean for her daughters-in-law. By marrying her sons, these Moabite women had become outsiders in their own land. Unless they returned to their former families, it was unlikely that any Moabite man would marry them. Were they to accompany Naomi back to Judah, it was unlikely that any Jewish man would marry them either. They might successfully struggle together and maintain their lives, but what of their futures? Would it not be the height of selfishness for Naomi, an older woman, to demand their loyalty—a loyalty that would be their undoing after she died?

True love meant, indeed demanded, that Naomi seek both their freedom and their blessing! And so, the decision was made in her mind. She must let them go. They must return to their Moabite homes. She would entrust them to the LORD’s kindness and care. Surely the LORD would watch over them and grant them His blessings within the gentle embraces of other loving husbands.

True love does not seek control over but rather freedom and blessings for others!

**O LORD God, fill our hearts with an understanding of the needs for others. Help us to look beyond ourselves and in love to seek blessings for others! Amen.**

*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. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.”* Ruth 1:16-17a

## True Love Involves Genuine Devotion to Others and to God!

Their emotions were running high! They stood on the heights of Moab overlooking the deep Jordan River valley. Judah lay beyond. Both daughters-in-law had initially refused Naomi’s counsel, but Orpah had finally relented. They had wept, kissed, and Orpah had turned back. She had done the seemingly sensible thing—returning home to seek a new life, where a new life was most probable!

Ruth, however, continued to refuse Naomi’s well-intentioned advice. “Entreat me not to leave you,” Ruth implored. She was deeply attached to this mother of her deceased lover. There would be no turning back from this decision or its consequences. Ruth knew this, but true love involves genuine devotion to others...and to God! She was ready to make the commitment to follow Naomi and the God whom she now served. She was ready to go where Naomi was going; to lodge where Naomi was planning to lodge; to live among a people who might always view her as a foreigner; and, finally, to die and be buried in a place distant from everyone and everything she had ever known. This is true love!

Was there some doubt, even fear within Ruth’s heart as those two women stood gazing at each other, occasionally glancing at the eastern and western horizons, one whispering of the past, while the other beckoned to the future? There may well have been, but love, as John would later point out, casts out fear! (1 John 4:18) Indeed, true love, which proceeds from God, brings the certain knowledge of divine love and His constant providential care!

Dear heavenly Father, as we stand on the edge of the present and gaze into our futures, may Your love fill our hearts with a joy and confidence that replaces any doubt and fear. You have given us Jesus and have promised us all things necessary for our present and future lives. For all this we praise You! Amen.

*She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?” So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Ruth 1:20-22a*

## True Love Supports Others Amidst the Great Sorrows of Life!

Was Naomi correct in her assessment? Was it indeed the Almighty who had “dealt bitterly” with her? Was it God who brought her “home again empty”? Had God “testified against” and “afflicted” her by taking away her husband and sons? Reminiscent of Job, we do well to simply entrust her situation to the grace and power of God! He is certainly not the author of evil but rather the great Sustainer amidst evil, the faithful Bringer of all that is good!

And so, the LORD God provided Naomi with Ruth; one who quietly and without presumption accompanied Naomi to her former home in Bethlehem. Their arrival caused a stir among the women of that community. Was it...could it be Naomi, who had finally returned home? Amidst her loss and with sorrow, Naomi urged her former friends to no longer call her Naomi, which means “my pleasantness.” Rather, “Call me Mara,” she said, which means “bitter.” Naomi had departed years before accompanied by a loving husband with two young sons in hand but now returned bereft of all three. Death is no respecter of persons, and its icy embrace seeks to freeze the human heart.

True love, however, supports others amidst the great sorrows of life! Ruth remained close to this older woman whose mind had been overcome by the bitterness and negativity of loss. She remained at her side to wipe away the tears, to embrace her with reassuring arms, and to provide those encouraging words we all need to hear when sorrows in life seek to overwhelm us.

Lord God, help us quietly to serve those overcome by the sorrows of this life. With faithfulness, may we support the Naomi's in our lives. Give us patience, endurance, and indeed the true love necessary to fulfill our respective roles and callings. Amen.

*Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.” Ruth 2:2*

## True Love Seeks to Serve and Expend Itself in Service to Others!

“When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” (Deuteronomy 24:19) So wrote Moses, and so our Heavenly Father arranged for the survival and dignity of the less fortunate in Old Testament times. Gleaning was hard work! It was, in fact, backbreaking work, as you bent low to the ground for hours at a time picking up the stalks of mown grain dropped or overlooked by field-hands collecting Bethlehem’s precious harvest.

It was this work to which Ruth, the Moabitess, now turned to keep soul and body together both for herself and for Naomi. It was an act of service—a loving response necessary to meet pressing needs. True love, after all, seeks to serve and expends itself in service to others.

Elimelech, Naomi’s deceased husband, had been a landowner in Bethlehem prior to their departure. The land, presumably, was still there, but there had been no one to sow the seeds during the time of planting. The customary rains, therefore, did not germinate and cause grain to grow—only weeds and an assortment of volunteer plants covered the landscape.

For Ruth and Naomi—their future lay in the hands of providence and anyone in whose sight Ruth might find favor. She was among the “strangers” in Israel as well as being a “widow” of a fellow Israelite. Would anyone notice her plight? Would anyone permit her to work on their land and within their fields? Ruth did not know, but she requested permission first of Naomi, trusting that the God she had come to serve would bless her efforts!

Dear Father in heaven, when needs arise, we pray You would watch over us, move us in love to take advantage of any opportunities You provide for us, and then bless our efforts to help and serve those whose needs have become our own. Amen.

## Weekend Rest Journal — Bonus Devotion

*Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered him, "The LORD bless you." Ruth 2:4*

# True Love is Genuine and Characterizes Every Relationship in Life!

Faith and its fruit, love, can be either genuine and heart-felt or disingenuous and false. The good fruit comes from the good work of the Spirit within a believer's life. The false fruit is the sad consequence of unbelief. When Boaz is first introduced into the narrative of Ruth, he is described as "a relative of Naomi's husband" and "a man of great wealth." (Ruth 2:1) This, of course, leaves his character a matter of speculation, because one's relatives and financial status do not speak to a person's values or viewpoints.

However, the first words out of Boaz's mouth, as he greets his workers out in the field and their response to him in return, speak volumes concerning this man's faith and his character! "The LORD be with you," he said to them, and they responded, "The LORD bless you." Boaz's words and the thoughts which guided them were not immediately directed towards or limited to the business at hand. He did not approach his workers and say, "Well, how is it going today, men? What does the yield look like in this field? When will you be ready to move on?" No, his thoughts were rather on the LORD and the vital role He plays in every person's life. The LORD, after all, is the God of grace and mercy, of promise and providential care. Boaz's thoughts expressed a deep desire for the welfare of his workers and his wish that the LORD would watch over and be with them for their good. The response of his workers suggests the same...a genuine desire that Boaz prosper and receive the blessings that only the LORD's providential care might provide.

This simple conversation speaks well of Boaz and predicts for us his future words and actions which reflect a true love that was both genuine and, as later revealed, characterized every relationship in his life...including his future relationship with Ruth!

**O LORD God, fill our hearts with a genuine faith and love, so that our Christian character will be evident within our lives and will form the basis for our every relationship in life. Amen.**

*Then Boaz said to Ruth, “You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”* Ruth 2:8-9

## True Love Seeks to Protect and Provide for Others!

Boaz was a man of many virtues. Among them were his powers of observation and attention to detail. After his arrival in the field, he called his foreman over and inquired, “Whose young woman is this?” (Ruth 2:5) He had distinguished between Ruth and all other female gleaners and employees, recognizing that she was new. He observed her young age, assuming some sorrow lay in her background--either the loss of parents to care for her, or the premature loss of a husband to provide for her.

When the foreman informed Boaz she was “the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi” (Ruth 2:6), he approached Ruth directly, yet with deference—not demanding but suggesting a course of action, which would safeguard her person and satisfy her needs. True love, after all, seeks to protect and provide for others! Boaz suggested: “You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”

The choice was now Ruth’s. She could accept the gracious offer of protection and provision, or she could seek her fortune elsewhere. Recognizing that the LORD’s hand had guided her to the field of this kind man, Ruth gratefully accepted his most gracious offer!

**Dear Father in heaven, please guide our lives as You guided Ruth to the fields of Boaz. Grant that we, too, might exercise true love as we seek to protect and provide for others as You give us opportunity. Amen.**

*Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." Ruth 2:11-12*

## The Exercise of True Love Leads to a Good Reputation and Personal Blessing!

Solomon once wrote concerning the value of a good reputation: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). What Solomon writes is certainly true, but it is especially true in smaller communities, where it seems that everyone knows everything about their neighbors. This appears to have been the case in ancient Bethlehem!

Boaz had revealed his loving kindness by providing Ruth with protection and seeing to her provision. Here we learn, at least in part, the reasons for that kindness. Boaz had heard about Ruth long before he had met her. Her kindness to her mother-in-law since her husband's death had been reported to Boaz. The fact that she had left her family behind and had come to live with Naomi among a people she did not know had likewise been reported to him. Beyond this, the fact of Ruth's growing trust in the LORD had become evident to all who observed her. She was indeed seeking refuge under the wings of the LORD God of Israel.

Consequently, Boaz blessed the young woman standing before him, praying that the LORD would indeed repay her for her work and grant her a full reward for her faithful service! Indeed, Ruth had exercised true love through her devotion to Naomi. That love led to a good reputation, and that good reputation in turn led to great personal blessing!

O LORD God, please help us always to recognize the importance of our reputations as Your dear children. Grant that we may exercise true love in all our relationships, so that others might see our good works and be led to glorify You as both Savior and Lord. Amen.

*Boaz said to her [Ruth] at mealtime, "Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." Ruth 2:14-16*

## True Love is Generous and Giving in its Dealings with Others

The true measure of a man is best taken by observing his dealings with those of lesser rank and opportunity. Let us observe the measure of Boaz and his further dealings with Ruth. When the morning's work was complete and the time for a midday meal had come, Boaz invited Ruth to join his workers and partake of the food he provided them. Boaz did not need to do this. Landowners often provided food for their employees, but not for the independent gleaners collecting harvest leftovers. Boaz, however, personally invited Ruth to eat and apparently encouraged her not only to satisfy her own needs, but to take enough food to share with Naomi.

After the meal, Boaz issued an unusual two-fold command to his young harvesters. First, "let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her." This violated standard protocol! Gleaners understood that they were never to go into the newly mown grain, where the harvesters were setting up sheaves. Second, the young men were instructed to "let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her," and, once again, they were instructed: "Do not rebuke her!" This was highly unusual!

What explains these exceptions? They are best explained as the fruit of true love! We are not here talking about romantic love, although that eventually arose between Boaz and Ruth. We are rather talking about a true love that is generous and giving in its dealings with others!

**O LORD God, please fill our hearts with a true love that is generous and giving in its dealings with others. May our love reflect Your own love for us, as revealed through the life and death of Jesus. Amen.**

*Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?”* Ruth 3:1

## True Love is Willing to Sacrifice Itself to Secure the Future of Others

Don't rock the boat! That is the attitude that many of us have, when after troubled times, things level off and are going smoothly. Why suggest changes which could disrupt and possibly ruin everything? True love, however, does not think that way. True love is willing to sacrifice itself to secure the future of others, and that is exactly what Naomi was willing to do.

The end of harvest had come. Life had taken on a certain rhythm for both Ruth and Naomi. Ruth spent her days gleaning and was doing well, especially in view of Boaz's generosity. Naomi remained home and had things in good order. Evenings were spent together in quiet harmony. Food stores were no longer tenuous, and their future looked secure and ever so much better than when they first arrived back in Bethlehem. Why, indeed then, rock the boat?

Naomi's words explain her motivation and loving intentions: “Shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?” Indeed, life had improved, for the LORD was ever faithful and kept His promises to provide for them. But Naomi, in love, wanted more for her daughter-in-law. Yes, it might mean sacrificing her new-found security and the company of the one whom she had come to love more than life itself. Yet, Naomi—moved by true love—wanted Ruth to experience the full blessing of marital life once again and perhaps in the future maternal love.

The same LORD, after all, who established the laws of gleaning to assist the disadvantaged, also established the laws of the kinsman-redeemer to maintain the families of Israel. Through one of them the promised Savior would eventually come. And so, Naomi sat her beloved daughter-in-law down and explained how she was about to suggest an action that might separate them in this life for Ruth's blessing in order ultimately to unite them before God in the life to come.

Dear heavenly Father, help us all to make the difficult choices necessary in life that sacrifice ourselves to secure present and future blessings for others. Amen.

*“Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the Lord lives! Lie down until morning.” So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Then he said, “Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”* Ruth 3:12-14

## True Love Both Honors God and Seeks to Uphold the Reputation of Others!

Throughout the narrative of Ruth, Boaz exhibits personal integrity. Nothing, however, reveals that integrity more than his response to Ruth’s request to serve as her kinsman-redeemer. The role of kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament reflects the role of our Savior. The kinsman-redeemer was a restorer of life and family. When a husband died, the kinsman-redeemer would marry the widow. Their first child would be the heir of the deceased husband, thereby restoring life to that family. The kinsman-redeemer had to be related, able, and willing to perform the role.

That Boaz truly loved Ruth and wanted to fulfill the role of kinsman-redeemer for her is self-evident from the storyline. But his response to Ruth’s request demonstrates not only Boaz’s integrity, but also his true love for her, and his even greater love and respect for the LORD.

This was the case because Boaz chose not to ignore God’s laws in pursuit of selfish desire. That law outlined both who and how the kinsman-redeemer was chosen. If Boaz had simply desired Ruth, he could have ignored God’s guidelines and easily compromised her reputation in the eyes of that closer relative. Having done so, he could have taken her for himself. But Boaz neither compromised his faithfulness to God nor put Ruth’s reputation at risk. On the contrary, he took decisive steps to prevent false rumors from arising, while entrusting their future to the LORD. True love both honors God and seeks to uphold the reputation of others!

**O Lord God, help us to demonstrate true love by honoring Your word while upholding the good reputation of others. Amen.**

## Weekend Rest Journal — Bonus Devotion

*Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.”* Ruth 4:13-15

## True Love is Rewarded by God!

Over one-thousand years after Boaz married Ruth, the apostle Paul would write: “Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is the greatest of those virtues, because while both faith and hope are limited to this life, love transcends this life and will last throughout eternity. Because of this, when the Spirit of God moves someone to love—especially to love as he or she has been loved by God—that true love is rewarded by God!

We see this as the story of Ruth concludes. Boaz loved God, and that love led to his love for his neighbors, for his relatives, and ultimately his love for Ruth. God rewarded that love by giving Boaz Ruth as his wife—a partner to share the pleasures and pain of life. Ruth, who likewise came to love God and trust in Him, demonstrated her love for Naomi, her dear mother-in-law and friend. She was rewarded with both a new husband and a son—Obed, the grandfather of David and ancestor of Jesus. And dear Naomi, who in sorrow once suggested she be called by a new name...Mara (bitter), but who was willing to sacrifice her entire future for Ruth, was rewarded with a most blessed future—an honored position within the home of Boaz and Ruth where she was entrusted with the care of her new grandson.

Indeed, love...true love is the greatest of all virtues. It flows from the heart of God to bring blessing to all God’s children in this world. And when it is embraced by faith, it transforms our hearts and lives.

**O LORD God, fill our hearts and lives with Your love. Amen.**

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 5:3

## Sermon on the Mount

Our Savior begins His Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes. These are His declarations of the blessed condition of believers. What a wondrous thing to be numbered among the MAKARIOI (Greek), the blessed ones. (Some refer to the beatitudes as “macarisms.”)

Note the accent over the final “e” in blessed (bless-ed). It is abundantly evident that we are blessed (blest—EULOGETOS), i.e., that God has blessed us. However, Jesus is not speaking of this in the Beatitudes. He is speaking of people on whom He bestows a special status: the blessed ones. These (we) are in a state of spiritual well-being. Whereas, EULOGETOS speaks of what we have received, MAKARIOS speaks of what we are.

The Old Testament, also, speaks of the blessedness of believers. For instance, “Blesséd is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the instruction of Jehovah, and in His instruction he meditates day and night.” (Psalms 1:1,2)

As we journey through the Macarisms, we need to keep this in mind. Some read the Beatitudes as a recounting of what we should try to be. No. This is what Christians are. Moreover, Jesus is assuring us of the marvelous blessings that accompany blessedness. This is not to say that we earn these blessings. It is God’s doing that we are blessed, just as it is His doing that blessedness is crowned with blessings.

As will be seen, each of the Beatitudes is connected with Jesus Christ. Without His work of redemption, the blessed state could not exist. Therefore, we begin by giving thanks to Jesus for freeing us from our former wretched state and bringing us into this blessed state.

**Blesséd are the sons of God,  
They are bought 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! AMEN!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 391:1

*“Blesséd are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 5:3

## Poor

When people hear the word, “poor,” most think about money. Religious people who think this way have a religious, double vision. They mix the spiritual and the material. They want to take Jesus and turn His message into a social gospel (caring for the body, but not the soul). Jesus was sent to earth not to make us materially rich. He did not start a housing program for the poor. He made no attempt to change the Roman government. That little baby in Bethlehem came to save us from something quite different.

“Blesséd are the poor IN SPIRIT.” The poverty is spiritual. The poor in spirit are those who say, “I am nothing. I have nothing to lay before God but my sins.” Such people have a high standing before God, who says, “On this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Is. 66:2) The contrite humble themselves and exalt God. They are saying, “You, O God, are right. I am wrong.” This is what King David said: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.” (Ps. 51:4)

What, then, makes us blesséd? We are blesséd, not because of our poverty, but because of what God has linked to this status. We are blesséd, because “theirs [ours] is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus says that ours IS the kingdom of heaven, not that it will be. The kingdom of heaven is ours now: a kingdom in which we have forgiveness, salvation, righteousness, and glory. These gifts come down from heaven and ultimately bring us to heaven. Even now the kingdom belongs to us, who sorrow over our sins and tremble with excitement over the Gospel of forgiveness. Even now we enjoy the riches of Christ, but there is more to come, so much, much more ... beyond our wildest imaginations and it is ours.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

The Lutheran Hymnal 388:4

*“Blesséd are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

Matthew 5:4

## Mourn

There are many causes for sadness. Perhaps, most can be described with one word: loss. The loss of a loved one, of property, of a job, of good health or a limb ... etc.

Reducing all losses to their basic cause, we are left with SIN. This too is a loss: the loss of righteousness and holiness ... the loss of a loving relationship with God ... the loss of peace ... the loss of eternal life. In addition are the losses which are consequences of sin.

It is the consequences that are of concern to unbelievers. Refusing to acknowledge the disease, they deal only with the symptoms. “Doctor, give me something to make my pain go away.” Or, they go to a psychiatrist, “Help me to overcome my depression.” Or, they turn to intoxicating substances.

As for us, we go to the great Physician of the soul and ask for the cure, not for some mind-numbing drug, which might remove the agony of guilt while allowing us to continue sinning. We go for the cure. Blesséd are we, for we will be comforted. “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’” (Is. 57:15) And, what does He say? “The blood of Jesus Christ, My Son cleanses you from all sin.” (1 Jn. 1:7) Truly, “Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Cor. 7:10) What a singular distinction God has given to us! We have a preeminent status as those in whom God has worked “godly sorrow.”

As for the consequences of sin, we know that these are only symptoms, which draw our attention to the disease. Therefore, we mourn and repent of the sins, while humbly enduring the earthly consequences, for we know that, thanks to Jesus, we will never endure the eternal consequences.

Praise be to God, who through His Spirit has numbered us among the blesséd ones.

**Lord, grant that we, who mourn, will be comforted and numbered among the blesséd. Amen**

*“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”*

Matthew 5:5

## Meek

So easily, Jesus could have avoided sorrow and suffering. He could have rallied twelve legions of angels and destroyed His enemies. Actually, it took only a word in Gethsemane. “I am He,” He said, and all His enemies fell over, as if swept down by an invisible hand.

However, instead of attacking on a mighty, war horse, He mounted on a young donkey and went to meet those who would kill Him. He meekly allowed these enemies to abuse Him, falsely convict Him, and nail Him to a cross. “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth ... For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.” (Isaiah 53:7,9) Let the shame come; He would endure in silence. Let the injustice come; He would endure. Let the cross come; He would endure. Let the agony of hell come; He would endure.

Meekness is the strength to humbly endure suffering without complaint and without striking back. It takes strength to say, “God, You are control. I know that what You are doing is for my eternal welfare. I will quietly accept what You lay upon me.”

The world thinks, “Blesséd are the aggressive, for they will own world.” However, God reveals that this exalted status belongs to the meek. Blesséd are you, brothers and sisters of Christ. The earth is not going to end up in the hands of the aggressive, but in the hands of the meek ... in your hands. Wait and see. It will come to pass. Do not be fooled by outward appearances. There is a greater power at work and a greater plan. Wait in patience and in meekness.

“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth... Wait on the LORD, And keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.” (Psalm 37:8,9,34)

**Dear Father, favor us with Your presence and show us the pathway of meekness. Amen.**

*“Blesséd are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”* Matthew 5:6

## Hunger and Thirst

Most people can sense physical hunger and thirst and they know how to satisfy it. Go to the source of food and drink. In addition, they hunger for recognition, power, riches, sex, and temporal knowledge and are not averse to using wickedness to satisfy their craving.

However, when God’s Son came down to earth, He did not try to obtain such things for Himself or for us. The objective of His earthly life was to be righteous by the keeping of God’s Law. From Bethlehem to Calvary, He was perfectly obedient, fulfilling all the laws of God. Of all the people on earth, He alone achieved perfect righteousness.

Can we attain such a status? If so, God will declare us to be blesséd. However, if not, He proclaims us curséd. What an eternally wretched status that would be! Yet, this is what we have earned for ourselves by our sinfulness. Far from attaining the status of a righteous one, we fell to the infamy of complete unrighteousness.

It is in response to this that God, out of infinite love, sent His Son into the world. Jesus of Nazareth came to achieve for us what we failed to achieve for ourselves. Since He was our substitute under the Law, the fulness of His righteousness has been counted to our credit.

God’s blesséd ones (us) hunger and thirst for righteousness, but not a righteousness of our own. Our craving can be satisfied only by Jesus. As we confess our sins and seek forgiveness ... as we read the Bible and go to church, we are filled. “Filled,” Jesus says. There is no emptiness left in our hearts. We need to add nothing, for if we try, we replace His righteousness for our “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

**Praise be to You, O God, for continually satisfying our hunger and thirst with the Bread and Water of Life (John 6:35; 4:13). Amen.**

## Weekend Rest Journal — Bonus Devotion

*“Blesséd are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”*

Matthew 5:7

# Merciful

A few years back, a high school bulletin dedicated a space to “shining lights” on campus. This space recorded random acts of kindness shown by students. They are random because they are spontaneous, “done without method or conscious decision.” Mercy is a fruit of the Spirit, which functions almost instinctively.

The merciful Christian is not a “boy scout” looking for a good deed to do; the good deed is “looking for him.” When they meet, there is a reflexive act of mercy. There is no, “Should I or shouldn’t I?” Mercy jumps into action.

Look at Jesus. When the sick and suffering cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us,” Jesus immediately responded. Of course, the greatest act of mercy is found in His sacrificial love. He was “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)

As is the Master, so are the servants. Blesséd are you merciful ones. When you see someone in distress, you are moved to help. You don’t merely feel mercy; you show mercy. Truly, this is a blessed condition. Being merciful is a status that ranks us alongside God Himself. “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

The blessedness of the merciful is further revealed, when Jesus proclaims, “they shall obtain mercy.” Those, who show mercy, receive mercy. This frequently happens when God is merciful to us in things of this world. “He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given. (Proverbs 19:17)

A much greater mercy is displayed on Calvary, where Jesus took our sins and punishment on Himself. “Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.” (Micah 7:18)

Let us pray: blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Amen. (Prayer from 1 Peter 1:3)

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

Matthew 5:8

## Pure in Heart

Among the Greeks, the word MAKARIOS was used to describe those who had risen to an enviable position in life. It is the rich, the powerful, and the famous who were considered to be MAKARIOS.

However, Jesus took this term and turned it on its head. He says that the MAKARIOI (pl.) are those who are poor, sad, meek, and merciful. These have achieved the most enviable position before God. Now, Jesus adds one more superior characteristic: purity of heart.

When we look at ourselves through the lens of the Law of God, we see impurities abounding in a frightening way. Then, our hearts condemn us. However, “if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (1 John 3:20).

He knows every sin, but, instead of condemning us, He says, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Now, looking through the lens of the Gospel, we see that our hearts have been purified in the blood of the Son of God. So, yes, we are the pure in heart. The inner voice that condemns us is repeatedly silenced by the words of the Gospel: «Your sins are forgiven.» The blood of Jesus is a constant, ongoing cleansing agent embedded in our hearts. Through faith, Christ maintains a pure heart within us.

“Blesséd are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Here is the guaranteed outcome for the pure in heart. We will stand on the crystal clear courtyard in front of His exalted throne and gaze upon the dazzling glory of the Most High God. The sight will not kill us. It will thrill us, and we will share in that glory. What a blessed standing we have before our God.

**We are rich, for He was poor;  
Is not this a wonder?  
Therefore praise God evermore  
Here on earth and yonder.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 97:3

*“Blesséd are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

Matthew 5:8

## Pure in Heart

Among the Greeks, the word MAKARIOS was used to describe people who had achieved an enviable position in life. Status was usually measured in terms of money, power, prestige, or fame. Jesus, however, gave the term makarios to those who are poor, sad, meek, merciful, and peaceable. They have the highest standing before God: blesséd. To these qualities, Jesus now adds purity of heart.

Where are you on the purity scale? Looking through the lens of the Law of God, we see impurities abounding, and the Law condemns us. However, looking through the lens of the Gospel, we see that Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might...“purify for Himself His own special people” (Titus 2:14). Therefore, with joy we confess that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The condemning voice of the Law is repeatedly put to silence by the Gospel of forgiveness.

However, if we are pure in heart, why do sins arise so easily? It is because of the constant conflict between our Old Adam and our New Man. “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:17 ESV). The Old Adam is bent on hate, while the New Man is committed to love. More than that, the New Man trusts that the blood of Jesus is an ongoing cleansing agent within our hearts. Thus, purity of heart is maintained.

Just how blesséd are we? “Blesséd are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Here is the guaranteed outcome for the pure in heart: we will see God. Standing on the crystal clear courtyard in front of His exalted throne, we will gaze upon the wondrous glory of the Most High God and even share in that glory. “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Lord Jesus, purify our hearts by Your Spirit that we may glorify You in our lives, Amen.

*“Blesséd are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* Matthew 5:9

## Peacemakers

Fighting; warfare; violence on the streets; assassinations; school shootings; turmoil; death. Even in the wombs of mothers, there is violence. 1,032,100 babies were killed in 2023.

So, what are you going to do about it? “Who? Me? What can I do?” Actually, you are doing it, for Jesus is talking about you when He says, “Blesséd are the peacemakers.” Self-analysis might lead you to doubt this. Sins do not define a Christian. At heart, Christians are peacemakers.

This begins at the baptismal font, where God made peace with us. This couldn’t have happened if it were not for the Prince of Peace. God’s own Son became man and stepped into the world filled with conflict with God and with each other. It began in Eden, where Adam blamed Eve and God for his own sin. Ever since, people have been blaming God and each other for their own failures.

In spite of this (or because of it), the God of peace rushed in to make peace. The Seed of the woman would crush Satan and deliver the rebels. Four thousand years later on Calvary, the Prince of Peace endured our punishment, thereby satisfying the just anger of God (propitiation). God has been pacified.

“Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!” (Nahum 1:15) From Christ’s empty tomb, the Gospel of peace went out into all the world. Even at this moment, peace is being proclaimed to you, the reader. Moreover, it is not a passive proclamation. It is an active, powerful message, reaching into and transforming you, creating faith in your heart.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1) Faith makes this peace ours. All is well between God and us. Nothing more needs to be added. So it is that we begin our trek along the only way of peace, which leads us to eternal peace.

“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.” Amen.  
(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

*“Blesséd are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* Matthew 5:9

## Peacemakers

In the previous devotion, we saw how God took troublemakers like us and transformed us into peacemakers. This began when the Prince of Peace pacified the righteous anger of God. Then He sent out the Gospel of peace by which the Holy Spirit filled our hearts with peace.

Thus we began our trek along the only way of peace. It is on this journey that the blesséd show themselves to be peacemakers. Peace cannot be contained. Peter and John said, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Jeremiah (20:9) explained: “His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.” Peace within must come out. It is a way of life.

Sharing our Prince of Peace with others is the ultimate way to make peace. Those who believe will rejoice to learn that they are at peace with God. They join us on the trek to eternal peace. Such peacemakers we are as we talk about Jesus with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. In addition, we can spread peace throughout the world by praying for and supporting pastors, missionaries, and mission helpers, so they can carry the peace of God where we cannot.

Peacemaking also shows itself in an earthly sense. Paul writes, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans.12:18). How can we enjoy or share the peace of God, if we are engaged in conflict with one another? Therefore, we do what we can to resolve conflicts and live peaceably with others.

Just as God is the great Peacemaker, so are His children. So Jesus says, “For they shall be called sons of God.” We may be so called by other believers. Even unbelievers can see that followers of the Prince of Peace are themselves peacemakers. Above all, God calls us His sons. Where the Father is, there the sons will be gathered together. What blessédness is ours.

**May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.**

*“Blesséd are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 5:10

## Persecuted

How would you like to be highly regarded because you are the richest person in the world, or the most powerful, or the smartest, or the most attractive? On the other hand, how would you like to be an outcast, one who is regarded as weak, unpopular, or ignorant? How would you like to be persecuted, just because you are different from most people?

Welcome to Christianity. True Christians are seen as an impediment to the world’s attempt to grab fame and fortune, power and prestige, beauty and brilliance. The humble, selfless, righteous lifestyle of Christians is a living accusation against their pride, selfishness, and unrighteousness.

Therefore, the world goes on the attack in an effort to silence us. More than that, it is an attack on “the Lord our Righteousness.” It is because we faithfully follow Christ that we are persecuted.

Before you cringe in fear, however, listen to Jesus’ final and longest beatitude. “Blesséd are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

People are willing to suffer if it is worth it. Athletes are willing to suffer injury. Patients are willing to endure the surgeon’s knife. Ice fishermen are willing to endure the freezing cold. They all believe that it is worth it. It is not the pain of the moment, but the glory of the outcome.

What is the outcome for those who are persecuted? “Yours is the kingdom of heaven...great is your reward in heaven.” The victory, the healing, the fish. These are only temporary, but the outcome for those persecuted for Jesus’ sake is eternal: the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, enduring persecution does not earn us a place in heaven. Christ earned this for us. He cleansed us from all our sins in His own blood and clothed us in His righteousness. He endured hell so that we will enjoy heaven.

Therefore, “blesséd are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”

**Lord God, keep us steadfast in the midst of persecution for  
Jesus’ sake, Amen.**



*Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over. 2 Kings 2:14*

## The God of Salvation

The name Elisha means "My God saves." Grammatically, you could almost say it means "My God is Jesus." And theologically, that's exactly what it means.

Elisha was God's hand-picked successor to Elijah. As Elijah was preparing to go to heaven, he offered Elisha a boon. Elisha asked, "For a double portion of your Spirit." Elijah told him, "If you see me when I go up to heaven then you will know that God has given it to you."

And boy did Elisha see—Elijah went up to heaven in a chariot, and Elisha cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen."

Elisha knew his prayer was answered. When he crossed back over the Jordan, he struck the waters with Elijah's cloak and cried, "Where is the God of Elijah?" And the waters parted.

The point was clear to him and to all. Elijah was gone but Elijah's God, the true God, the Yahweh God and Savior remained.

Many years later, the same point was made. Jesus, whose name means "Yahweh saves" had fulfilled His name. He who is the only true God, had made the only sacrifice for sin, and had Himself conquered death and hell. Jesus, the resurrection and the life, ascended into heaven, and His disciples saw Him as He went riding the clouds as His chariot.

The point was again the same. The Spirit was to be poured out. God had not left His Church alone. Where is the God of Elijah? He is riding the clouds of heaven. He is pouring out His Spirit on His Church. He is preaching His mighty Word. He is coming again soon.

**Now our heav'nly Aaron enters With His blood within the veil;  
Joshua now is come to Canaan, And the kings before Him quail.  
Now He plants the tribes of Israel In their promised resting place;  
Now our great Elijah offers Double portion of His grace.**

Lutheran Service Book 494:4

*And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." 2 Kings 5:10*

## The God of Humble Means

When the Syrian general Naaman was struck with leprosy, he heard from his Israelite slave girl that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure him. So, he came down and demanded that the king of Israel heal him. The king was upset saying, "Am I God to kill and to make alive?" But Elisha heard of it and told the king to send Naaman to him.

When Naaman came, Elisha sent his servant to say "Wash in the Jordan river seven times and you will be cleansed." Naaman was angry. It seemed ridiculous. He said he figured Elisha would come out and "call on the name of the LORD his God and wave his hand over the place." What seems to have offended Naaman was the humble means. There didn't seem anything special to him about the muddy Jordan river. But his servants pointed out that the promise Elisha had made was a "great word." That is, it was a great promise! Why pass it up?

So Naaman went and washed and was cleansed.

This is not a baptism. However, the parallels are impossible to ignore. And the biggest parallel is this—where is the God of Elijah? He was in the water. And so He is in baptism. There was nothing special about the Jordan. And there is nothing special about the water in the font in church. What is special is the promise. Might your flesh be offended at the seeming silliness of it? "What, I just dip in this water and I'm cleansed? How does that work?" But, give heed to Naaman's servant's, "It is a great word he has spoken. Will you not do it?"

Your command is clear and plain,  
 And we would obey it duly: "You must all be born again,  
 Heart and life renewing truly, Born of water and the Spirit,  
 And My kingdom thus inherit."

Lutheran Service Book 592:2

*So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 2 Kings 6:16*

## The God of Heavenly Hosts

Once, the King of Syria thought he had a spy. Every time he went to attack Israel, Israel knew ahead of time where the attack would be. A servant told him, "It isn't a rat! It's a prophet!" Indeed, the prophet Elisha had been giving the King of Israel inside intel from God about where and how Syria would attack.

So, the King of Syria sent his armies after one prophet and his servant. They were in the city of Dothan at the time. The armies came by night and surrounded the city. When Elisha's servant saw it, he was terrified. But Elisha was unbothered. He said, "Those with us are more than those who are with them." Then he prayed for God to open the servant's eyes that he might see - and he did. "And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Elisha had been right, and those angelic warriors were far better than anything Syria had.

No blood was shed that day. Elisha instead prayed for God to blind the Syrian army. Elisha led them to the King of Israel, asked the Lord to open their eyes, and instructed that they be fed a great feast and sent home.

The God of Elijah is the Lord God of Sabbaoth - that is, the God of armies. This God could send forth His heavenly armies to destroy all who oppose Him. Yet, He does something so much greater. He makes peace. As when He came as a man to suffer and die, He let Himself be arrested. Instead of calling twelve legions of angels to fight, He healed His enemy's ear and He died to save the world.

Who is this that comes in glory  
 With the trump of jubilee?  
 Lord of battles, God of armies,  
 He has gained the victory.  
 He who on the cross did suffer,  
 He who from the grave arose,  
 He has vanquished sin and Satan;  
 He by death has crushed His foes.

*And the man of God was angry with him, and said, “You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times.” 2 Kings 13:19*

## The God of Persistent Prayer

When Elisha was about to die, King Joash of Israel (a wicked king) came to him weeping, “My Father, My Father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” Perhaps he was asking for a boon from Elisha as Elijah had given to Elisha. Elisha told Joash to take a bow and arrow and shoot. When he did, Elisha cried, “The LORD’s arrow of victory!” Then he told Joash to take a bundle of arrows and strike the ground with them. Joash struck the ground three times and stopped. But Elisha was angry because he only struck the ground three times. He told him, “You should have struck the ground five or six times for then the Lord would have given you victory over Syria until you made an end of it.”

What Elisha, and more importantly, Elisha’s God was encouraging was boldness and persistence in prayer. Elisha had made a bold request when asking for Elijah’s spirit. Joash’s three strikes were not as bold. Jesus similarly encourages boldness and persistence in prayer. “Ask and you shall receive!” (Matthew 7:7) “Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give you!” (John 16:23). Luke 18, “they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

Are you likewise bold in prayer? Or do you forget that it is the God of Elijah, Who has conquered, Who has ascended, Who bids you pray and promises to hear you? Do you ever strike once, twice, or thrice and then quit? Do you lose heart?

Instead, cry again, “Where is the God of Elijah” and dare to pray for big things. Pray and shoot the Lord’s arrow boldly! Pray “greedily” for all of the gifts of the Spirit!

Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring,  
For his grace and pow’r are such,  
None can ever ask too much.

Lutheran Service Book 779:2

*So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet. 2 Kings 13:21*

## The God of Resurrection

This wasn't the first time Elisha had raised someone from the dead (see 2 Kings 4). But it is the first time that a dead man raised someone from death. It's incredible, when the dead body touched Elisha's bones, that dead body came to life!

Of course, this shows that it isn't Elisha who raised him just as it wasn't Elisha all along doing the miracles. It has ever been the same God of Elijah who was with Elisha - the God who raises the dead. The God who became man and willingly chose death so that through death He might destroy death and life might reign in and over death.

It is as if Jesus being buried in the grave has touched the dead bones of all who ever died. And like the man thrown into Elisha's grave, all will again spring to life. For the scriptures say, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

So, for you who have been bound to Jesus in baptism, you shall live in joy eternal! Wherever and whenever you are buried, in the grave you will find not death and decay and fear but Jesus' empty grave and Jesus' eternal life just as surely as Elisha will. For where is the God of Elijah? He was buried in a tomb, but He is not there since He lives. And that means He is with you, and you will be with Him forever!

**Weeping, be gone; Sorrow, be silent:**

**Death put asunder, and Easter is bright.**

**Cherubim sing: "O grave, be open!"**

**Clothe us in wonder, adorn us in light.**

**Jesus is risen and we shall arise,**

**give God the glory, Alleluia!**

Lutheran Service Book 474:4



*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

2 Corinthians 5:17

## A Fresh Start

It's back-to-school season once again. At the beginning of the school year, everything is possible. Every student has the opportunity to get all As, be a star of their chosen sport, or the most popular student. Each lecture or classroom activity is planned to go perfectly. Soon enough, though, teachers, students, and staff discover that this will not be the perfect school year after all. Students will struggle in class, not understanding particular concepts or assignments, and teachers will struggle with keeping up with preparation, or grading, or classroom management. Before we know it, the school year we were so anxious to begin becomes a semester that we can't wait for to end. Why is this?

We all know the true cause of all these problems: sin. Because of the fall into sin, we live in an imperfect world. We need look no further than our own lives for the devastating impact of sin. Just as we start every school year with the potential of perfection that is immediately crushed, so we begin each day with intentions to live as better Christians only to find that we fail instantly and often. As Paul writes, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." (Romans 7:19-20)

So, what do we do? If we take the humanistic solution, we would rely on ourselves to figure out a way to improve, perhaps trying to apply some self-help advice. We know, though, that this won't work because as humans, we are all sinful: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Instead, we need to look for our solutions in the Word of God. In that Word, we find the pure gospel message of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Even though we sin daily, Christ's death has paid for our sins, and we now stand before God fully justified and saved.

**Heavenly Father, whenever we begin a new year or new day, let us be reminded that though we are sinful, Your mercies are new every day. Amen.**

*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. . . . And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.* 1 Corinthians 2:2, 4-5

## A Real-World Education

One of the criticisms of a Christian education—whether home school or Christian day school—is that it shelters students from the “real-world.” The argument is that when students graduate from a Christian school, they are not prepared to take on all the challenges of further education or a secular career or even interact on an equal intellectual and social level with their non-Christian peers.

Though those with a Christian education can and do thrive in these areas, the real point is what constitutes the so-called “real-world” and what prepares people best for it. One reality of our world is that we were born in sin and continue to sin daily. We just need to examine our own sinful lives to see how we do not live up to God’s Holy Law, summarized for us in the Ten Commandments. The other reality we are faced with is death: “The soul who sins shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:20) Until Judgment Day arrives, nobody born will escape death.

A Christian Education—that is, an education centered in God’s Word—does not focus “on the wisdom of men but in the power of God” and thus emphasizes the two biggest problems we will encounter in this life—sin and death—and provides the solution to them. This solution is expressed in the simple Gospel message: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Thus, a Christian education provides the proper preparation for this life, the so-called “real-world,” as well as for eternal life afterwards. Indeed, recognizing the death is not the end of our lives puts our lives here on earth in the proper perspective.

**Lord God, as the world heads back to school, let us return to your gospel message of forgiveness. Amen.**

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 NIV*

## Where Does Christian Education Take Place?

As teachers and parents know, during the first few weeks of school, students are a little rusty. Over the summer, most students are not involved in formal schooling and may forget some of the things they learned over the past school year. This time of year, then, can serve as a good reminder for us about what the Bible says about where and when Christian education should take place.

While it may be easy for parents to outsource religious education to their church (Sunday School) and their Christian day school, the Bible clearly places the privilege and responsibility of teaching God's Word to children on parents. As we can see from our text, education in God's Word is to be provided at home and at all times. Our Bibles should not be tucked away all week, only to be taken out for church on Sundays; instead, God's Word should be a constant topic of conversation and instruction. Children are gifts from God lent to parents, whose responsibility it is to care for them. While we want to provide for all our children's needs, their greatest need is to hear and believe the good news of salvation through Christ Jesus.

Such a responsibility, of course, can appear daunting to parents. They should be comforted by the fact it is not their teaching skills that makes the difference. Instead, the Holy Spirit works faith through the words of Scripture itself. Parents can prepare themselves as teachers of the Word through prayer and their own study of the Bible. Luther's Catechism, which was written for fathers to instruct their families, is also a wonderful place to start in learning (or reviewing) the wonderful truths revealed in the Bible. Home devotions and hymn singing also provide precious time together in God's Word. And, finally, spontaneous conversations and real-life lessons provide constant opportunity to share Scripture.

**Heavenly Father, we pray for the knowledge, ability, and desire to share Your saving Word at all times in all places. Amen.**

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20*

## Who Is Responsible for Christian Education?

In yesterday’s devotion, we looked at how God places responsibility on parents for their children’s education in God’s Word. However, if we look at the most basic definition of Christian education—teaching others about Christ—we can see from our text that all Christians have the great responsibility and wonderful privilege of sharing God’s message of salvation with others. Jesus encourages not only His disciples but all of us to share His Word with “all the nations . . . teaching them observe all things that I have commanded you.” We Christians, then, are the teachers, and the world is our classroom.

Many of us, though, may feel unqualified to teach God’s Word to others. Isn’t that the job of well-trained pastors and teachers? How will I come up with the right thing to say? What if I say something wrong? Fortunately, God gives us examples in the Bible of teachers who would seem unqualified to themselves or to their contemporaries. For instance, Moses, the great leader of the children of Israel, did not feel qualified for his position because of his ability to speak. Also, the very disciples that Jesus is speaking to in our text were not well-educated scholars but men of humble “blue-collar” backgrounds.

So, where do we get the confidence to become Christian educators, ready to teach God’s Word to all people at all times and in all places? We have to recognize that it is the Holy Spirit that converts people to faith through God’s Word, not through our own eloquence or skill. Furthermore, while we can and should prepare ourselves by studying God’s Word on our own and taking advantage of learning opportunities in church and Bible classes, God will also provide us the words: “for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matthew 10:20).

**Jesus, please provide us the confidence and knowledge to share the gospel with all. Amen.**

*But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:14-15*

## A Christian Education Checkup

When oxygen masks are deployed on airplanes, passengers are supposed to put on their own mask first before helping children or others. While this may appear selfish, getting one's own mask on enables a person to be lucid enough to help others. While our previous two devotions have focused on imparting Christian education to others, we should not neglect first getting the necessary "oxygen" from God's Word so that we are ready bring that life-giving power to others. Whether or not we are still in school, this time of year can provide us another attempt at what psychologists call a "fresh start date" (like the new year or a birthday), which provides a time to reflect and restart. How are you doing on your own Christian education?

A temptation that Christians can have is the feeling that we already know everything. Why go to church or Bible class? Haven't we heard all the same stories over and over again? Why continue to read the Bible on our own or study the catechism? Dr. Martin Luther, the learned theologian, provides a good example. He wrote about the catechism: "I must still read and study daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and am glad so to remain." We are never too old to memorize, recite, and meditate on the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostle's Creed and to study the Bible.

As we continue into the fall, let us use the idea of back-to-school to redirect our lives back to the Bible and its teachings. Though we will fail on this earth to achieve a perfect understanding of the Bible, may we ask God for forgiveness in neglecting His Word and for the desire to dwell in it daily.

Heavenly Father, direct our hearts and minds to the study of Your Holy Word, so that we may grow in faith. Amen.



*Noah did everything just as God commanded him.*

Genesis 6:22 NIV

## Obedience in the Face of Uncertainty

When God told Noah to build an ark, the command must have sounded strange. There had never been a flood like the one God described. Yet Noah obeyed. He trusted God's word and acted on it, even when the outcome was unseen along with peer pressure and ridicule all around him. The flood was God's judgment on a world hardened in sin. Noah "retained the true worship of God" and lived in reverent fear while others mocked him. Martin Luther imagined Noah enduring ridicule like: "Art thou alone wise? Shall we all be damned?"

Obedience is often tested in seasons of uncertainty. We want clarity before commitment, but faith calls us to trust even when the path is unclear. Noah's obedience preserved life and fulfilled God's plan. This reminds us that obedience is not about understanding every detail; it's about trusting the One who does.

Jesus perfectly modeled this kind of obedience. Philippians 2:8 says Jesus "became obedient to death—even death on a cross." His obedience secured salvation for all. When we struggle to obey, we look to Christ, who obeyed fully for us and now empowers us through His Spirit.

Today, God may be asking you to take a step that feels risky—sharing your faith, forgiving someone, or making a decision that stretches your comfort zone. Like Noah, you may not have all the answers. However, obedience opens the door for God's blessing. Thankfully, because of Jesus, we obey not to earn God's favor but because we already have it in Jesus.

**Lord Jesus, thank You for Your perfect obedience. Help me follow Your example and trust Your wisdom over mine. Amen.**

*Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.* Genesis 6:9 NIV

## Righteousness in a Corrupt World

As stated yesterday, Noah lived in a world where corruption and violence were rampant. Scripture says that every thought of humanity was evil all the time (Genesis 6:5). Noah's isolation was a severe trial for his faith, as he believed God's promise of grace amid universal wickedness. Yet Noah stood out—not because he was flawless, but because he walked faithfully with God. His righteousness was rooted in faith, not his own perfection. Luther even called Noah “the martyr of martyrs,” because his long obedience and preaching met with scorn rather than repentance.

The Lord warned that the old world's destruction is a lesson for the present age: when pride and lust dominate, judgment follows. The same is true for us. We live in a culture that often celebrates compromise and self-interest. It's easy to blend in, but righteousness calls us to stand out. Like Noah, we are invited to live differently—not by our own strength, but by God's grace.

Here is the good news: Jesus is our righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” We cannot earn righteousness; we have it through faith in Christ. When we trust Christ Jesus, His perfect record becomes ours. That truth frees us from striving and empowers us to live boldly for God in a broken world.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus, who is my righteousness. Grant that the Holy Spirit help me to walk faithfully with You and reflect Your character in a world that needs Your light. Amen.

*He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark.* Genesis 8:10 NIV

## Patience in God's Timing

Life on the ark during the flood was cramped and challenging, filled with animals and uncertainty. Noah may have felt abandoned at times but trusted in God's timing.

Once the floodwaters began to recede, Noah did not rush out of the ark. He waited for God's direction. Even after sending out a dove and seeing signs of dry land, Noah stayed put until God said, "Come out." That kind of patience is rare—and powerful.

Waiting is one of the hardest disciplines of faith. We live in a world that prizes speed and instant results, but God often works through seasons of waiting to shape our character. Noah's patience not only preserved his family, it honored God's timing.

Jesus also modeled perfect patience. He waited for the Father's timing in everything—from the start of His ministry to the cross and even His impending return. Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son." God's timing is never random; it is always purposeful. Jesus trusted His Father completely, even when the path led to suffering, because He knew the plan was perfect.

When you grow impatient, look to Christ. His patience secured our salvation, and His Spirit empowers us to wait with hope. Waiting does not mean doing nothing. It means actively trusting that God knows what is best. Like Noah, we can rest in the assurance that God's timing will never fail.

**Lord, teach me to wait on You. Thank You for Jesus, who trusted Your timing perfectly. Help me rest in Your plan and resist the urge to rush ahead on my own. Amen.**

*Then Noah built an altar to the Lord.* Genesis 8:20

## Worship After Deliverance

After months of confinement in the ark and witnessing the destruction of the earth, Noah's first act upon stepping onto dry ground was worship. He did not rush to build a house or plant crops. He built an altar. Gratitude was his priority. By starting with worship, Noah reminds us that life must originate with God's Word and reverence.

This moment is powerful because it shows Noah's heart. He recognized that his survival was not his achievement. It was God's mercy. Worship was his response to deliverance. Too often, when God answers our prayers or brings us through trials, we move on quickly without pausing to give thanks. We celebrate the blessing but forget the One who gave it.

Noah teaches us that worship should be our first response, not our last thought. When God provides, protects, or restores, He deserves more than a passing "thank you." He deserves purposeful praise.

Jesus is the ultimate reason for our worship. Through His death and resurrection, He delivered us from sin and eternal separation from God. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise." Our worship flows from the cross—where mercy triumphed over judgment.

Think about your own life. Has God brought you through a storm—physical, emotional, or spiritual? Have you seen His hand in your family, your health, or your work? Do not let gratitude fade into routine. Offer praise today. It might be a prayer, a song, or even a journal entry—but make it intentional and Christ-centered.

**Lord, thank You for Jesus, my ultimate deliverer. Help me never take Your blessings for granted. Teach me to worship You first and fully. Amen.**

*“I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”* Genesis 9:13 NIV

## Covenant Keeper

After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah—a promise that He would never again destroy the earth by water. To seal this covenant, God placed a rainbow in the sky as a visible reminder of His faithfulness. Luther notes that God’s acceptance of Noah’s offering and His promise never again to destroy the earth by flood (Genesis 8:21–22) were signs of divine favor. This was not just a promise for Noah; it is for all generations.

God’s covenant reveals His character. He is faithful, trustworthy, and unchanging. Even when humanity fails, God keeps His word. The rainbow reminds us that His mercy triumphs over judgment and that His promises endure forever.

The rainbow also points to something greater—the new covenant in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 8:6 says, “But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises.” By His death and resurrection, Jesus secured an eternal covenant of grace for all. Unlike the rainbow, a sign for our earthly life, the cross is the ultimate sign of God’s promise of forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life.

When storms and trials in this world come, remember this: God’s faithfulness is not seasonal; it is eternal. No matter the challenges we may face, His promises remain secure in Christ. The rainbow reminds us of mercy after judgment, and the cross reminds us of mercy instead of judgment.

Lord, thank You for being a covenant-keeping God. Thank You for Jesus, who sealed the new covenant with His blood. Help me trust Your promises when life feels uncertain. Amen.



*“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”* Matthew 7:24-25

## Solid Ground

There is a church in Marquette, Michigan, which is built on a hillside. Across the street, slabs of stone erupt out of the mossy ground. The bedrock, which the city is built upon, makes above-ground appearances throughout the city. There is even a rumor that the church’s foundation rests on the bedrock of the hillside. With such a secure foundation, the church will likely never have issues with settling or shifting foundations.

As immovable, unshakable, and rock solid as the physical foundation of this church is; the spiritual foundation of those who make up its part in the Holy Christian Church is even greater. Built on the rock of Jesus Christ, their foundation is truly immovable, unshakable, and rock solid. Bedrock can be moved through the effort of man with pickaxes and jackhammers, but Christ’s grace remains immovable even by those who try to limit or change it. Bedrock can be shaken by earthquakes and other natural phenomena, but God’s promises are unshakable in the face of natural calamities or other storms in life. Bedrock can even be ground down to sand with enough time and patience or brute force, but Christ’s love for His Church does not wear away with the passing of time or the brutish consequences of His followers’ sins.

Christ is truly the foundation every person needs in their life, and He, Himself, is the bedrock upon which He builds His church. Therefore, no storm of life can wash away His guiding and guarding presence.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said  
Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

The Lutheran Hymnal 427:1

*“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20*

## Unwinnable?

Most games are made to be won. Chutes and Ladders would be no fun if no one ever made it to the top. Sorry and Trouble have “home spaces” where you are safe from getting knocked back to the start, because who would want to play a game where you never win, but rather endlessly go around a board until you decide to quit. Even the Hasbro “Game of Life” ends with a winner after everyone finishes their forty-five to sixty minute “life” around the board.

If life were a game, then heaven would certainly be the “home space” where you are finally safe from losing. But how do you get there? Jesus describes how difficult it is to enter the “home space” of heaven in Matthew 5:20. The outward righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was something people of Jesus’ time considered unsurpassable. Today, still, the highest levels of outward righteousness fall far short of the righteousness required to enter heaven. So if life were a game, it would be unwinnable on your own.

However, you are not on your own. If life were a game, then you have the greatest teammate to ever play the game. Jesus, your Savior, played the game with a level of righteousness that cannot be improved upon. What’s more, is that He gives you this righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, so that you can enter the “home space” of heaven, and win what was unwinnable on your own.

Life is no game. There are no repeats, saved games, or retries. But Jesus didn’t need any of those, and you don’t either since Jesus, the ultimate winner, grants you the prize of eternal life which He won. You will surely fail and have to try again at many things in your life. That is part of life. But thanks be to God who grants you the perfect score.

Dear Savior, I am not righteous. Thank You for declaring me righteous. Amen.

*“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”* Matthew 5:29-30

## Cut It Out

The infection was serious. Due to extreme circumstances, the gangrene had been allowed to infect the patient’s toes, feet, ankles, and calves. The only realistic option for treatment was amputation at the knees. One key aspect of amputation is that all of the infected, dead, or problem tissue has to be removed. The surgeon has to remove the source of the problem or it will persist.

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He spoke of amputating appendages and plucking out eyes if they are the source of sin. They are not the source. The blind or half-blind man can still sin with the mind’s eye. The maimed man can still sin without the use of his hands. The source of sin is found rooted deep inside each person. Jesus identifies the source of sin in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” The source of sin is not the input of your senses, but rather it is what is already inside of you, and you can’t cut it out.

Thankfully, there is someone who can. Speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord GOD said, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26) You cannot cut out the source of sin in your life, but your God can cut it out and replace it with a heart that serves Him.

**O God, Create in me a clean heart, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Amen**

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Matthew 6:21

## What the Heart Follows

A couple once bought a nice piece of property out in the country that had an old run-down house on the land. This couple loved their house in the city, but thought it would be nice to have a countryside retreat to escape to now and again. As the years went by, they slowly made improvements to their countryside retreat. Floors were replaced, and appliances were updated. The couple found themselves spending more time and money restoring their ramshackle retreat than they spent on the house they lived in, though it was certainly in need of upkeep as well. Even though updating that old country house ate up hours of their time, the couple found themselves falling in love with country living.

Before they knew it, the couple had sold their house in the city and moved full-time to the country. They fulfilled in an earthly way what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. They poured the treasure of their time, talents, and energy into the countryside house, and their heart followed.

What do you find yourself pouring your time and treasures into lately? Is it something that you want to set your heart after? Your Savior hopes that it is Him because He wants your heart. He wants your heart because He found a place for you in His heart. He spent His time and the very treasure of His own life on you. Praise be to Jesus who bought you back from the condemnation of hell with His very own body and blood!

Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect and use  
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine,  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart, it is Thine own,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.

The Lutheran Hymnal 400:4-5

*“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 6:1 (ESV)*

## The Good Secret

“Secrets, secrets, are no fun. Secrets, secrets hurt someone,” goes the popular and mostly accurate saying. The catchy rhyme encourages old and young alike to lead open, genuine, and honest lives without the need for secrets. Keeping secrets from others is usually a surefire way of hurting someone’s feelings, with a few notable exceptions such as surprise parties, gifts, and the like.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of one more notable secret that you can keep: the secret of doing good. He doesn’t say that you have to keep your righteous deeds secret, as if you should do them at night to make sure that no one sees. But, He says that if keeping your good deeds secret would prevent you from doing them in the first place, then there is a problem. That problem would be an unhealthy and ungodly fixation on your reputation. If you do good only to be seen as good, then you have sinned against the Lord God with your heart, even while your actions appear godly.

There is forgiveness for this sin in the One who did not seek the praise of men, but sought the praise of God. Jesus’ actions were done openly, honestly, and with a genuine heart. He lived not to be praised by the crowds, but to receive honor from His Father. The Father bestowed honor on His Son by declaring the words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Your Father in heaven knows of your deeds as well. His silent praise and approval are all that you need. So go ahead and keep the good secret of your good deeds.

**Father, let me never seek the praise of men, but only the praise and honor from You that in turn glorifies You as the One who makes my good deeds possible in the first place. In Jesus name, Amen.**







Thou holy Fire, Comfort true,  
Grant us the will Thy work to do  
And in Thy service to abide;  
Let trials turn us not aside.  
Lord, by Thy power prepare each heart  
And to our weakness strength impart  
That bravely here we may contend,  
Through life and death to Thee, our Lord, ascend.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Martin Luther, 1483-1546  
The Lutheran Hymnal 224

