

Faith & Fellowship

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Christ Alone



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Editor In Chief/
Graphic Designer: Troy Tysdal
ttytsdal@clba.org

Contributing Editor: Brent Juliot
bjuliot@clba.org

Copy Editor: Aaron Juliot
ajuliot@clba.org

Cover Photo:
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Quiet Moments

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The Lamb of God

MARTIN LUTHER

John cried out, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) From this passage we learn that all people have been plunged into sin by the devil and that only the Lamb can lead us out. Our unbelief isn’t Jesus’ fault. The guilt is ours.

You may think, “Jesus carried the sins of Peter, Paul, and other saints. They were holy people. But who knows if Christ will carry my sins, too? If only I were as good as Peter or Paul.” Can’t you hear what John is saying? “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” You must admit that you too are a part of this world. You were born of a human mother and father—you aren’t a cow or a pig! It follows, then, that your sins are paid for, just as



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the sins of Peter and Paul are paid for. You are unable to pay for your own sins. Peter and Paul could not pay for their own sins either. There are no exceptions.

Therefore, don’t listen to your own thoughts. Listen to God’s Word. It promises forgiveness of sins to anyone who believes that this Lamb carried the sins of the whole world. Did you hear that? The Lamb didn’t miss any of it. He carried all the sins of the world from the beginning of time. Therefore, he carried your sin too, and he offers his grace to you.

Dr. Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 and died on February 18, 1546 at the age of 62. He was Doctor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg. Luther, Martin, By Faith Alone. Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1998.

Delayed?

TROY TYSDAL

As the plane I was on descended toward O'Hare International Airport, I looked down upon one of Chicago's many large cemeteries and thought to myself, "That's life—or at least that is the inevitable outcome of life—death."

The thought triggered memories of loved ones lost, consoling grieving family members, repressing grief of my own—only to deal with it at a later date, and then... the painful realization that I will one day feel death's sting again.

As my plane touched down, I pushed the dark thoughts from my mind and gathered my belongings in preparation to run through O'Hare to catch my connecting flight. I had been gone over a week and was anxious to return home to see my wife and kids. As the plane unloaded, I weaved between passengers and hustled to the nearest monitor only to read the dreaded word... DELAYED. The inconvenience filled me with frustration and concern, "How long will I be stuck here? When will I see my family again?"

In the first century A.D. at the church in Thessalonica, the followers of Jesus Christ wept and mourned as if they had no hope. They had been taught the doctrine of the resurrection by Paul and Silas, but they feared that those who died before Christ's return might be lost to the grave forever. Thoughts of doubt filled their minds, "Will we ever see our loved ones again? Why is Christ delayed in his coming?"

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those



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who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The believers in Thessalonica were failing to properly apply the doctrine of the resurrection to those who slept in death—they were failing to grasp the great magnitude and scope of Christ's power. It is one thing to believe that Jesus can grant eternal life to those with breath in their lungs and blood in their veins. It is altogether another to believe that he has the power to raise our lifeless bodies from the dead.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we struggle when we see death assault humankind. The tyrant shows no mercy to those who are young, nor any respect for those who are old. Even creation is subject to it. The trees of the forest, the birds of the air, the beast of the field—all eventually are claimed by death. "That's life—or at least that is the *apparent*

inevitable outcome of life—death." But that is only how it appears.

There is One with the authority to lay down his life and to take it up again. There is One who stepped into death and stepped out again—it is Jesus Christ. In *Christ alone* we see death defeated.

In this life, we cry out, "How long, O Lord? Why are you delayed in your coming?" But Scripture has already given us the answer; Christ is patient, not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

The suffering we experience in this life cannot compare with the glory that will be revealed in us when Christ returns. Though we experience death now, we do not grieve like those who have no hope. In Christ, death has been defeated, and its sting removed and replaced by the promise of a glorious reunion in the presence of God.

That's life, for all who believe in Jesus Christ, resurrection is inevitable.

Rev. Troy Tysdal is Director of Communications and Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and serves as editor in chief of Faith & Fellowship magazine.



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Jesus Christ—the Beginning and the End.

Christ Alone in Luther's Galatians Commentary

ERIK HERRMANN

As we commemorate 500 years since the beginning of Martin Luther's reform, it is fitting to remember the major themes that animated those reforms in theology, preaching, and Christian piety. The word *sola*—"alone"—became a watchword for the distinctive emphases of the Reformation: *sola scriptura*—by Scripture alone; *sola gratia*—by grace alone; *sola fide*—by faith alone. All of these slogans expressed the Reformers' efforts to clarify, safeguard, and faithfully proclaim the center of Christian faith and life: Jesus Christ. The one great Alone—*solo Christo*—appears like the sun with the other *solas* orbiting about it, basking in its warmth and light. Or as Luther wrote: "In my heart reigns this one article: faith in Christ. From him, through him, and to him all my theological thinking is flowing and reflowing by day and by night" (WA 40 I, 33).

This quote of Luther comes from the preface to his great commentary on Galatians, published in 1535. The commentary grew out of his lectures in 1531. He was a bit embarrassed at

how long-winded it seemed, but if read as a testimony of Christ, he thought his profusion fitting. The preeminence and centrality of Christ in Luther's thought gives his theology both its catholic and evangelical character and relevance—all Christians should benefit from it.

As the quote above indicates, one distinctive feature of Luther's focus on Christ is how it serves as the starting point and touchstone for all other doctrines. This is especially clear in his Galatians commentary, as Luther continually argues from Christ *back* to other doctrines. One cannot truly grasp sin, the human condition, or the proper use of the Law until one knows what kind of Savior was given. Luther said, "Therefore those who fall away from grace do not know their own sin, or the Law they follow, or themselves, or anything else at all... For without the knowledge of grace, that is, of the Gospel of Christ, it is impossible for a man to think that the Law is a weak and beggarly element, useless for righteousness" (LW 26, 408-409). It is only from the vantage point of faith in Christ that all other doctrine can be truly

known. In what follows, we will offer a few examples of this from Luther's commentary.

The Definition of Christ. "The highest art among Christians is to be able to define Christ... But if this true picture of Christ is removed or even obscured, there follows a sure confusion of everything; for the unspiritual man cannot judge about the Law of God" (LW 26, 178, 373). The importance of defining Christ rightly is repeatedly stressed by Luther; this is the true starting point for theology. Certainly the Christ of the Creed is the Christ of Luther. He is both God and man to be sure; but defining Christ must go further than simply accepting the old doctrinal formulations of Christ's divine and human natures. For Luther, to confess that Christ is true man keeps one from rummaging and climbing about to find and apprehend God; instead God has come to *us*. Speculation about God, apart from Jesus the incarnate God, leads one to every form of works-righteousness: "Begin where Christ began—in the Virgin's womb, in the manger, and at his mother's breasts. For this purpose

J-Term: Watch the Videos



On January 23, 2017, Dr. Erik Herrmann spoke at Lutheran Brethren Seminary's annual J-Term event commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.



Session #1

Dr. Herrmann explores the biblical and theological understanding of the Law active in the time of Luther, and how Luther's Reformation epiphany led to a distinct understanding of the Law and the Gospel.

Session #2

In this session, Dr. Herrmann surveys recent developments in interpreting the New Testament's relationship to the Law, and shows how Luther's Reformation contributions on this topic can provide a helpful and corrective lens through which to evaluate these newer insights.



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he came down, was born, lived among men, suffered, was crucified, and died, so that in every possible way he might present himself to our sight.... and thus to prevent us from clambering into heaven and speculating about the Divine Majesty" (LW 26, 29).

Luther also speaks of Christ's divinity in a similar way. Because Christ is true God, he has control of our salvation and has the power and authority to dole it out freely. Even as the Father grants us grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, life, and victory over sin, death, the devil, and hell, so Christ himself grants us these things—as Paul clearly states in his greeting to the Galatians, "Grace to you and peace from God the Father *and our Lord Jesus Christ*."

"Here you see how necessary it is to believe and confess the doctrine of the divinity of Christ... Therefore when we teach that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is the Victor over sin, death, and the eternal curse, we are testifying at the same time that he is God by nature... For it belongs exclusively to the divine power to destroy sin and abolish death, to create righteousness and grant life" (LW 26, 282-3).

The Law Against Christ. Christ is the Unique One, and so an antithesis is produced between him and everything else in all creation (LW 26, 175). Even the Law of God, the highest and greatest thing in all creation ("what is more necessary

in the world than the Law and its works?" (LW 26, 112), cannot be on par with the Son of God (LW 26, 141). Because Christ is who he is and does what he does, the Law cannot *be* or *do* any of these things. And so at any point when the Law claims for itself anything which by right belongs to Christ alone, the two are in conflict: "But if my salvation was worth so much to Christ that He had to die for my sins, then my works and the righteousness of the Law are vile—in fact, nonexistent—in comparison with such an inestimable price" (LW 26, 183).

Not only does the Law look dim in the light of Christ, but the human condition appears utterly dark. Arguing from Christ back, Luther delves into the depths of human sin: "These words, 'the Son of God,' 'he loved me,' and 'he gave himself for me,' are sheer thunder and heavenly fire against the righteousness of the Law and the doctrine of works. There was such great evil, such great error, and such darkness and ignorance in my will and intellect that I could be liberated only by such an inestimable price... For I hear in this passage that there is so much evil in my nature that the world and all creation would not suffice to placate God, but that the Son of God himself had to be given up for it" (LW 26, 175).

The Law For Christ. So is the Law evil? No, the Law is not from the devil, it is God's Law, but when the Law is used contrary to God's intention, this then is a

diabolical use (LW 26, 14). Since Christ has always been our righteousness (as the promises testify), the Law was never *intended* to justify. It has another purpose. The law works *for* Christ by taking away all our hand-holds and confidences until only he is left. When the Law serves the Gospel in this way, they are "as far apart in time, place, person, and all features as heaven and earth, the beginning of the world and its end" (LW 26, 316) and at the same time "joined completely together in the same heart" (LW 26, 343).

Luther's reform has often been regarded as a "Copernican Revolution" in theology. Perhaps this is true, though like Copernicus Luther does not actually place anything new into the center, but only attends to him who has always stood there: the sun of our righteousness. "In my heart reigns this one article: faith in Christ. From him, through him, and to him all my theological thinking is flowing and reflowing by day and by night."

Dr. Erik H. Herrmann, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.



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The Curtain is Torn (Matthew 27:51).

Christ Alone

Life in Jesus

BRAD PRIBBENOW

It is no overstatement to say that the death of Jesus Christ stands as the single greatest moment in all human history. On that dark, dreary day outside the city walls of Jerusalem, events of historical, even cosmic proportions were taking place. Not only did these developments contribute to the turning of the western world's calendar from B.C. to A.D., but, for the Christian Church, they constituted the central event that captures and demonstrates the mercy and grace of God toward us sinners: Jesus Christ, the righteous God-Man, dying in innocence on a cross, atoning for the sins of the world, reconciling us to God. The doctrine of justification—rightly

identified by the Reformers as the central doctrine of the Scriptures—finds its source in this atoning and substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday. Only Christ could accomplish and deliver this justification to us.

The Gospel writers also record a series of more immediate and localized effects at the time of Jesus' death on the cross. These incidents include earthquakes (Matthew 27:51), the raising of people who were dead (Matthew 27:52-53), and—important to this article—the rending, or splitting in two, of the Temple curtain (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). As remarkable as the first two happenings were, it's this last

event—the splitting of the Temple curtain that separated off the central, most holy space in the Temple—that is of enduring importance to us.

The architecture of the Temple was an intricate and glorious sight to behold. Its most primitive expression is in Moses' "tent of meeting" (Exodus 27-31). The tent of meeting was a gathering place for anyone who had need of "inquiring of the Lord" (Exodus 33:7). Moses tells us in the book of Exodus that when he entered the tent, the Lord "would speak to [him] face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exodus 33:11). Through Moses, God gave instructions for incorporating this tent of meeting into a larger, portable

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Tabernacle which would accompany the people of Israel through their wilderness wanderings toward the Promised Land (Exodus 25–27; 30–31; 33:7–11; 35–40). The expressed purpose given the Tabernacle was to be a dwelling place for God through which he could meet with and speak to the Israelites. This place, the Lord added, “will be consecrated by my glory” (Exodus 29:42–43).

Once the people of Israel were settled in the land of Canaan, they eventually upgraded their Tabernacle to a permanent and more fitting structure called the Temple. In the prayer of dedication for this building, King Solomon reiterated an understanding of the essential function of this space. He prayed to God saying, “May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive” (1 Kings 8:29–30).

Simply put then, the Temple served as a visible sign of God's presence and glory. It was the meeting place that God established between himself and humanity. At the heart of the Temple—both in its physical structure and in its liturgical function—was the tent of meeting, now called the “Holy of Holies.”

The term “Holy of Holies” (also called

the “Most Holy Place”) is first used in Exodus 26:33, where a distinction is made between it and a space just outside of it called the “Holy Place.” Separating these two spaces was a veil or curtain. The importance of this curtain cannot be overstated. Its proper placement had life and death consequences, for no one could enter the Holy of Holies—the place where God dwelt upon the mercy seat, which was situated above the ark of the covenant and between the wings of the cherubim (Exodus 25:17–22; 1 Kings 6:19–28; 8:6–9)—except the high priest, and only once a year (see Leviticus 16). To break this commandment brought certain death (Exodus 33:20).

Jump ahead 1,000 years to Good Friday. The Gospel writers record that at Jesus' death “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). What did this mean?

It meant that because of what Jesus accomplished at the cross, access to God's presence was not limited to one human person (the high priest) or to one day of the year (the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16). Access was now granted to all who would come believing that Christ's death on the cross was sufficient for them, and thus that Jesus was their only hope of justification before God. The physical, dividing curtain between God and humanity was opened wide. And, in the powerful words of Hebrews 10:19–20, all are now invited “to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, *that is, his body*” (emphasis added). On account of Christ alone we are given the gracious invitation to “draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22).

I've often wondered what kind of terror came upon the immediate Jewish religious community when the Temple veil was split open. We're not told of this in the New Testament. But they must have repaired it. For, as Paul says, this people was still under the veil (2 Corinthians 3:12–16).

But this is not the case for us! Through Christ, and on the basis of his blood shed on the cross, the veil separating us from God's presence has been done away with. Through faith in Christ and his atoning death, you and I are given the gift of reconciliation with God and access to him for any and all of our needs. Now, through *Christ alone*, God's desire for his relationship with us is made even more glorious and beautiful than we could ever imagine: “I will be their God and they will be my people” (Genesis 17:8; Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33; Ezekiel 37:23; cf. Psalm 73:28; Revelation 21:3).

Rev. Brad Pribbenow is Professor of Old Testament at Lutheran Brethren Seminary.

Christ Alone

Life After the Resurrection

LINDSAY NATALE

Six years ago I received a phone call from my dad telling me that his cancer had come back. It had now made its way from his lungs into his brain. At first I was in shock—was this really happening? In his previous six years dealing with cancer, it had always been confined to his lungs. Dad explained all the symptoms he was experiencing and all the tests the doctors had run, confirming it had returned. My second response was, “Is there anything we can do about it?” I believe those two responses are pretty common for someone who receives a cancer diagnosis, and also for the loved ones of that person. Almost everyone today either knows someone with cancer, or knows someone who has cancer. The initial shock is common, but it quickly turns to a fighting stance. After the initial bewilderment, subsequent discussion becomes, “How can we beat this?” rather than, “How long do we have left?”

But for my family, after my dad explained everything that was going on, our emotions turned to, “How long do we have left?” He chose not to go through treatment because there was no effective treatment to kill this kind of cancer. The available treatment would only prolong his life a few more months. With the help of family, I flew out to New Jersey the following weekend. I spent the next week with my dad in the rehab center. Three months later, my dad passed away.

When you lose a loved one there is a period of wondering, “What’s going to happen next?” and “How is life going to continue without them now?” Through lots of prayer and support from my husband Mike and other family and friends, my family was able to make it through this time.

As humans, we don’t like to experience anything outside of our own plan for life. We crave being happy. When we receive bad news, we try to dismiss it or pretend

we didn’t hear it. Most of us will react in shock and denial that we could potentially experience something so life-changing.

A similar situation happened when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to suffer and be killed in Matthew 16:21-23: “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’”

At the time this was all happening, the disciples were contentedly following Jesus and learning from him. Then he shared something with them that they weren’t expecting. He was going to fulfill



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the prophecies of the Old Testament by dying and then rising on the third day. After receiving this news, Peter rebuked Jesus and tried to convince him that what he had just told them wasn't necessary. Jesus knew God's plan for him, that his death would save people from their sins and reunite them with God. Peter had trouble hearing that because he didn't want to lose his friend. When we are told something we don't want to hear or weren't expecting, we don't always think clearly. We don't always react the way that we should.

Later, after Jesus was arrested, the disciples went into hiding for fear that they would face the same fate. They worried more about how to protect themselves and not about what Jesus had promised them would happen in the coming days. Think about what they must have been going through on Good Friday when Jesus was journeying to the cross to be crucified. Imagine the heartbreak

when those at his crucifixion witnessed Jesus' last breath on the cross. In our own experiences, we can feel that same hurt and pain. The disciples, like us, were not perfect. So their reaction to the loss of a loved one is similar to how we respond in difficult times of loss.

Today our encouragement comes from knowing how the story was resolved. On that Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead. Death could not hold him. The Scripture tells us that Jesus bore the sins of the world on the cross. In Jesus, we have a Savior who came to save us from the day of judgement—the day when people will be held accountable for their sin. In Jesus, we have a Savior who calls us by name and tells us that we are forgiven.

In that truth, we are filled with hope, peace and joy. Joy, that in Christ, we can now stand before God. Nothing can replace the joy that we feel when we know that our heavenly Father is looking

down on us and saying, "I called you, and you are mine; I love you, and my Son has paid the price for your sins." Oh, Glorious Day!

Lindsay Natale serves as secretary for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's Eastern Region. She is a member of Faith Chapel Lutheran Church in Cranston, Rhode Island where her husband, Rev. Michael Natale, serves as pastor.

How Do You Read the Signs?

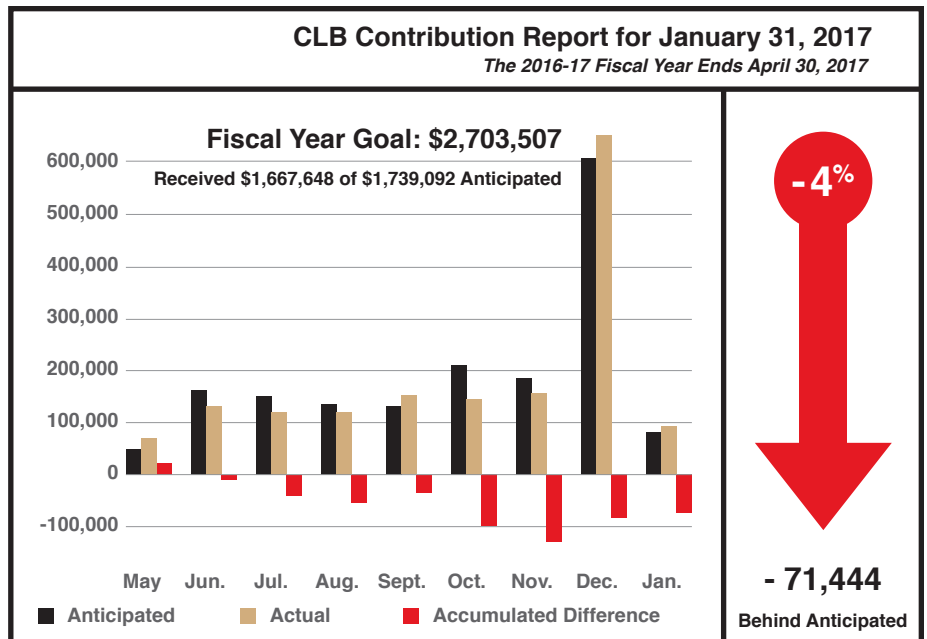
ROY HEGGLAND

Have you ever read a sign and then realized that it could be read in more ways than one? Sometimes the sign maker has one thing in mind, and the sign reader gets a different message. I enjoy reading signs to see if I can come up with an entirely different meaning from what was intended.

Years ago when our children were young, Barbara and I took the kids to a strawberry farm to pick strawberries. As we approached the farm, I saw a sign that said "Pick Your Own Strawberries." I turned to the kids and said, "I guess we are out of luck today. We wanted to pick their strawberries but they are telling us to go pick our own strawberries." Our children and my wife all groaned but then laughed as they saw how the meaning intended by the sign could be stood on its head to mean the opposite.

A favorite of mine is the sign on a chiropractor's office that reads, "Adjustments while you wait." I want to know how he gives someone an adjustment if they don't wait! And I am sure everyone can identify with the sign posted at the end of a construction zone on the highway, "End Construction." Yes, please, end construction right now!

Moving from the trivial to the sublime, let's look at the sign that Pilate placed on top of the cross where Jesus was crucified. It read, "King of the Jews." The religious leaders were incensed when they read it and told Pilate to change it to read, "He claimed to be the King of the Jews." Pilate refused to change the wording however and said, "What I have written, I have written." We don't know for sure what Pilate intended by his writing. Perhaps he was trying to shame the Jews, since he could find no reason to crucify Jesus except to save his own neck from the angry crowd who would have appealed to Caesar.



The strange thing about this particular sign is that even though Pilate probably wrote it to mock the Jewish leaders, and they rabidly disavowed that Jesus was the King of the Jews, the sign was still correct. Jesus was—and is—the King of the Jews. Jesus was the eternal king whom the Old Testament prophets declared would establish his throne forever. Pilate and the Jewish leaders thought the sign was a terrible exaggeration. Yet what the sign said was true. But even had they believed that Jesus was the King of the Jews, the sign itself was one of the biggest understatements ever written. We know from Scripture that this King of the Jews was also the King of the Universe: the almighty, omniscient, everywhere present God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who became flesh so that he could perfectly fulfill the demands of the law for people, die in their place on the cross, and be raised as the first of many sons and daughters of God who would believe in him.

One of the "signs" of a believer is good works. Once again, this "sign" is misinterpreted by most of the world (and many who claim to be Christians), when they think that good works are the way Christians demonstrate how sanctified they are. But, the Scriptures make it clear that our good works are just part of who we are as Christians. Our good works were prepared for us by God, who gives us the will and ability to do them. Good works, including giving a portion of God's gifts to help others, are a blessing and a privilege, not an obligation to show how "good" we are. Because when it comes right down to it, in God's eyes there is nothing pleasing or good in us, except what he has given us in Christ. Rejoice that he has done everything *for* us that he requires *of* us!

Roy Heggland serves as associate for biblical stewardship to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



From Obstacles to Opportunities

CHERYL OLSEN

The women who went to the tomb Easter morning saw a job to do: anoint the body of their friend and teacher, who had been buried quickly before the Sabbath. Removing the stone was an obstacle they were concerned about. But God was working behind the scenes, totally removing the obstacle, and giving them a much better job: to run back and tell the amazing story to their friends—that Jesus was alive!

Women today still have plans that get changed somehow. Instead of becoming discouraged, what would happen if we saw challenges or obstacles as opportunities for God to redirect us, with a much better avenue to accomplish his purposes?

Here are some who benefited from challenges.

1. Pacific South Region women have a yearly spring retreat at a wonderful California Hot Springs location. Three years ago, faced with lower cash-flow, they needed to cut expenses. Instead of a weekend speaker, they used a “Retreat-in-a-Box” from Group Publishing—a great cost solution. They also found this interactive method was much more appealing to younger women, yielding better involvement and excitement from the younger generation.
2. Pastors’ wives in the Pacific North Region wanted to get together yearly for a Pastors’ Wives’ retreat, desiring each other’s support. But money was only budgeted for alternate years. So, they got creative. Using donated vacation homes, volunteer meals, and cooperative planning, they’ve made it happen. Nobody is pampered, but all are appreciative!
3. Olympia, Washington women have a two-day get-away at their church.



Women from the CLB's Pacific Region at their spring retreat.

It is video and discussion-based, requiring little preparation. Pastries and fruit for a “breakfast bar” make it easy for even late-comers to grab something and slip into the group. Lunch is simple and low-key as well, so those helping in the kitchen don’t miss anything.

Sometimes life difficulties are the challenge:

1. One woman, who had been very involved in her church, found that her cancer treatments slowed her down. Then she started seeing that God was using her in unexpected ways to share her life and faith with her fellow cancer patients. God helped her see an opportunity that she embraced, even in that difficult situation.
2. Another woman welcomed the prayers of her church for her own upcoming cancer surgery. Months later, she shared that she was amazed by people who told her, long after her surgery, that they were still praying for her. Unknown to those praying,

God was not only healing her cancer, but using them to draw her closer to himself, and to his body of believers.

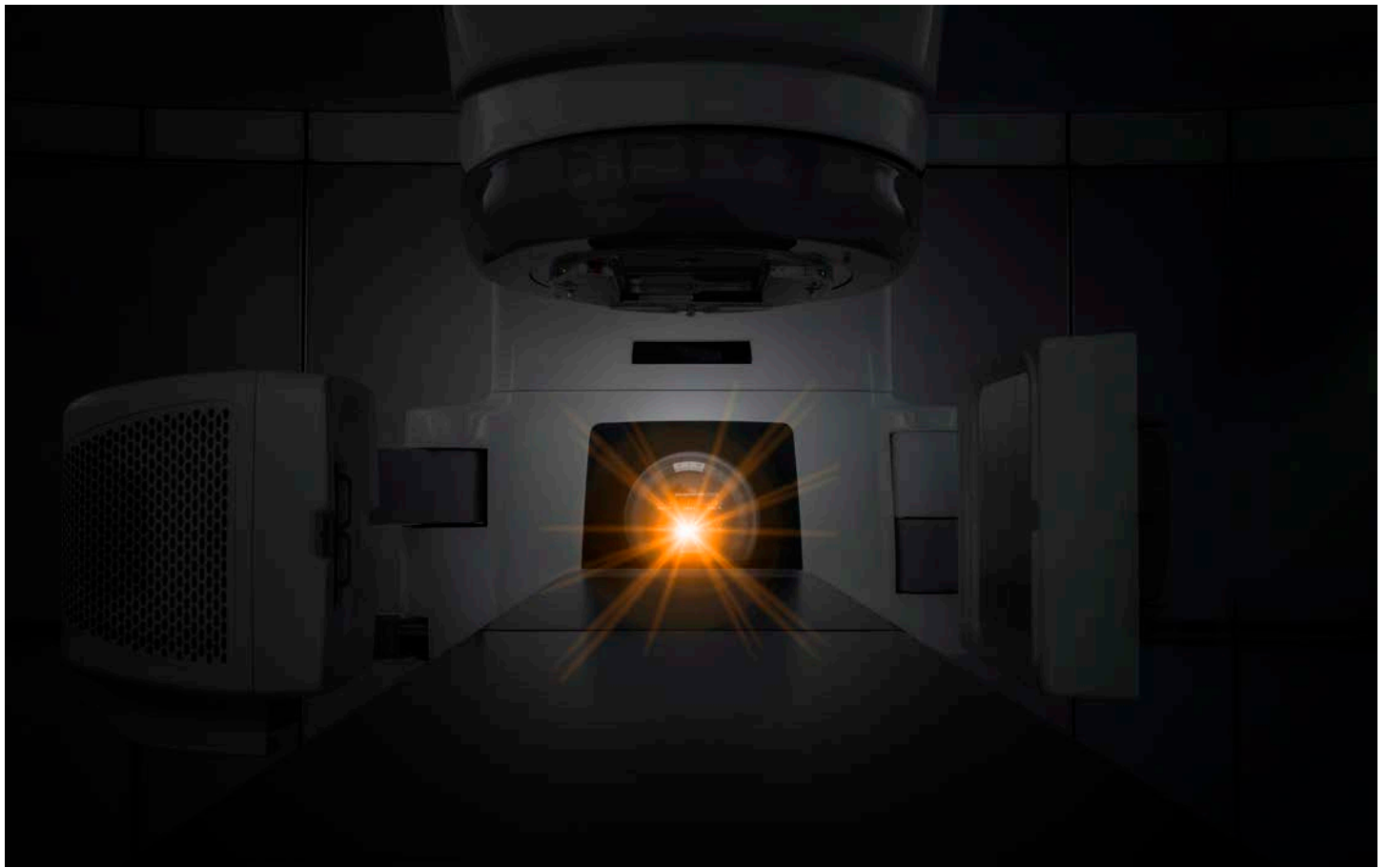
3. A pastor’s wife currently attends an exercise class at the “Y” to meet others in her community. Since friendships are often formed through common interests, her challenge is that most women in her class are very different from her in practically every way: age, politics, and even some by sexual preference. But she has found herself surprised at the love God is giving her for them—caring for them as true friends, and eagerly looking forward to what God is going to do through her.

What is your challenge? Look for the opportunity God will provide to love others through you!

Cheryl Olsen is the Faith & Fellowship correspondent for Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



Visit: www.WMCLB.com



Thomas Heckerl/Stock

Linear Accelerator.

Christ Alone Life in the Shadow of Death

WARREN HALL

Have you ever received a call or heard a piece of news that cast such a shadow over you that it caused you to want to stop and turn back the clock? To return to a simpler time and place? To hit the reset button and begin again? What is it that would cause you to stop and look at the future—your future?

October 28, 2015. The day after my annual physical. A call from my doctor: Something on my blood test. Family history of cancer. Stage 2. Need to see you again, soon. You have Cancer.

That call took me from wondering what it might be like to deal with a diagnosis of cancer to the full reality of CT scans, radiation treatments, hormone therapy, radioactive seed implants and a calendar full of tests and appointments. It took me from being recognized at the gym,

to being recognized at a building with the word *cancer* in its title. From being a once-a-year patient to an everyday patient. From thinking about the now, to thinking about the future. From being in control, to out of control. All with one phone call.

I've climbed mountains for years. I've traveled over glaciers and crossed many crevasses. When you pause to look down into a crevasse, the color of the ice turns from white to blue and finally to black. The blackness indicates a crack in the glacier that is too deep for light to penetrate. That phone call from my doctor had taken me to the edge of a very dark hole. It caused me to stop and ask, "What now? Where do you want me to go with this, God?" After all, I'm still young. I'm a husband, a father.

God had an answer for me. He took the doubt and fear resulting from the cancer diagnosis, and he replaced it with peace and purpose. He told me, "Don't worry about this. I've got this. Be at peace." He truly gave me a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). He took away fear and replaced it with the hope we find in Isaiah 43:1b-3a: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior..."

My wife and I realized soon after my diagnosis that we had a choice. Either

Meet Your Council of Directors



This photo was captured on Warren's GoPro while catching a wave in Westport, Washington.

If you are experiencing struggles related to cancer, Warren welcomes the opportunity to share those with you.

Contact Warren at: warrenhall@gmail.com



Warren Hall

Warren Hall serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as an ordained layperson representative on the Council of Directors.

He is the Administrator at Hope Church in Everett, Washington—where he also serves the congregation as an elder. He was born into a Christian home in Seattle to Don and Faye Hall, where he saw Christ modeled every day.

He graduated from Seattle Pacific University in 1983 and married his wife Sarah a year later. They have three grown children, Greta, Nelson and Emma. Warren's hobbies include soccer, hiking, biking, surfing, brisk walks and anything that has to do with family.

He currently serves on various Pacific Region-North boards including the Regional Executive Council, Bible Camp board, men's retreat planning committee and LEAD retreat planning committee.

we could panic—question God and ask, “Why me?”—or we could put our whole trust in him. We recognized that when we are taken to a point where all control is out of our hands, there God works most deeply in our hearts. When he is in control, our comfort comes from recognizing that in our weakness, he is strong.

I sat down with our grown kids and explained to them that, someday, this was going to kill me. Not cancer, necessarily, but life. I definitely was going to die sooner or later. I knew from the example of my own parents, that as we watch a Christian couple live out their lives, it is a powerful testimony. I could either go to pieces in front of my kids, or use this as an opportunity to teach them that death is just another step in one's Christian walk. Being at peace with where God has us, and being used in whatever situation he places us—this was a lesson I could teach them most powerfully by simply living it.

So what to do with this diagnosis? How can I be light and salt as a cancer patient? How can I minister to others experiencing struggles and challenges in their own lives? The first and third Wednesdays of each month find me at the Swedish Cancer Institute just north of Seattle, sitting in a cancer support group with 5-10 other patients. For an hour and a half, we share with each other. Our successes and our frustrations, our progress and our setbacks. They know that I work in a church. They know that I am praying for them. They know that

there is something different about me and my cancer journey. Sitting in this group, I see people who have lost everything: their health, their money, their relationships, their jobs. But the greatest casualty of the trials they are going through is that they have lost their hope. They have endured chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, pain and uncertainty. There is nothing left for them to grab hold of. There is no future for them. They are lost. Hopeless. They don't know about a Savior who has given everything for them. A Savior who understands suffering and pain greater than they have experienced. Someone who loves them, even unto death. They are a microcosm of the world we live in—alone, lost, hopeless.

So what do I do with this diagnosis, this situation God has placed me in? How do I respond to the Apostle Paul's call in 1 Thessalonians 5, to rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances?

I began praying for my fellow patients, for my doctors and caregivers, for my family and friends. During my treatment, I found the perfect “prayer closet,” quiet and private, all my own. It's called a Linear Accelerator, a photon radiation machine for treating various cancers. During the eight to ten minutes it took to treat the cancer each day, the technicians retreated behind an eight-inch thick steel and concrete door, leaving me in perfect peace, able to quietly pray. Each day the technicians would ask me, “Why are you so upbeat, so happy?” I told them that in

our church, we have various ministries: kid's ministry, youth ministry, Sunday worship, etc. I told them that this was my cancer ministry, my opportunity to share my faith and hope in a place with a limited, yet needy membership.

God wants each of us to come to a point in our lives where we say, “O.K., God, what do you want me to do? Where do you want me to go?” When Jesus called his disciples, some of them were fishing. Yet when he called them, they dropped everything and followed him. They gave up their former lives to minister to others. What could God accomplish in us and through us if we just trusted him enough to drop everything and follow him? Sometimes trust is hard to come by until we are pushed to a point where there is nothing left for us to do but to trust in him—and to know that whether we live or die, we live in him. As Christians, that is where our hope is found. Jesus died and was resurrected for us.

Wherever God has you, go and share the good news!

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Warren Hall serves as a member of the Council of Directors for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. He is Church Administrator at Hope Church at Silver Lake in Everett, Washington.



The gymnasium at New Hope Christian Camp and Retreat Center in Platte, South Dakota.

Unspeakable Tragedy

JOEL DAVIS

It was September 17, 2015. As my family prepared to leave for vacation later that day, I received a phone call about a fire at the home of Scott and Nicole Westerhuis. Nicole was the daughter of George and Karen Fish, and George was the president of our congregation, Bethel Lutheran Brethren of Platte, South Dakota.

At the time of the call, the Westerhuis family's whereabouts were unknown. As I stood outside the house with George and Karen, we prayed that their daughter, Nicole, son-in-law, Scott, and grandchildren, Michael, Connor, Jaeci, and Kailey were on a trip and not in the

house. But later in the day, our greatest fears were realized when firefighters found the family in the home. What a tragedy!

The Westerhuis family was involved in many community activities, with the children enrolled in elementary school and high school, so the loss was felt throughout the community. George and Karen are members of Bethel, Scott and Nicole were members of the First Reformed Church, and Scott's mom, Pat, is a member of the Christian Reformed Church. So all three churches mourned the loss of this family.

I called Pastor Gary Witkop, CLB

Western Regional Pastor, to let him know what had happened and to ask him for prayer for the community and for local pastors ministering to the community in this sad time. Gary offered prayer over the phone and asked if I wanted him to come to Platte. I thanked him and said that I thought I could handle things at this time.

But things got a lot worse. As the weekend went on, the investigation into the fire took a turn. It was determined that it was not an accidental fire, but a deliberately set fire at the scene of a murder-suicide. On Monday, around 5 PM, I was asked by the police to

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:21

accompany them to George and Karen's house, as they brought news that their daughter and grandchildren had been murdered by their son-in-law before he set fire to the house and shot himself. It was difficult for me, but devastating news for George and Karen.

On the drive I called Pastor Witkop and asked him to come to Platte. Not only did I need his help, but I felt our entire community would soon need as much pastoral support as possible. Gary said he would come, and that he would start the nine-hour trip from Colorado first thing in the morning. That evening, the nightly news reported the murder-suicide, and our whole community felt the painful sting of death. The following morning, a group of us were gathered to pray when Pastor Gary walked in. He was unable to sleep the night before, so he decided to drive through the night to be with us. His presence was a blessing and source of encouragement to our community. He stayed several days and walked alongside the Platte Ministerial Association as we ministered to the families of those who were hurting.

In hindsight, I can now see how God had been preparing our Ministerial Association for this tragedy. We are an active group of pastors who work together for the glory of God. About eight years ago, the Ministerial started the process to bring Christian counselors to the community. This led to the Ministerial becoming an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. These two seemingly small things have played a big part in the healing process of our community. We now have two wonderful Christian counselors

who have been working with children, teens, parents, and so many more people affected by the tragedy. They have helped us pastors in the community be more effective in our ministry and in helping the community heal. There is still a long way to go, but I believe God is carrying us through the process.

A year after the tragic deaths of the Westerhuis family, the estate put the property up for auction. The house is gone, but a large complex remains, estimated at a value of \$1.5 million. It consists of 40 acres, with a steel-framed building that houses a full-sized gym, a large room and office space on the main floor, four bedrooms with bathrooms, a kitchen and gathering space on the upper floor, and a large garage unit.

After some discussion and a lot of prayer, the Platte Ministerial Association came to the conclusion that the Lord was leading us to buy the property with the purpose of turning it into a Christian retreat center. We shared our vision with the community and asked for financial support. In this regard, the Ministerial's non-profit status was once again very important.

We knew from the start that this was a God-sized plan and only God could accomplish it, and that is exactly what he did. Over the next few months, God provided funds for the purchase of the facility in amazing ways. We are now in the process of finishing the upstairs rooms. This spring we will reopen the facility as the New Hope Christian Camp and Retreat Center.

God is redeeming this property in the name of Jesus Christ. These facilities

are being transformed into a place where children will once again laugh and play, but more importantly, they will hear the name of Jesus Christ proclaimed. The community still hurts, but we hear testimonies daily about the healing that has been happening. We are reminded how God took the greatest injustice and tragedy, the death of his only Son, and turned it into our greatest good. God sent his Son to redeem not only us, but the whole world. This is who God is. He takes things that are dark and empty and shines the light of his grace upon them.

No one could have foreseen such an unspeakable tragedy. But God was at work—before, during, and after—to provide for his people's needs and to accomplish his purposes in the Platte community.

Rev. Joel Davis serves as pastor at Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church in Platte, South Dakota.



Read Stacy Severson's testimony on our Facebook page: New Hope Christian Camp and Retreat Center, Platte, SD



Christa Redmann serving at the CLB denominational headquarters in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

A New Face at the CLB

CHRISTA REDMANN

Christa Redmann is the CLB's new Executive Administrative Assistant in the Office of the President. This means that she is now the first face you are likely to see when you enter the denominational offices, and the first voice you will usually hear when you call. Faith & Fellowship interviewed Christa with the goal of helping you get to know her to some degree even before your first contact with her.

F&F: Christa, please tell us about yourself, and your formative experiences.

Christa: I was born in North Dakota and raised in Menomonie, Wisconsin. I am the oldest of three girls and love how my family has gained two brothers, a niece,

and nephew over the last six years. I also believe NASCAR is a sport, and claim children as some of my favorite people in the world. In my free time, you may find me reading, quilting, or working on curriculum.

I grew up attending Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church in Menomonie. The church introduced me to Inspiration Point Bible Camp. I was privileged to be a camper for five years and on summer staff for four years. Inspiration Point began to help me see God's calling on my life to serve people, specifically his church. I served all four summers on support staff and was blessed in ministering through the details.

I have also been honored over many years to be equipped, trained, and loved

by my local congregations. During my time at Oak Ridge, I was given the opportunity to teach the junior high Sunday School class for two years. While in college, I attended Word of Life Church in Le Sueur, Minnesota and served with the youth group. Finally, over the last five years I have been attending Oak Hill Church in Bloomington, MN. There I was challenged through serving in Children's Ministry and curriculum development. In these places, I formed friendships and was invited into the lives of the congregation. What a blessing to live life with others! If only I could name them all here! Plus, I was pointed to the cross and reminded daily of the work of the Holy Spirit on this earth.

Psalms 139:7-10 became my high school

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Psalm 139:7-10

graduation verse and it has followed me through these experiences and more. No matter where I go, God is there. In the lowest of lows and the highest of highs, his hand is holding me fast.

F&F: As a young adult, what interested you vocationally? What education and experiences did you have prior to joining the CLB team, and how might they have prepared you for your work now?

Christa: During high school, I became interested in psychology through my opportunities to serve at Inspiration Point and my local church. That led me to pursue a degree in psychology from Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN. While earning my degree, I interned with a small research institute, which turned into a part-time and then full-time job after college. That opportunity really showed me how a small company works together, with all hands on deck pursuing one mission.

From there I entered the field of higher education working in St. Paul at both Concordia University and Bethel University in the Registrar's Office. I recently heard that the Registrar's Office is like the plumbing of a house. When everything is working correctly it isn't noticeable, but everyone notices when things aren't working. I found this to be true as I gained and improved my skills in communication, organization, and time management.

In just the last two years, I was also

privileged to work part-time as the Children's Ministry Coordinator at Oak Hill Church. This opportunity really solidified my call to serve in ministry in a full-time capacity. I was able to learn about event planning and to dig deeper into the mission of the CLB. Each of these positions has contributed to my passion for the CLB, my detail-oriented mind, and my desire to serve wherever I go.

My career goal? I would say it's to be the girl with ten pencils in her hair making sure the details are in place so others may live out their God-given gifts for the kingdom. I see this as fitting right into my new role and I couldn't be more excited!

F&F: What process led you to this new position? Why were you interested?

Christa: I was first introduced to the position via a Facebook post on the Church of the Lutheran Brethren page. I honestly didn't think much of it, but God kept bringing me back around. I had been on a journey since April 2016, looking towards the future and asking for God's guidance on the next steps. I knew I wanted to be in ministry full-time, but wasn't sure how that would look. As I walked through the process of applying for this position, it became more evident that God was providing an opportunity for me to serve the CLB in a full-time capacity. This greatly excited me as my love for the CLB mission has grown

through the many congregations and people who have touched my life.

F&F: Christa, your new job title is "Executive Administrative Assistant in the Office of the President." Sounds like a lot of work! How will your strengths be utilized in this new role?

Christa: I see this as a two-fold position; first, as an assistant to the Office of the President. It is always better to do things in a team and I am grateful that I get to serve on the team as we work for the mission of the CLB. Second, to assist the congregations of the CLB—whether this be through work with the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, the Yearbook, biennial conventions, or helping anyone with questions they may have.

This utilizes my strengths of being both detail and people-oriented in one place. I am excited to both get to know the people who make up the CLB and find new and creative ways to keep the details in place. My prayer is that through this combination, the mission of the gospel remains the focus of all we do and are as the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

May the community of the CLB be built up so that we shine the light of Christ to the world around us!

Christa Redmann is Executive Administrative Assistant to the President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Contact Christa at: credmann@clba.org

Bringing God's Word Closer

ETHAN CHRISTOFFERSON

I like the word “visceral.” I use it sometimes when I want to describe a response to something—one that emerges out of deep feelings, and doesn’t get filtered by rational thought.

For example, when I describe the time I slogged down a cup of leftover coffee which had been left overnight in the cup holder of my car only to discover a drowned cockroach sloshing around in my mouth while savoring the last swallow, I get a pretty predictable response from listeners—a visceral scrunched-up face and a groan—“That’s just DISGUSTING!” My response on that fateful day was visceral too. I remember spewing that last swallow of cold coffee and everything floating in it back into that cup and scrambling out of my car like it was on fire, looking for a place to scour out my mouth as quickly as possible.

We have visceral responses to many realities. When I recite one of our frequent Taiwan encounters with creepy-crawly things like snakes, spiders, and

lizards, many of our friends and family unthinkingly shiver and mutter, “How can you stand to live in that place?!” More significantly, when we see someone bullying a child, we feel compelled to do something. When terrorists cut off heads or blow up innocent people, the rage wells up inside us and we feel like screaming, “STOP!”

I have a question for you (and me too): When you hear of places in the world where people live and die without really hearing the gospel (like many corners of our ministry area in Taiwan), what is your response? Is it visceral? “That’s just WRONG!” and “I HAVE to find a way to get them the good news!”

Our typical response to the needs of the world’s lost people is so different from God’s. His willingness to sacrifice greatly so that these precious ones can be saved emerges from deep in his character. When we, in the face of such great and obvious need, hesitate, calculate the cost to our own interests, and distance ourselves

from these needs, we set ourselves up in opposition to him and what he is doing. And so, we too are among the lost who need his grace and forgiveness.

As Sandy and I take time during these days in the USA to reflect on the needs in Taiwan and make plans for future ministry, we find God strengthening our resolve to continue and even increase our efforts to bring the Word closer to the unreached in Taiwan. We know that God has given many of you that same resolve to join us in finding a way to get the good news to those in Taiwan who are still outside God’s kingdom. Thanks be to God for his enabling grace!

Please pray for us as we continue to travel throughout the USA this spring and share about our Taiwan ministry. We want to be God’s hands/feet/voice to bring his Word closer to those we meet.

Ethan and Sandy Christofferson serve the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as missionaries to the unreached Hakka people of Taiwan.

Waiting on a Call to Taiwan



Pastor Ben and Sara Hosch feel the call to join our mission efforts in Taiwan. Ben and Sara have been sharing their passion for the unreached of Taiwan with CLB congregations while they wait for the CLB to confirm their call.

For information on how you can support this mission contact LBIM at: 218-739-3336, or by email at: LBIM@CLBA.org

North American Mission

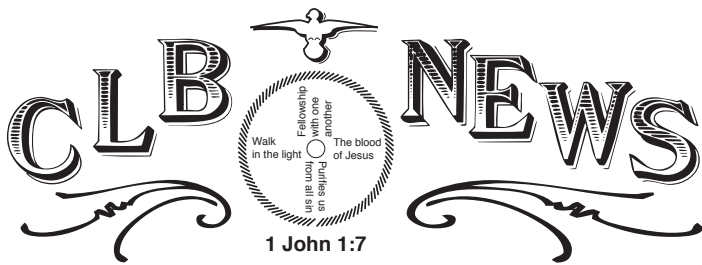
Ben Hosch serves as pastor of Stavanger Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, where he and his wife Sara attend with their children (Adelaide, Emery and Winnie).

Lutheran Brethren Seminary

In 2016 Ben graduated with a Master of Divinity degree from Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS), where his grandfather Rev. Harold Hosch served as Professor of Old Testament from 1977-88.

International Mission

While at LBS, Ben and Sara sensed a call to mission work among the Hakka people of Taiwan. Ben is related to the Kittelson family who have served in Taiwan since 1987. The Hosch family currently waits for the CLB to confirm their call to Taiwan.



Walvatne Called Home

Rev. Elwin Walvatne, age 86, of Fergus Falls, MN, passed away Sunday, January 29, 2017 in Fergus Falls.

Elwin Walvatne was born July 20, 1930, the son of Edwin and Bertha (Chensvold) Walvatne. Pastor Walvatne graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in 1948. He went on to graduate from Moorhead Teacher's College and Lutheran Brethren Seminary.

Elwin began his career in ministry at Bigfork, MN and served churches in Antler, ND; Edmonton, Alberta; Cooperstown, ND; Malta, MT; and Lake Mills, IA. After retiring in 2003, he returned to Fergus Falls, and served as an interim pastor in other locations.

Elwin is survived by his wife, Hanna, of Fergus Falls and their four children.

Vettrus Called Home

Rev. Richard Vettrus, age 78, interim pastor of Ebenezer Lutheran Brethren Church of Rolette, ND, passed away on Monday morning, February 6, 2017 at Trinity Hospital, Minot, ND.

Richard Vettrus was born on October 23, 1938 in Superior, WI, the third child of Rev. Ole and Clara (Olson) Vettrus. Richard graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy and later Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He also attended Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA and received a Master's in history from Wagner College in Staten Island, NY.

Pastor Vettrus served congregations in Floral Park, Brooklyn, and Nanuet, NY; Princeton, NJ; Pasadena, CA; West Union and DeWitt, IA; and, as an interim pastor, in Arvada, CO; Eugene, OR; and Rolette, ND.

Abrahamsen Ordained



L to R: Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty, elder Michael Hahn, Pastor Chris Priestaf, present and past elders Steve Andersen (hidden), Peppy Stiansen, Herb Jacobsen, Allen Abrahamsen, Gary Johnson, Billy Williams, Lloyd Listor, Bill Snyder, and Pastor Dan Christenson.

On January 8, 2017, Allen Abrahamsen was ordained as an elder at Mt. Bethel LBC in Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania. Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty officiated the service.

Save the Date!



Women's Ministries

Annual Convention

June 24, 2017

Location: Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center, Mt. Bethel, PA, in coordination with the Eastern Region Biennial Convention. Details to follow!

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Big Talker

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).

There once was a man who was being considered to head up a certain organization. When he came to interview with the board, the man made great promises and predictions. He was extremely self-confident. The man was a Big Talker. He claimed that the organization had fallen short of expectations in the past because of its archaic approach to things. They needed to start over, completely new. He alone had a new plan, and the ability to implement it. In effect, he was saying, “Trust me, follow me, and I’ll take this organization to new heights.” It appealed to the board to have someone else carry their responsibility for future vision. They hired the man.

As the Big Talker instituted his new policies, people in the organization soon began questioning his approach. But when they approached him, the Big Talker said, “I’m in charge here. It’s my way or the highway.” The organization was fractured, and members of the board were greatly distressed. The Big Talker eventually imploded, blaming the board and the organization as he departed. The board was left to pick up the pieces and start over.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...” In this statement, Jesus seems to be responding to accusations that he was just a Big Talker. In fact, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees were threatened by the fact that Jesus taught differently than they did—with personal authority—and that large crowds of people were responding to him. The teachers probably used Jesus’ signature teaching approach—“you have heard that it was said..., but I say to you...”—as evidence that he was rejecting Scriptural traditions. They accused Jesus of leaving the Word of God behind and promulgating his own strange teaching—just a Big Talker, not to be trusted.

The teachers and Pharisees were both right and wrong. Jesus *was* rejecting much of the teachers’ traditions. But he was not rejecting the Scriptures. In fact, far from abolishing the Scriptures, he boldly announced he had come to fulfill them. So Jesus was The Big Talker: “To know me is to know the Father”... “whoever follows me will never walk in darkness”... “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.” He is the only person in all of history who could make such incredible statements, and then completely back his talk with his actions.

On the cross, by giving his life for humankind, Jesus brought a new and living way to all who would believe in him. *Christ Alone* could do this!

Rev. Brent Juliot serves as pastor of Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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