

Faith & Fellowship

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Theology of the Cross



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Quiet Moments

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Show Us the Father

MARTIN LUTHER

Philip spoke according to the theology of glory: “Show us the Father.” Christ set aside his flighty thought about seeing God elsewhere and led him to himself, saying, “Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). For this reason true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ, as it is also stated in John 14:6, “No one comes to the Father, but by me.”

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly... These are the people whom the apostle calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18), for



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they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said.

The friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through

the cross works are dethroned and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God’s.

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, Luther’s Works - Volume 31. Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1957.

Not That!

TROY TYSDAL

A few years back, I was called to the local hospital to visit a parishioner before surgery. As I entered the building, I stopped at the front desk to pick up my identification badge and check in with hospital staff. They informed me of the room number I was looking for and I quickly made my way to the elevator.

Once on the elevator, I was joined by an elderly woman (hard of hearing) and her son (old enough to be my dad). The elderly woman read my identification badge, and believing she was speaking at a level I could not hear, said to her son, “He’s a pastor?” The son, understanding this was *not* a private conversation, attempted to come to my aid. He replied, confidently, “That’s what the badge says.” “He doesn’t look like a pastor!” his mother shot back. Slightly amused by the conversation, I glanced toward the son. As our eyes met, his face turned white with embarrassment. “What’s a pastor supposed to look like?” he asked sternly. I tried to pretend I didn’t notice, as his mother’s eyes slowly scanned me over—head to toe. “Not that,” she replied.

MATTHEW 27:41-43

The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked Jesus. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

The Jewish people had waited centuries for their Messiah, their Christ—their anointed one. The promise could be traced back to their earliest books. Moses had told of *One* who would crush the head of Satan. Samuel had prophesied of a *King* whose kingdom would have no end. David had called the Messiah the *Son of God*. Yet, when their long



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Christ and his disciples.

awaited redeemer finally appeared, he was rejected.

The Jews wanted someone to liberate them from Roman captivity. They were waiting for a conquering king—perhaps someone riding atop a white horse, dressed in fine linen, wearing a crown of gold. Jesus didn’t fit the description they had created for themselves. He didn’t look the way they thought he should look. He didn’t act the way they thought he should act. He healed on the Sabbath. He ate and drank with tax collectors. He spoke with prostitutes. Even John the Baptist had his doubts. He sent disciples to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3, ESV).

Jesus did not meet the expectations of the people, and it would only get worse. As he was mocked, his body beaten and hung from a cross, you can imagine a simple question being asked, “What’s the Messiah supposed to look like?” The answer most would accept, “Not that!” Yet, in his suffering, something divine was visible. As Jesus gave up his spirit, the centurion, who stood in front of him and saw how he died, said, “Surely this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Martin Luther writes, “God can only be found in the incarnate, humiliated, and crucified Jesus Christ.”

Are you looking for God? Are you hoping he will ride in on a white horse and deliver you from your present circumstance? Perhaps you are looking in the wrong place—expecting the wrong thing.

Seek the *One* who traded his throne for a cross... who made himself lower than the angels... and you will find the *One* who died for you. The *One* who crushed the head of Satan. The *One* who removed the sting of death. The *One* preparing a place for you in a kingdom that will know no end.

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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Theology of the Cross

A Controversial Doctrine

ROBERT OVERGAARD SR.

This is the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation. One of Martin Luther's most controversial Reformation teachings was a doctrine he called the "theology of the cross"—hardly a controversial sounding name. What could be more everyday Christian than a doctrine about the cross of Christ?

Why was it so controversial? It said that some of the major authorities in the Church could not possibly lead people to know God since they used a method of reasoning that could not, in principle, lead to God! You can't get there from here! There will always be a veil over the eyes of those who seek God in the same way the Scholastics did because God hides himself from them!

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church offers this definition of **theologia crucis** (Latin, "theology of the cross"):

"The name given by Martin Luther to the theological principle that our knowledge of the Being of God must be derived from the study of Christ in his humiliation and the sufferings he underwent on the cross. He opposed it to a *theologia gloriae* ('theology of glory') which would maintain with the Scholastic theologians that a true knowledge of God can be obtained from the study of nature."¹

But this definition can only describe the theology of the cross at a distance. The theology of the cross is a truth that demonstrates itself as people are led to know God by coming to terms with their own sin, which cuts them off from knowing God!

This isn't a theological game, although it can sound like it. It is about the narrow gate that leads to knowing God. You only come to know God by studying the

"Christ in his humiliation and sufferings," but this study is not an academic study. It is more like the allegorical character Christian, in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who came finally to a hill called Calvary, bearing his heavy burden of sin on his back. As he stood contemplating the meaning of the cross, he was suddenly aware that his burden had fallen away, and was tumbling down the hill behind him!

As Luther grew in this understanding of the *message of the cross* and how you could come to know God through the *theology of the cross*, he did so in terms of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. There Paul clarified the very issue Luther had with the Scholastics (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:8). He saw them as trusting in their own wisdom to know the invisible through the visible, that is, through their

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:19-20

philosophical understanding of God in nature, in visible things. They believed they could infer things about the very essence of God, his goodness, his purity, how he treated sins, and then rationalize out to everyday policies and doctrines, including how God forgives sins. This unholy alliance between Aristotle and the Scriptures interpreted by the Church could not lead to God *in principle*. Why? Because, since the Fall, mankind's knowledge of God is limited to seeing him at a distance in his creation. God has raised a wall of separation. God is hidden from the wisdom of men. He only removes the wall through the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Colossians 1:20 says, "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

When Luther talks about our sufferings, he is really talking about our being led to repentance, although in some of his early debate language he still shows signs of seeing suffering as a way to God. Luther at that point had not yet fully understood that Indulgences simply could not be harmonized with the Gospel. He was still trying to reform them. But he recognized that the humbling of repentance was the proper setting for this discussion.

When one considers how the Holy Spirit leads us to repentance, it is not only Christ who suffers and dies. We are called to die to our self-righteousness and our bent to going our own way. The Spirit kindly focuses on the sin that separates us from God (John 16:8). Why is this

necessary? Because since Jesus opened a way for forgiveness, it means we must have sins needing forgiveness. If we are to walk together with God, sin that separates us must be cleared up. Yes, it is atoned for on the cross, but it needs to be talked about between us and God. He insists on leading us to take responsibility for our sins. There is no merit in this for us. Rather our refusal to hear the voice of the Spirit through the Word means we are refusing to be led to the cross.

Luther called this painful confrontation with sin the "alien" message of the Gospel. When God expresses his will in the Law we see how we fall short or how we have stepped over the line. His Law, like a mirror, shows us ourselves in the light of his presence. We begin to suffer the pain and guilt of facing up to sin.

God's solution for us is opened by way of the substitutionary suffering and death of Christ on the cross. When we see our sin removed we find that we actually know God as our heavenly Father. We are alive in him and he makes our hearts his home. We walk in the light with him, receiving his daily cleansing—open and in the light with him about all of our needs.

By the time Luther published his Small Catechism in 1529, he had moved fully into his understanding of the message of the cross and the theology of the cross. He didn't use the term "theology of the cross" in his writings after those earliest years, but he built the truth into all of his teaching. In the Small Catechism his teaching on repentance, and his teaching

on how we can (or cannot) come to God, is down to earth and personal. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength come to him, but the Holy Spirit calls me through the gospel..." It is foolishness, an offense and just plain frustrating to people who have not come this way, but it is experienced as the power of God by those who have been led to faith.

Rev. Robert Overgaard, Sr., served as president of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America from 1986-2001.

Sources

1. Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 1615). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.



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Theology of the Cross

“Who Do You Say I Am?”

BRAD HAUER

The text message on my wife’s phone read, “God told me last night the kids are your punishment.” Danny was very upset and was using Jon and Jack’s autism to inflict pain. The words stung for a moment, like bumping an old injury. But the pain quickly turned to pity. Danny’s god is the god of retribution who severely punishes you for your misdeeds. If you suffer, you must have done something to deserve it.

The Gospel of Mark (8:27-38) recounts the conversation of Jesus and his disciples on their way into the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Word of Jesus has spread. People are talking. Jesus asks his disciples what they are hearing, “Who do people say I am?” They answer: Some say a messenger—John the Baptist; others say a miracle worker—Elijah; and still others, a reformer—one of the Prophets.

But now Jesus makes it personal. He presses the real question to his disciples, his closest friends, “I’m really not so interested in who others say I am. Who do you say I am?”

There’s something bigger about Jesus than the roles the people think he plays: messenger, miracle worker, reformer. Peter, to his credit, quickly steps up to the plate. “You are the Christ,” Peter says. And he is absolutely right. Peter understood there was more going on with Jesus. As C.S. Lewis has famously demonstrated, we can’t accept Jesus as a great moral teacher without accepting him as God: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse...”

This is one of the critical points in Jesus’ journey of redemption. No more secrets with the disciples. They were charged, seriously warned, to tell no one else about him yet. But without a doubt, this is who he is. He is the Christ.

But what kind of Messiah is Jesus? Jesus explains that “...the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.” Mark says Jesus spoke plainly about this. But this word was not what they expected. Peter takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him. Messiahs don’t suffer, they conquer. Kings aren’t rejected, they rule. Gods are not killed, they are worshipped.

On Mission for Christ



The Hauer Family: Brad, Jackie, Jonathan, and Jack.

Brad Hauer

Brad grew up moving quite a bit, living in 13 different states. He has called Orlando, Florida home since 2001. He is in the second year of the Master of Divinity program at Lutheran Brethren Seminary and is a graduate of Southeastern University in Practical Theology and Pastoral Ministry.

Brad works with CRU (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ). This fall he is launching *Lighthouse Missional Community*, a network of house churches in Orlando. He and his wife Jackie, their two special-needs boys, Jonathan and Jack, and a French Bulldog named Gigi live in the Lake Nona neighborhood of East Orlando.

Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Mark 8:27-29

It just doesn't make sense. Peter doesn't understand.

And neither would we. The *theology of the cross* doesn't make sense to us. Pat Thurmer says: “We want a glorious savior, we want victory, we want power, prosperity, mighty displays, and sensible deliverance. The way of suffering and the cross sounds nuts to us. But the decisive exhibition of God's justice, the greatest display of his strength, the vastness of his mercy, and the ultimate demonstration of glory and grace is accomplished in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Any other plan, scheme, vision, or mission, no matter how much more practical, sensible, or attractive it appears to be, is from Satan himself.”

The message of the cross sounds foolish to natural man, but it is the power of God.

Jesus, turning and seeing his disciples,

rebukes Peter in the strongest language. “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” When natural man comes to think about God, it is possible to understand “the who,” but not “the how.”

Danny's text message wasn't the first time we encountered this kind of thinking. When Jonathan was born prematurely, with an unexpected genetic condition, and autism, we struggled to understand how this could happen. What had we done wrong? Was this our fault? Had God failed us?

What we didn't fully see at the time was a God who is known through suffering and the cross. I used to think about his holiness, sovereignty, his unmatched power, and his highness. These things make sense to us. What doesn't make sense is this God's lowness, his humility,

and dare we say, his weakness. Gods don't die. It doesn't make sense. That's not the way we would do it. But this is who he is.

A God who dies naked on a cross. A God who forgives sin. A God who bears the burden of a messed-up world, taking the worst it has to offer upon himself. The Savior of special-needs kids, of guys with their minds set on the things of man, of self-righteous rejecters of his grace, rebellious daughters, rule-following sons, hard-hearted middle managers, and parents tempted to believe their kids are their punishment.

This is the Christ.

Brad Hauer is completing his Master of Divinity degree through the distance education program at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



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Theology of the Cross

Hidden in Plain Sight

SETH LEIVESTAD

One of the first games we learn as a child is peek-a-boo. It is a simple game, where a grown-up hides their face from an infant with their hand... and then removes their hand quickly to reveal their face... and says, "Peek-a-boo, I see you."

This game then moves up to the familiar game of hide-and-seek. What a great game! The excitement of running to your favorite hiding spot, and the anticipation of either being found or passed by.

As a child, I never wanted to be found... I always looked for a spot where they would actually have to call me out: "Seth, we give up—come out, come out, wherever you are." This is how we all played the game—we would never hide in plain sight.

In 1 Kings 22:29-37, King Ahab thought he could play hide-and-seek with God...

but to God, Ahab was always hidden in plain sight. In fact, God would prove that with a divinely guided arrow that would end Ahab's life. At the beginning of chapter 22, King Ahab (King of Israel) desired to go to war in order to reclaim the land at Ramoth-Gilead that had been lost to the Syrians three years prior.

To strengthen his army, Ahab wanted to unite with Judah. But before Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, committed his allegiance and his army, he wanted to hear from a prophet of God.

It was customary, before making such a major decision as going to war, that the king would seek a message from a prophet to know God's will. Ahab brought out his 400 false prophets and presented them to King Jehoshaphat and they began to prophesy that the king would be victorious.

But King Jehoshaphat was a godly man and he was skeptical of these prophets; he wanted to hear from a true prophet of God. He asked if there was a prophet of the Lord.

King Ahab responded that there is one—but he doesn't like him because he never tells Ahab what he wants to hear. Jehoshaphat insisted on hearing this prophet.

So King Ahab brought Micaiah before them. Micaiah started to prophesy in a mocking way saying, "Attack and be victorious, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

This upset Ahab, so he shouted at Micaiah, "Speak the truth of the Lord."

Then Micaiah truthfully told Ahab that the 400 prophets before him were filled with a deceitful spirit to entice him to go to war. If he goes to war, all of Israel

Someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded."

1 Kings 22:34

will be scattered, and Ahab will die in the battle.

This prophecy angered Ahab. So he threw Micaiah into prison.

King Ahab went forward anyway, and King Jehoshaphat, knowing Micaiah's message, still decided to join him. But, fearing the prophecy to be true, Ahab came up with a plan. Ahab had King Jehoshaphat wear royal robes, while he disguised himself as a soldier.

Ahab did not disguise himself to hide from the Syrians, but *to hide from God*. This brings us back to the arrow which struck King Ahab and took his life.

Let's focus on an object in the story that may seem small and insignificant—let's focus on that arrow.

Many ministers teach only stories of hide and seek in which God finds men and women where they are, restores them, and uses them for good. People like Moses, David, the Apostle Paul. But that did not happen with King Ahab. Sure, God found him, but not in the same way as the others. King Ahab was found by what can only be described as a divinely guided arrow, not to restore him, but to destroy him.

A Syrian soldier drew his bow and shot it at the Israelite army. This divine arrow soared through the air and hit King Ahab right in the weak section of his armor. To the Syrian soldier, it was all chance... random... a lucky shot.

But God knew that arrow had only one purpose... to seek and find Ahab in his hiding spot. To God, Ahab was hidden in plain sight.

This event is a great illustration of our inward sinful nature. King Ahab's stubbornness, self-centeredness, his inward resistance to listen to God—this is how we resist God's will for us. We can put on the armor of self-righteousness, the armor of respectability, or the armor of good works and a moral life, but this armor will not protect us from the divine arrows of God that seek and find us.

Understand, I am not saying this divine arrow will literally kill us as it did King Ahab. Yet, it could, if the truth delivered to us is rejected. But the purpose of this arrow is not our destruction. The purpose of this arrow is to lead us to repentance. In a spiritual way, this arrow is sent to penetrate the "armor" that we have put around our sin, the sin we try to hide from ourselves, from our family, friends, and from God.

Jesus said, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known" (Luke 12:2). Hebrews 4:13 says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight."

This divinely guided arrow of the Holy Spirit penetrates our armor and reveals to us our sin. God uses the arrow to draw our attention to his Word. Through the Word, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we learn

what God has to say about our sin. We learn that sin brings death, and that Christ alone can protect us from death through his atoning work on the cross. Paul wrote, "...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

God sent his Son into the world to overcome sin and death. Jesus went to the cross on our behalf to free us from sin, guilt, shame, and ruin, and to provide us with an eternal home.

God doesn't like to play the game hide-and-seek. He likes to play peek-a-boo. Unlike our version, he removes *your* hand from *your* face and he looks at you as his precious child and says, "I see you and I love you."

Seth Leivestad serves as pastor at Calvary Community Church in Fullerton, California.

The Big Lie

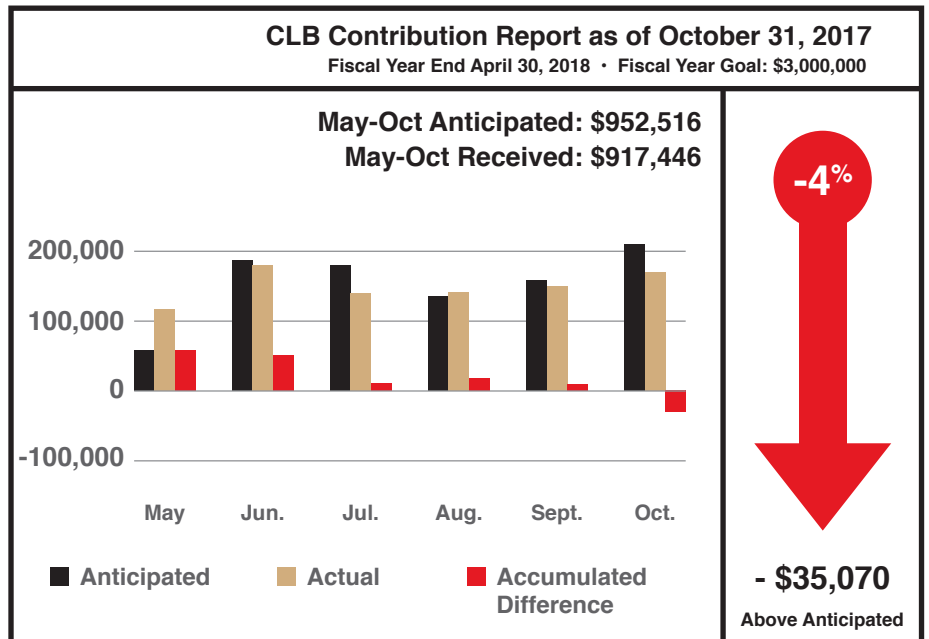
ROY HEGGLAND

Why is the message of the cross such an affront to our old natures? Why is the world so antagonistic towards God's offer of salvation? Why do some people believe that Christians are uninformed simpletons in need of rehabilitation? Why does Hollywood consistently belittle and deride Christian values? Why are Christians the most persecuted group on earth?

The Bible itself confirms that, to the world, the Gospel is foolish (1 Corinthians 1:18) and offensive (Galatians 5:11). This Gospel, the message of the cross, also seems to be foolish and offensive to many who call themselves Christian. How can that be? The answer lies in an understanding of the difference between the theology of the cross and a theology of glory.

A theology of glory could also be called a conditional theology. This theology is characterized by "if..., then..." statements. If I live a life pleasing to God, then God will love me more. If I give generously to others, God will give me more. If I am a Christian, then God will reward me materially and make my life easier. This theology can be characterized by the slogan, "God helps those who help themselves." At its root, a theology of glory puts people at the center.

The theology of the cross is very different in that it is not conditional at all. This theology recognizes that Christ's work on our behalf is finished and complete. We cannot add to it. This theology agrees with the Apostle Paul as he reminds us—those who have been saved by faith alone, through grace alone, and in Christ alone—that we should live transformed lives in view of God's mercy to us through Christ Jesus. The transformed life is not conformed to the world's way of thinking and acting. It



is a life of trust in Christ, no matter the circumstance.

This life is antithetical to one lived according to a theology of glory. It accepts pain and suffering as part of the cross we bear for Christ's sake. This life does not live for itself but for others, and takes no offense since it has no rights outside of Christ. This life loves others as Christ has loved him or her. It is concerned for the welfare of others. It recognizes that we are all dead in our trespasses and sins without the free gift offered by God through his Son. This life recognizes that it is powerless to do anything pleasing to God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit as he leads and guides through the Word. This life is one of repentance and the joy of forgiveness as we come to him with our sin and failures.

We should not be surprised that the world and many in the Church reject those who live in a theology of the cross. The theology of the cross contradicts everything they want to believe about

the inherent goodness and capability of people to participate in some way in their own salvation.

Thank God he has accomplished it all for us! Thank God that he allows us to serve him by serving our neighbor. Thank God that he calls us through his Word and Spirit to live lives that are being transformed into the image of his Son (2 Corinthians 3:18), who lived and gave himself for all people.

Roy Heggland is Associate for Biblical Stewardship for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

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Dreaming of Christmas

CHERYL OLSEN

Christmas creates images of pristine snow-blanketed landscapes, warm hearths, hot steaming flavorful beverages, and joyous laughter with loved ones. Or the reality of nasty frozen mud-chunks, fallen from cars splashing through the slush of a dreary rush hour, in a crowded anxiety-ridden city. Which scene are you dreaming of? Me? Oh, I aspire to the first. Don't you?! It is my ideal! But Christmastime is not always like this picturesque daydream.

I remember it was Christmastime, December 23rd, when, as a sixteen-year-old returning home from school, I was greeted with the devastating news that my Grandpa had unexpectedly died from a heart attack. We celebrated a hurried, rather solemn, "early Christmas Eve" that night, before heading north to be with my Grandma, and gather as an extended family for the funeral.

It was almost Christmastime again, I recall, over a decade later, when my husband and I packed up our six-week-old son, with our family of five, for a snowy trek across all of Wisconsin and Minnesota to join some of the same relatives for my Grandma's funeral.

It was close to Christmastime, in a memory that I try not to revisit too often, that we lost a little one, early in pregnancy. And three years later—it happened again, during that seemingly tragic, coldest, and bleakest of months. There is a faint memory of quietly discussing these events in hushed tones, huddled together in a kitchen conversation with my sister and sister-in-law, as we three commiserated over our own separate, but shared losses. Three cousins who wouldn't be born: three who couldn't join those happily playing in the next room.

Death and December—Christmas and Crisis: these words have intertwined in my life. It was just after Christmas that my husband's Grandfather passed away. It was January 9th that my own Dad went



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home to be with Jesus. It was Christmas Day that I went into premature labor with our fifth child seven weeks before he was due to be born! Yet, somehow, I never feared for his life. I was buoyed by a confidence that wasn't my own. Rough days and weeks lay ahead, but Jesus was my support, along with church and family.

Over the years, God has shown me through his Word, and sheer piling up of life events, that he is faithful and won't leave me! Christmas itself overshadows, outshines all the dark memories! All those difficulties that happened in the dead of winter would have been hard no matter when they happened. But those memories now also swirl together with the best of my family memories, the best memories of youth group parties, women's events, cozy conversations over coffee—all taking place because we are celebrating Jesus' arrival on earth!

Christmastime is a celebration of the fact *that he came*; that Jesus is God *with us*. He came to give hope to a broken, muddy, dreary, sin-filled world. A true

life, that is pristinely pure because of his forgiveness.

I'm dreaming of the opportunity to infuse some hope-filled memories for someone this Christmas...

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



Visit WMCLB online: www.WMCLB.com



Paul and Teresa Szobody educating future Chadian missionaries who will proclaim the Gospel to those who have not heard.

The Incarnation, the Cross, and Jesus' Mission

PAUL SZOBODY

When the Son of God embedded himself into humanity, the Most High made himself the lowest, the First took the last place, and the Sovereign of the universe hung on an umbilical cord in a poor Jewish girl, gladly.

Presently, we are guests in a tiny, poor Arab village. Religious authorities forbid the public proclamation of Christian faith in our region. A neighboring village chief has objected to our presence. The piece of desert on which we built our homes and school is simply a gift for our use. Some say it's a precarious situation. Yet, was not Jesus' entrance into the world even more fraught?

In our little mission camp, we educate aspiring Chadian missionaries. Our pedagogy respects African culture: conversation and relationships count a great deal. No tests, no diplomas, just oral readings, good discussion, husbands and wives together, common prayer and common labor. We seek to get to the heart of Jesus and to the heart of what will prepare us to follow him in mission.

For Jesus is the mission of God: God, deep in this seed of the woman and of Abraham, come to crush Satan and bless all ethnic families (Genesis 3:15; 12:3). Jesus *is* the kingdom—the saving presence of David's seed come to reign kindly in and for human beings (2

Samuel 7:12). His earthly sojourn is the revelation of just who God is and what he's up to.

And so—in whatever we're up to—Jesus addresses us: “Follow *me*” and “As the Father sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Notice: His being, life and mission configure ours.

If we're to keep in step with him, where's he going? Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated: “When Christ calls someone to follow him, he bids that person to die; for, after ‘follow me,’ Jesus adds, ‘and take up your cross.’” The Holy Spirit, who shaped Christ and his mission, also shapes Christ's members and their mission in like contours, in *cruciform*.

*God incomprehensible
 makes himself understood
 in this humanity (of Jesus),
 God ineffable (indescribable in words)
 makes himself heard
 in the voice of his Word-in-flesh, and
 God invisible
 makes himself seen
 in the body that he united with the nature of the Eternal.
 And God, dreadful when his majesty breaks forth,
 makes himself felt
 in his sweet gentleness, in his loving kindness and human compassion,
 according to the words of the apostle:
 "The human compassion and loving kindness of God
 our Savior has appeared to the world." (Titus 3:4)
 — Pierre de Bérulle, 17th-century French theologian and reformer*

In fact, Jesus' life is a perpetual sacrifice—of soul and body—to the Father, for the multitude. From the womb of the Virgin the cross seems engraved, as it were, in scar tissue on Jesus' sacred heart. In his every state, act, word, disposition and heartbeat, the cross is simply *there*—the divine adoration through self-abnegation, the chosen lowliness, the preferred obscurity, the love of life-lived-for-others.

What could this mean for our mission?

On the cross, thorns penetrate the skull, piercing and contradicting cherished human thinking, especially about God. Spikes make human strength writhe and wither like a half-crushed frenzied worm. What can one *do* on a cross? Give up. Die. It seems absurd, a gross failure, a reason to despair. Who wants to follow *that*?

But when pretentious intellect and vain self-confidence breathe their last, *God* provides for what *he's* planned. He has a marvelous habit of bringing life out of death, of making wise the absurd and a capital success of apparent failure. With him despair is not far from grace (Luther). What he kills, he elevates and perfects by resurrection.

After all, it's *his* mission, isn't it?

Consequently, the cross liberates me from my addiction to the religious feeling

that I have to win God's favor. I don't, for Jesus did. Also, as one of my seminary professors used to say, I no longer need to survive, win your approval, or "succeed" in the eyes of people. I don't, for Jesus didn't. I'm free. Free to follow the way of Jesus in mission, free from the pressure to strategically pull off an Ishmael in order to make my life's work look good.

While the formal study of missions ever clamors for new methods, employing the latest tools from the social sciences to achieve measurable results, Jesus still walks, silently waiting to be noticed, still calling: "Follow me."

Jesus' start-up in mission, for example, holds profound lessons for ours. His early itinerary teaches that, in order to go up, go down to the marginalized who sit in darkness; to do something big, get little, submit yourself to other people and consider their needs as more important than you and yours; to shine light, seek a hidden life of prayer, watching and waiting on God; and to make the voice heard, learn to be quiet and listen—for the kingdom does not consist in talk but in power (1 Corinthians 4:20), in a voice of thin silence (1 Kings 19:12).

What's the result? Luke says—twice—that Jesus grew in wisdom and in favor with his Father and people (Luke 2:40, 52). If you have wisdom and favor, you

have a ministry, a circle of influence and something worth communicating, something felt in the heart of the hearer to be from above.

So-called incarnational ministry doesn't necessarily mean you will look, cook and smell like the host culture (though it may help!). It does mean, however, that the attitudes and forms of ministry will issue from Christ's concrete life in the context of local culture. The goal will be to so announce the heart of Jesus (another way to say *grace*) that God *makes himself felt in his sweet gentleness, in his loving kindness and human compassion*.

In our present situation in Chad, we've been made very dependent on the favor of God and the people. On the day our village chief promised us land, he remarked, "I see no reason why we can't live together in mutual respect."

Nor do we.

Paul Szobody serves Lutheran Brethren International Mission with his wife Teresa as missionaries in Chad, Africa.



*Is God calling you to mission work?
 Contact: LBIM@CLBA.org*



Students at Lutheran Brethren Seminary preparing for full-time ministry.

Taking Up the Cross of Ministry



DAVID VEUM

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

—Jesus (Mark 8:34)

Harsh words? Strong words, yes. But harsh words? Three former Lutheran Brethren Seminary students faced that question as they followed Christ into ministry. Jason Rogness grew up on a farm near Toronto, South Dakota, left a career in sports journalism, and now serves as pastor of Community in Christ LBC in Arvada, Colorado. Paul Tjelta grew up as a pastor’s son in Pasadena, California and Nampa, Idaho. He was an architect before

coming to LBS, and now serves as pastor of Bethesda LBC in Westby, Wisconsin. David Narvesen grew up attending Community of Joy Lutheran Brethren Church in Eagan, Minnesota. He was a civil engineer in Washington state, and is now studying the French language in France in preparation for mission work to the unreached Fulbe people of Chad.

What did it cost you to follow Christ into ministry?

Jason: The first thing that comes to mind is money! While I was finishing my Bachelor’s degree in Broadcast Journalism, the Fargo Fox television

station offered me a job. It was exactly the job you would hope to get coming right out of college. I could have also been a farmer, another career that I would have loved. There is cost in being away from family and the farm. I miss both because I hold close my family and the life I had growing up on the farm.

Paul: It “cost”... money, perceived security, leaving a sense of belonging for not belonging, trading an anticipated path for my children for an unknown path for them, leaving behind our friends and our children’s friends, and feeling responsible for all that my kids and my wife left behind. It cost everything!

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”

Mark 10:29-30

David: The decision to leave from our part wasn't one that felt like we were giving up anything. True we were leaving good jobs and a home we had for eight years. Leaving friends and co-workers was really the only thing hard about moving, but when our backs were to Washington and we were heading toward Minnesota there were no regrets.

Why did you leave to follow Christ in ministry?

Jason: The call to ministry was clear, and my desire to be in the news room was gone. To spend more money earning a Master of Divinity was an easy choice. After completing my degree, I accepted a call to Arvada. I thought I would be there a couple years and then move back to the mid-west to be closer to family. But the door has remained opened for me to keep serving this congregation. It hasn't been easy, especially when you are missing holidays, birthday parties, and special events. But again, it's the call that has kept me where I am, and the people he has called me to serve. I also see that part of the reason for leaving was to find my wife, Savanna. Although I didn't know it at the time, the Lord was orchestrating our meeting, which was at the church after a baptism!

Paul: Luke 9:23-24 pushed me over the edge. Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

David: Why did I leave? Good question. I enjoyed my job and was getting more and more successful in it, but at the end of the day I just knew there was something else God was calling us to.

Was it worth it?

Jason: It has absolutely been worth it! While the moments of longing to be near home are very real, they pale in comparison to the peace that the Lord gives you when you are living his call for your life.

Paul: It didn't cost me anything. A better question is, “What did I gain?”

David: Absolutely. These days are certainly harder, but in the end the joy of seeing what God is doing is worth it.

How does the cross make it possible to follow Christ into ministry?

Jason: My purpose in life is not determined by my own self. That was given to me when Christ died, rose again, declared me righteous, and gave me the mission to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). In fact, we've all been given that purpose. There are just too many who haven't realized it yet.

Paul: The cross makes it possible because the cross is the point at which God's claim on my life grabs me and won't let go. He has claim to my life as my Creator, but at the cross he laid claim to my life as my Lover. God's claim on me as Creator speaks to my mind. His claim on me as

Lover takes my heart and makes me his own. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). May I live my life to “the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12)!

David: There are days/weeks when I am being stretched beyond imagination, and looking back I know in those times it is only the cross that is carrying me. Without Christ coming down to this earth and knowing suffering worse than I can comprehend, it wouldn't have been possible, I think, for us as a Church to be able to fully go as he commands in Matthew 28. He bridges our weakness through his victory over the cross and gives us strength and hope as we seek to spread his mission to the world.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

—Jesus (Mark 8:34)

Strong words, yes, but not harsh. Not when they are spoken by the *One* who loves us and laid down his life for us.

Should the Lord be calling you to prepare for ministry, it is worth it. The cross makes it possible.



Rev. David Veum, D.Min, serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as president of Lutheran Brethren Seminary.



Harold and Joyce Rust in front of Knox Presbyterian Church where they hold their monthly Celebration Service and Supper.

Mission: Red Deer

ROGER OLSON



Whether it's a married couple who are finding themselves part of planting their second Lutheran Brethren congregation in Alberta or young adults eager to see people come to know Jesus, friendships are key to the Red Deer mission known as *The River*.

Over the past year, Pastor Harold Rust, former president of Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute in Camrose, Alberta, and his wife Joyce have been doing foundational planting work—getting acquainted with the region and building relationships with people in and around this city of 100,000. Now, living in the area together with their daughter Naomi, they are launching home-based communities where those who are part of the mission can welcome those who are being drawn to become disciples of Jesus.

Young adults who have come to know and love Harold and Joyce, most through their experience at Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute, are key members of the team. “It’s exciting to live here,” says Imanuel, a university student from Germany. “I’ve always wanted to intern in the church and see the kind of work the pastor does. It’s a passion of mine to see people grow. Church planting is all of that combined. It will be exciting to see a common vision develop, with ways to invest in the kingdom of God. This is what made us come here.”

“We are recently married and, before going back to Germany after Christmas, we have time to get involved,” his wife Alanna notes. “We have a heart for missions... a heart for doing things. We thought it would be cool to step into some things, to pray and meet people and see what God will do.”

Former Bible School students who are now attending Olds College and Red Deer College are excited to stay connected with the Rusts and at the same time be engaged in mission. “It’s fun that you guys are here,” Melissa Skretting, a nursing student at RDC, has shared with the Rusts. “I like the thought of being part of something new, pulling people in that haven’t been a part of church before, or have misconceptions. It’s really important to clarify things for them.”

Wayne and Karen Sollid, close friends of Harold and Joyce, recently relocated to the area after playing a key part in planting Resurrection LBC in Camrose. “It feels like we are living parallel lives, ending up in the same places, working in very different ways, but doing the same mission,” says Karen. “Our farm near Camrose helped support them in practical ways—food for the school, jobs, space



for student activities. Now they can use our Olds house as a support for ministry. It's been fun having young adults on our farm and in our home, visiting and getting to know them."

With the support from these and other team members, on Sunday, October 22, home-community friends came together for the first monthly *Celebration Service and Supper*. These gatherings provide a place for home communities to connect, worship, and encourage one another and provide a venue where members of area Lutheran Brethren congregations can bring friends and family members, introducing them to new friends and new life in Christ.

As this next chapter of ministry begins, pray that in the months ahead many new friends will become friends of God.

Rev. Roger Olson serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Canada as Regional Pastor.

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Jodi Jacobson/Stock

Ramrod Key, Florida, United States—September 2017: Home destroyed by Hurricane Irma.

Hurricane Irma

PAT THURMER

On September 10, 2017, Hurricane Irma made its way past our city, Cape Coral, Florida. The damage here was less than expected, but neighboring communities were hit hard. Irma was the seventh most intense hurricane to hit the United States mainland. (Hurricane Charlie in 2004 caused more damage in Cape Coral.)

Approaching Storm: As Hurricane Irma approached Southwest Florida, people prepared for it by putting up hurricane shutters and plywood over their windows to protect their belongings as best they could. Many residents braced themselves to stay, while many others fled to safer areas, and some sought refuge in area shelters and churches. A couple families who live in more vulnerable areas decided to camp out at our church, Living Faith Church.

The able-bodied who stayed at home stocked up on food, water and gasoline. The differences in people's temperaments are highlighted at such times and the best and worst of human nature is seen. Some selfishly hoarded more supplies than they could possibly use and others selflessly helped others before and after the storm. Stores quickly ran out of supplies and they were hard to come by until some days after the storm.

The Storm: In some ways, the hurricane itself was the easiest part of the experience, as there was really nothing more that could be done except ride it out. In our home the electricity went out with an early gust of wind. With all the windows boarded up, the event was endured in dim candlelight. Thankfully, building codes are such that most homes built in recent years stood up to the high winds very well. We were thankful here that a storm surge was not the factor many feared.

Aftermath & Recovery: The days immediately following a hurricane are the most difficult. As soon as the storm passed, some shutters could be removed to let in light and fresh air, but with the power out, the Florida heat quickly became stifling. Without power, there was little news or information available

about how hard the area was hit, or who was hurting and where. Immediately after the storm it was dangerous to drive because of downed trees, power lines and standing water.

In the days following, as information became available, people began to mobilize to help those who were hardest hit. At our church, a few individuals organized a relief effort to collect and distribute needed supplies in area communities. Multiple car and truck loads of non-perishable food, water, and hygiene supplies were delivered to distribution points here in Southwest Florida.

A kind of depression sets in after a storm like this. There are piles of branches, toppled trees, shingles and garbage along the roadside, along with the tarps covering damaged roofs. This all mars the beauty of an area ordinarily seen as a vacation spot. The mess will take a long time to clean up and repair. And yet, what we experienced here is nothing like the devastation experienced nearby. So we're cautious about saying things like, "God answered our prayers," because the prayers of neighbors nearby were not answered in the same way. The devastation of Puerto Rico from Hurricane Maria, the earthquake in Mexico City, the fires in California, and the massacre in Las Vegas—these all remind us that the earth is groaning and has been since the Fall into sin. This isn't our home.

Martin Luther said, "God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbors do." In the midst of suffering, it is heartening to see people come forward to help one another and share the love of Christ.

We are thankful for many people throughout the CLB who prayed and voiced concern for our church and its people both before and after the storm. May God bless you.

Rev. Pat Thurmer serves as pastor of Living Faith Lutheran Brethren Church in Cape Coral, Florida.

Anderson Installed



L to R: Mary Anderson, Pastor Kristian Anderson, Regional Pastor Stan Olsen, and Faith & Fellowship's Correspondent for Women's Ministries Cheryl Olsen.

On September 24, 2017, Kristian Anderson was installed as East Campus Congregational Life Pastor at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church in Moorhead, MN.

Johnson Installed



L to R: Elder Bill Buck, Pastor Alan Johnson, Regional Pastor Phil Heiser.

On October 1, 2017, Regional Pastor Phil Heiser installed Alan Johnson as pastor at Community Church of Joy in Sammamish, WA.

Bachiu Ordained as Elder



L to R: Elder Scott Kopperud, CLBC President Jonathan Overland, Elders Vern Bachiu, Kenton Klassen, Art Hundebly, and Dan Hagen.

On July 2, 2017, Vern Bachiu was ordained as an elder at Rock of Ages LBC in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. CLBC President Overland performed the ordination.

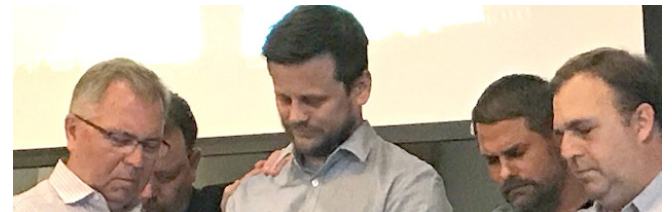
Spina Ordained



L to R: Regional Pastor Phil Heiser, Elder Dale McLerron, Rev. Jordan Spina, Elders David Wills, Rich Erickson, and Bob Olson.

On September 10, 2017, Jordan Spina was ordained and installed as senior pastor at Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, WA. Rev. Phil Heiser led the service.

Stenberg Installed



L to R: Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty, Rev. Aage Larsen, Pastor Daniel Stenberg, Rev. Andrew Foss, and Elder Mike Renn.

On September 24, 2017, Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty installed Daniel Stenberg as pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church in Bergenfield, NJ.



J-Term
1/24-26/2018

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHURCH: GOD'S CHURCH IN GOD'S MISSION
ED STETZER • MARK SUNDBY • RYAN NILSEN

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Consider It Pure Joy

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

—James 1:2-4

My Regional Pastor called recently to see how things were going. In the course of the conversation, I observed that, beyond the “normal” challenges we face as a local congregation, there seem to be an inordinate number of challenging circumstances for the families in my church. Individually, so many families, maybe the majority, are dealing with some very hard things, or have in the not-too-distant past.

His response was sympathetic. But he wondered if what we are fighting through is not so different from what many, if not most, of our churches are facing these days. Our society has changed so much in recent decades, the concept and experience of family life is in decline, and—with moral decay—young people deal with harder things at an earlier age.

Maybe that’s what’s going on.

If the “normal” Christian family in your local church today is facing major trials, James chapter 1 becomes very relevant. “Consider it pure joy,” he says. This does not mean we will understand and be happy about our hardships and losses. Certainly joy is not the same thing as happiness. And while James points to the benefits of our trials, such as patience, wisdom, faith, and maturity, there is no guarantee of our understanding why.

It is often a mystery known only to God. Our pain may be someone else’s gain, though we may never know or see how.

Ken Sundet Jones wrote, “This is why words like suffering and loss flow so frequently off the tongues of theologians of the cross. It is those moments in life where we come up against the limits of our own power and possibility, where we face the hard truth that our lives are truly and only in God’s hands. It is death itself that becomes the ultimate mirror to our helpless striving and asks, ‘On whom does your next breath, your next heartbeat, your next moment depend?’”

The theology of the cross. Suffering and even death for a purpose. We can’t always see it in our own experience; usually we can’t. But the cross of Christ is the clearest truth of all time: His pain and death, for our gain. Pure joy.

Rev. Brent Juliot is Pastor of Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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Thursday 1/25/18: Ed Stetzer, Ph.D.

Author, Pastor, and Contributing
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