



# identity

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHERN

**FIX YOUR EYES ON CHRIST**

## THE RIVER: REACHING THE LOST WITH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

### THEOLOGY

Grace and the  
Coronavirus

### TESTIMONY

The Porn  
Problem

### MISSION

A Christian  
Approach to  
Immigrants

### CHRISTIAN LIVING

Responding  
to Violence

BEHIND THE STORM  
REV. TROY TYSDAL

On February 26, 2020, a little over two weeks before the severity of the Coronavirus became common knowledge in North America, my wife and I boarded a plane with our two boys—one nine years old and the other six. We were flying from Minneapolis to Orlando on a family vacation.

The boys were excited. They had flown before... and they knew what it meant. We were on our way to someplace fun. They also knew that for the next six days they would have their parents' undivided attention. Isn't that what children crave most? They want to be heard, seen, and loved.

As our plane began to descend into Orlando, we realized that we had been flying over a storm, and to land in Orlando we had to travel through the storm. My oldest son had a window seat. I was sitting next to him. We could see flashes of lighting, but more than that... we felt the plan shake—we could feel the wind, the change in airflow.

I could tell that he was scared, so I asked him, "What's stronger, the airplane, or the storm?" With some doubt in his voice, he answered, "The airplane?" I laughed, realizing that I had asked him a trick question, and knowing that the truth might not bring him the immediate comfort he was seeking.

"No," I said... "It's the storm, but God controls the storm, and the storm can't do anything that God doesn't allow it

to do. God is in control, and he loves us very much."

God is in control.

We live in a broken world, and for the time-being God leaves it that way. He uses the trials we face to call us to repentance—to turn our hearts back toward him. But our repentance doesn't mean that we will be spared illness or loss. These things we are called to endure with hope. Our hope serves as a sign for those who do not know the Lord. Our hope points to something bigger—something better. You see, in times of hardship unbelievers are looking for an answer, and we believers have the answer... in Jesus Christ.

As our world battles COVID-19, it's hard to know what the coming months will bring. Will there be hardship? There already is! Will there be loss of life? There already is! But those things are part of life in this world. Even the Son of God wasn't spared suffering when he took on flesh to live among us. Jesus felt sadness, anger, and ultimately he was crucified. He was stripped, spit upon, mocked, and nailed to a cross. The father in heaven... silent. The sun in the sky fading to black. The Son crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—longing for the Father's attention—to be heard, seen, and loved.

If ever there appeared to be a moment that God had lost control, that was it—Jesus crying out and releasing his spirit.

But that was the plan.

Jesus laid down his life for the sins of the world. He died for our anger, our hatred, our lies, our rejection of the Father, and by his wounds we are healed.

I don't know what the coming months will bring... BUT I KNOW THIS... to get where we are going, we must travel through the storm. But we know the God who controls the storm, and he loves us very much.

In Christ we are children of God, and he is with us in every trial and every hardship.

The Apostle Paul writes, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

God is in control. Trust in him. Turn back to him, and one day you will see your Redeemer coming on the clouds in power and glory.

**AUTHOR**

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Church of the Lutheran Brethren



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THE PORN PROBLEM  
**REV. LUKE KJOLHAUG**

remember the first time I saw pornography. I was sitting in the back seat on my way to an event with some buddies. With a sly grin on his face, my friend riding shotgun turned around, opened up the magazine he had been reading, and let the centerfold fall out: “What do you think of that?” As I gazed upon the lurid picture, I was overcome by a conflicting array of emotions: Embarrassment. Excitement. Guilt. Pleasure. Regret. It was hard to look away.

**Breaking Down the Numbers**

The use of pornography is especially prevalent in our digital age, and the statistics are staggering:

- 1) 35% of all internet downloads are related to porn.
- 2) 65% of non-Christian men and 30% of non-Christian women view pornography at least monthly.

3) Within the Christian community, the numbers aren’t much different: 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women view pornography at least once per month.

To complicate things, moral attitudes toward porn are shifting, particularly among younger generations, with 90% of teens and 96% of young adults either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when discussing porn with friends. In other words, the idea that “viewing porn is wrong” is increasingly rare.<sup>1</sup>

**First Things First**

There’s an important part of this discussion that often gets missed but is important to affirm: Our bodies are good and beautiful.

Back in the Garden of Eden, the daily creation assessment, “God saw that it was good,” only changes to “God saw that it was VERY good” (Gen

1:31), after he creates human beings. Humans alone bear the image of the almighty God.

There is nothing intrinsically sinful or dirty about the human figure. In fact, quite the opposite is true. God himself is the author of beauty, and that means our desire for a one-flesh union with another person is actually a God-given thing. We were created as sexual beings, as C.S. Lewis observed: “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Humans feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex.”<sup>2</sup>

**The Diagnosis**

The problem, though, is that ever since the Fall, when Adam and Eve looked at that shiny fruit and pursued what was not theirs to have, human beings are born with a desire to abuse God’s gifts. We are ceaselessly dissatisfied

with the gifts God freely gives, chasing after the lusts of our own hearts and believing the lie that God is holding out on us.

The root of the problem, then, is not the attractiveness of the human figure but the condition of our hearts. This is bad news, especially for those of us who'd like to imagine we are "purer of heart" than anyone else. Jesus makes this abundantly clear in Matthew 5:27-28, where he ups the ante of the Law: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

In other words, it's not just about the external act; it's about the inward attitude as well. Jesus is saying that whenever we cast our lustful gaze at the glowing pixels of flesh on the other side of the screen, we are guilty of breaking the fifth commandment. Pornography is adultery. Full stop.

The problem, then, is the old Adam—our sinful nature—whose blood still courses through our veins.

### The Cure

If that is the diagnosis, what is God's cure? What is his prescription? It's simply this: God sends us a new Adam with new blood to do what the old one could not. Romans 5:19: "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

Jesus is the new and better Adam who came to succeed where the old one failed. Where we give in to temptation, Jesus overcomes it. Where we seek the forbidden fruit, he lives a pure and chaste life. Where we sin, he is holy. And where we fail to obey God's Law, he fulfills it—completely and fully—on our behalf. He takes care of our sins—

**D**ark experiences have spawned my hatred for silence. I think of silence as an invitation to dine at a table of cold spoilage from the fridge of my memory. Even more, it is from this fridge that all my unresolved life pains present themselves only to be digested decades later—mold and all!

I recount the worst of these feastings not long ago. I was sitting in my Toyota as the dark of the evening quiet approached. I sat there unsettled to the soul despite the placid composure of my body. Voices rushed forth, "Will you tell her?..." "She needs to know..." "She'll divorce you." They continued... "You told her you are clean when really you're a disgusting liar. You're done, man." I was alone, in silence. The menu that night was a decade of porn addiction along with the lies that followed. Lies to friends, family, my wife, and myself.

Sadly I am one of the many Christian men who have been addicted to porn (pastors and married men included). The numbers are jolting and increasing, and I'm assuming these numbers are from the honest addicts out there. I wasn't. It's easy to think that in order to be an addict you must consume your drug daily, ritually, and to the extent of a neurological dependency. Here's a simpler definition: addiction is anything toxic to the soul that you've tried stopping but find yourself returning to.

Porn has been my coping mechanism. I use it to stuff down

and numb the painful brokenness of my life that bubbles to the surface. Even more, as I ponder the matter more deeply, it's not so much that I'm addicted to naked women, but that I'm fastened to the fantasies and lies embodied on my pocket screen.

At the altar of porn, I believed myself to be receiving something sensual and stimulating, something to take away the earthiness of this life. It was a religious bodily high where I would look into the eyes of my god and for a brief moment lay enamored with illusions of control and choices, as well as a rehearsed "love" that says, "I want you."

Click by click I've noticed these fantasy lies warping the reality of who I am. In time I came to believe that I am a pornographer, liar, cheater, pervert and gross human being. The deceptiveness of this religion is that the virtual sex temple of porn shows up everywhere, offering you a sense of belonging and escape. It does this by manipulating your sacred biology. And should you choose to leave the temple, blackmail is there to remind you of the lies knitted to your soul that will be made public—hence your return.

Perhaps, like me, you have been caught in the undertow of shame, desperate to hide and escape the vicious cycle it imprisons you with. In this cycle, your addiction robes you in shame. You'll recognize shame by lies you tell yourself born out of your addiction: they often begin with "I am disgusting, I am..." And that very shame drives

THE PORN PROBLEM  
**REV. LUKE KJOLHAUG**

past, present, and future—by nailing them to the cross once and for all. He died and rose again for you and me, to declare that even in the midst of our worst failures he sees us only as righteous.

We are no longer defined by our failures, however great and however many they may be. We are forgiven. We are free. And only by learning to live in the freedom of Jesus’ forgiveness can the chains of sin be broken.

**More than  
 Accountability Partners**

You and I need to find someone to remind us of this. We need more than an accountability partner to stir up our guilty conscience and hold us to the letter of the Law. We need someone who will speak gospel-truth over us, to remind us again and again that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). We need a forgiveness partner.

Coming to terms with God’s verdict of “guilty” is a good thing, but only if it drives us to Christ and the forgiveness he won at the cross. So flee there, away from the desires of your own heart and toward the God who gave up everything for you. And rest in the promise that “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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**SOURCES**

1. All statistics are taken from the study “Porn Stats” by Covenant Eyes, which cites an array of sources—both Christian and non—for its data. It can be downloaded for free at <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>.
2. C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001, 136.

LEAVING THE ISLAND OF PORN ADDICTION  
**ANONYMOUS**

you back to your addiction. As your high departs you’re left dry and feeling worthless. You have nothing to cling to but a fantasy devoid of any truth or real intimacy.

Be suspicious of any god that promises a painless cure. There is only one true God who boasts of his love for you and offers you a way out. It comes by believing the truth. Truth has a voice and you hear him in John 8 as he speaks to the adulterous woman trapped by religious zealots. This unnamed woman is caught in her adultery, waiting to be bashed with rocks, when the voice of Truth tells her, “You are not condemned, go and sin no more.”

In the silence of Calvary, Jesus conquered your sin and shame and now calls you beloved. It is a cure that comes by way of pain, real intimacy and deep cost. He is not ashamed of you; in fact, he wants to confront you with the truth of who you are as he walks with you through the dark night of your addiction.

I lied. I wasn’t alone that night in the Toyota, though it was easy to believe I was. I heard another voice, the voice that beckons each of us to walk in the light, in truth. The voice that told the woman in John 8 to “go and sin no more” is the same voice that lives today and echoed in my ear, “She needs to know.”

I have heard it said, “You cannot shame your way into recovery.” This is true. Shame is a punched ticket back to the island of addiction. Recovery happens by believing, confessing, and walking in the truth in community. I mention community because community hedges our habits of hiding and isolation. My prayer for you is that you are not just reminded of your daughtership or sonship in Jesus Christ, but that you believe him and his profession of love for you. From this love he calls you out of darkness into his light, and says to you, as he said to the woman in John 8, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”



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HATE AND VIOLENCE  
**REV. KRISTIAN ANDERSON**

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**G**rowing up in Brooklyn, New York in the 1980s and 90s meant that I was no stranger to violence. I remember waking up in the middle of the night to the sound of gunshots on my street. I remember being given instructions to avoid walking down certain blocks due to the presence of gangs. During my first year of high school, in the heat of the gang war between the Bloods and the Crips, we were instructed that we no longer had to wear our school uniforms for gym class. The uniforms included the color blue, the gang color of the Crips, and the administration was afraid that students would become targets for stabbings. I was a blond-haired Norwegian in an area that no longer looked anything like me. I went to schools where I was a significant minority, which often made me, and my few friends who looked like me, targets for violence.

As I moved into adolescence and tried to establish who my friends were and

where I belonged, it was becoming more and more commonplace for kids to be divided by race. It was not about your socio-economic status, or if you were part of a team, or if you were in the school band together. You hung out with people who *looked* like you, so there was strength in numbers. It was about nothing more than survival. I remember the first time I was handed a flyer inviting me to an upcoming meeting about helping to preserve the white race. I experienced a wide range of emotions in that moment: I was tired of being afraid and was angry about the violence and hatred that had been directed at me from people of other races, but I also had people who looked nothing like me that were my best friends, that I had grown to love like family. Who was the enemy? Who was responsible?

Growing up in this setting, I became numb to violence. It was part of life. Inescapable. I felt helpless to stop any of it. Now this may not have been

your experience growing up, but everyone sees the turbulent state of our world. Many of us experience tumultuous interactions in our communities, maybe even on a weekly basis. Frequently this is due to the differences between groups of people in our areas. So what do we do with our feelings about this? What do you do when the person who was a victim of that violence is someone you know? What do we do when that violence infringes upon our freedoms and dramatically changes our lives?

It was not until my early 20s that I learned the answer to my question of who (or what) is responsible. I was sitting in a hot church pew on a Sunday morning. As I learned the truth of the gospel, I discovered that the answer to the violence question was, and always will be, sin. Events like the mass shooting in Las Vegas, the violence in Charlottesville, the tragedy at Pulse nightclub, the burning of black churches in Louisiana, the Poway,

“The tragedies we witness should drive us to ask the question: Where is my hope in the midst of all this despair and the reality of death?”

California synagogue shooting, the continuous gang violence in Chicago, and the mosque shooting in New Zealand are all a result of sin.

Incidents such as these wrench our hearts. They are a brutal reminder of the consequences of sin. All of these tragedies are different, and in no way am I trying to lump them all together to say they are all the same thing. But the reason why all these things happened, when you get down to the root of it, is sin. At the fundamental level, all this has taken place because we have rejected and rebelled against God. As stated in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” Death is the by-product of this rebellion. And although this is all true, it does not bring us any comfort. The reason it doesn’t bring comfort is that it does not bring us any hope.

But there is hope. The tragedies we witness should drive us to ask the question: Where is my hope in the midst of all this despair and the reality of death? It is the same question that Job asks in Job 17:15, when he says, “Where then is my hope—who can see any hope for me?” Our hope resides in our faith in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. As Martin Luther wrote in *On the Bondage of the Will*, “So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him

this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is there I shall be also!’”

So the two ingredients that are needed to formulate a Christian response to the violence in the world around us are an understanding of the reality of sin and the message of hope in Jesus. How then should we respond to these tragedies?

We first should pray. Pray against the evil that is present in our world. Pray for understanding. Pray for those who are victims of these atrocities. Pray for your heart to respond like Jesus would in those moments.

Second, grieve with those who are grieving. “Mourn with those who mourn,” as we are called to do in Romans 12:15. It is not always about having the right words, but instead being willing to be present amid the tragedy.

Lastly, we should then love. We should love those around us, even our enemies. This has been hard for me to do at times, if I am honest. Loving those who do not deserve love seems impossible, until we recognize that we were loved while we were still sinners,

in the midst of our rebellion. We didn’t deserve love either. When Jesus rescued us, we were still lost in our sin, unable to work our way out of it. But thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! When we show unexpected or unwarranted love to those who don’t deserve it, for just a moment, we get a glimpse, a reflection, of what our Lord and Savior has done for us.

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**RING...  
RING...  
RING...**



**IS GOD TRYING TO GET YOUR ATTENTION?**

God is calling people into the ministry.  
Is He calling you?

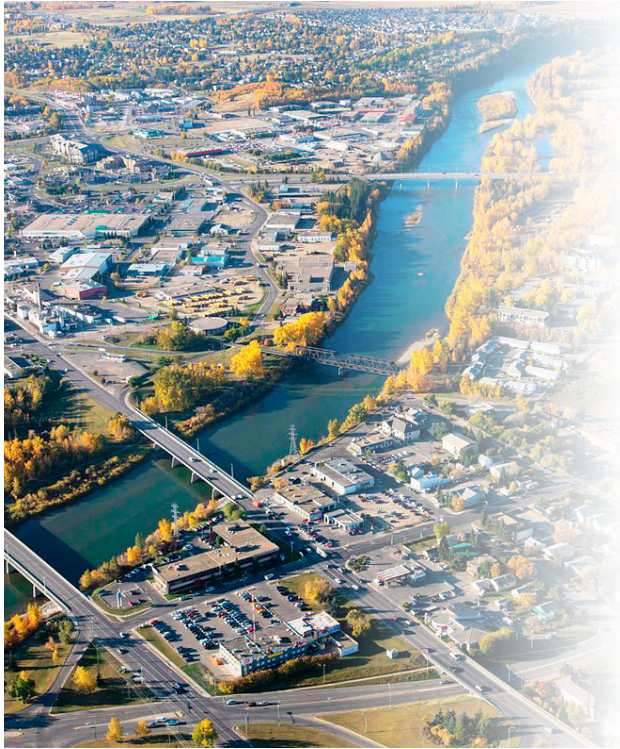
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# The River: Lutheran Brethren Church Plant

CROSS-CULTURAL NEIGHBORING  
**REV. HAROLD RUST**

**T**he world has come to North America... and that includes Red Deer, Alberta. We believe this is much more than coincidental. Our God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. He desires that the nations hear the gospel—nations that he brought to the world, into our neighborhoods, our towns, and our cities.

Samir came to Red Deer fleeing the ravages of war in South Sudan. He is an ambitious, happy and athletic young man who arrived hoping to attend college and eventually study medicine. But first Samir needed to improve his English skills. That's where our lives intersected and ministry began. He came to a resource center in downtown Red Deer, where my wife agreed to mentor him in English. Week after week they would read works like Hamlet or Tuesdays With Morrie, writing paragraphs and papers in proper academic style. Because of their relationship, Samir was able to share the pain of recent tragedies with us. The loss of his father and brother and the serious reaction of a friend to

illicit drugs have opened his heart to the comfort of caring Christian friends. We believe he is very near to the kingdom of God.

Cindy also came to the resource center for help with English. A recent newcomer from China, she wrestled with some of the terminology. One day, during a discussion about the months of the year, the teacher shared that her favorite month was April. Their anniversary was in April and often so was Easter. Cindy had never heard of Easter. So, in a Christ-centered yet non-threatening way, Cindy heard the whole story of Christmas and Easter for the very first time. What a privilege to listen, to pray, to share and to watch God at work in people's lives!

Dadi and Nisha spent well over a decade in a refugee camp in Namibia. They came to know Jesus as their Savior early in their lives and have a beautiful faith. They have a good command of the English language. Their greatest need is for safe and loving childcare because Dadi works long hours and Nisha is studying at college. What fun to help

fill a few of the gaps with love and care! They are part of our family in Christ who need encouragement and blessing as they settle into this new country.

I am sure you have stories that are similar. Newcomers from a foreign land are your neighbors, your classmates, and your fellow workers. Although their cultures may differ remarkably from ours, they need friendship and welcome. All the people around us, whether new or old, need the "gospel neighboring" that Jesus expressed in the story of the good Samaritan. This approach to welcoming the world has stretched us, convicted us and blessed us beyond measure.

To God be the glory!

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**REV. HAROLD RUST** is Church-Planting Pastor at The River in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada.

# A River of Living Water



## THE RIVER, RED DEER, ALBERTA, CANADA

### Prayer Requests:

Pray for friendships that lead to discussions of faith, and an honest search for truth.

Pray that newcomers to church would hear God's call to reach out to loved ones in their lives.

Pray that Jesus would be lifted high and draw people to himself.

Please pray that God would provide young leaders to join and become part of the leadership team in Red Deer. If you would like to join the ministry of The River, email Pastor Harold Rust: [Harold@RedDeerRiver.ca](mailto:Harold@RedDeerRiver.ca)



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NEW NEIGHBORS  
DR. GAYLAN MATHIESEN

**E**ach Tuesday I serve as an adult literacy volunteer, helping a man I'll call Ivan learn to read English. Ivan came to the United States during the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. Though his family was Orthodox Christian, they lived very peaceably in the dominantly Muslim republic of Bosnia in central Yugoslavia, with his father doing very well in business. Ivan says there were no problems in his community between Christians and Muslims prior to the war, but once the conflicts flared up, the Muslim community turned on their Christian neighbors, and his father's businesses were destroyed. All told, 144,000 people lost their lives, and war crimes were many.

Ivan's older sister, who lived in Croatia, had been granted refugee status to bring her family to the US. Thirteen-year-old Ivan went to visit his sister one

last time, but then the Bosnia-Croatia border was closed, so he could not go home. His sister invited him to go to America with her. "I have no choice," he said. A year later, he landed in the US, with no knowledge of the English language.

Eventually, Ivan connected with some uncles living in Minnesota and moved to Fergus Falls. He tackled English with zeal and entered high school, but a car accident, in which his uncle's car was hit by an intoxicated snowplow driver, left him with serious injuries that forced him to drop out. Following multiple surgeries, he set out to find a job, and has since been faithfully employed at a local factory and is frequently tapped to train new employees. He married a Christian woman and today worships regularly with his family in an evangelical congregation. Now finally learning to

read English, he is preparing for his citizenship exam. This is Ivan's story, or rather, Ivan is the story. According to Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, "A critical mindset shift toward a more missionary mentality is from the idea that people have stories to people are stories."

If people and their stories matter to God, shouldn't they matter to us? If so, how do we—God's missionary people—express that? As Russell Moore put it rather directly: "The Christian response to immigrant communities in the United States cannot be 'You kids get off my lawn' in Spanish. While evangelicals, like other Americans, might disagree on the political specifics of achieving a just and compassionate immigration policy, our rhetoric must be informed by more than politics, but instead by gospel and mission."



Created in the image of a missionary God, the Church is missionary by nature (John 20:21). We are called first to see our neighbors, including the immigrant, through the lens of God's redemptive mission, and there are many opportunities. We live in a time of unprecedented migration, with upwards of 12 million undocumented workers in the US and many others who are legal. While many profess the Christian faith, others are from nations where non-Christian religions are dominant. Without changing our zip code or postal code, we can help them learn our language and culture, help them secure a job, show them where to shop, and much more. For example, numerous congregations hold English conversation classes and tutor immigrants for the citizenship exam. The Bible says that God "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). Additionally, Christ told us that our response to the most vulnerable among us is a response to him (Matthew 25:40-45).

However, it's very easy to be swayed by the voices of our society, seeing all immigrants as dangerous lawbreakers from whom we must protect ourselves. But let us beware of the dangers that nationalism poses to our soul; the world is not our standard. While there are valid issues to be addressed, Jesus showed us a different way. Evangelist to international students, Chawkat Georges Moucary, reminds us that Moses associated aliens and strangers with widows, orphans and the poor. "This emphasizes that a foreigner's life is not an easy one. His work is often hard and poorly paid, and he may not be able to afford good housing. In addition...

there are emotional challenges: he is an uprooted person, deprived of the comfort of his native language, family, and friends. In short, he is alone. This loneliness is all the more painful because it is seldom a personal choice, hence the tendency for foreigners to stick together."

Let us ask ourselves, what would we do to feed our starving family, or to get them out of a war-torn environment? Russell Moore says the larger concern "is in how we talk about this issue, recognizing that this is not about 'issues' or 'culture wars' but about persons made in the image of God. Our churches must be the presence of Christ to all persons, regardless of country of origin or legal status. We need to stand against bigotry and harassment and exploitation, even when it's politically profitable for those who stand with us on other issues."

But there's another perspective too: God is up to something amazing in our day. As he said: "Look at the nations and watch, and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told" (Habakkuk 1:5).

Here is an amazing example: the highest growth rate for evangelical Christianity today is not in the west, but in places like Iran (19.7%) and Afghanistan (16.7%). According to the UN Refugee Agency, in 2015, 244 million people lived outside their country of origin, with 43% of these professing the Christian faith. Among the foreign-born living in the US, the figure for professing Christian is 74% (Muslims are 5%). Looking at legal immigrants only, the figure still exceeds 60%. "Many Hispanics sincerely believe that God has led them here for a purpose: to play an important role in a revival of the Christian faith in this country." Some

of the largest churches in Europe are either founded by Africans or led by people of African descent.

Most every region of the world is now both sending and receiving missionaries. What is God up to in all of this? We find the answer in the Scriptures: God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9); and he gave the vision of seeing one day "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Christianity is the world's most globalized, most geographically dispersed, and most culturally and ethnically diverse religion. We are God's missionary people—his primary chosen means of bringing in the fullness of his kingdom, his redemptive reign, that Jesus might be glorified in all the earth. How can we best join in his mission, even right where we are?

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INTERNATIONAL MISSION  
MISSION FIELDS

# The Old Sent

In Luke 10:2-4, Jesus gave this instruction to missionary teams as he sent them out: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.”

This instruction applies to us who follow Christ today just as much as to his first followers. The harvest is still plentiful. Over 7,000 of the world’s 17,000 people groups remain unreached with the gospel. This equates to 42% of the world’s population living in a context with very limited, if any, access to the gospel.

And the workers are still few. Of all the world’s cross-cultural missionaries, only 8% serve among these unreached peoples where there is no Church. We believe that faith comes through hearing the message of Christ (Romans 10:17), yet 44,000 people are dying each day without even having heard the message of Christ! This is perhaps why Jesus instructs those he sends not to greet people on the road. There is a sense of urgency here, a sense that we should not be sitting idly by just watching the fields, but should rather engage, join in, and pray for more laborers.

And yes, Jesus still sends us out like lambs among wolves. Jesus did not promise that this mission would be easy or comfortable or even “safe”—as the world defines safeness.

Yet Jesus still calls and sends us. And Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM) is taking this call seriously. We are committed to proclaim the gospel message in places and among peoples that are unreached. As Jesus sent out his missionaries in teams, LBIM is now endeavoring to send teams of missionaries to proclaim the gospel to unreached peoples. And we praise God for how he is raising up new laborers for this mission.

Who’s Next?

Contact: [LBIM@CLBA.org](mailto:LBIM@CLBA.org)

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## CHAD

Chad, a country in central Africa, is home to 141 unique people groups, each with their own language and culture. Seventy-five of these are considered unreached, with no Church within the context of their language and culture. LBIM is actively engaging three of these unreached people groups, namely the Bagirmi, the Bilala, and the Fulbe, by sending and supporting teams of missionaries to live in community with them for the sake of the gospel.

## JAPAN

Japan is a unique country characterized as both non-western and modern. The spiritual hunger of the population of Japan is evidenced by an average of 100 new religions recognized every year. Less than 1% of the Japanese population is Christian. LBIM missionaries in Japan are seeking to boldly and relevantly share the gospel, bringing hope and purpose to the spiritual void of the Japanese people.

## TAIWAN

Taiwan is a mountainous island nation off the eastern coast of China. The great majority of Taiwan’s population practice Buddhism or Taoism, religions that exert great community pressure on their adherents. LBIM missionaries are living in community with the Taiwanese people with a focused presence among the Hakka people group, relationally sharing the gospel and making disciples of Jesus.



We don't know her name. She is a refugee from the Central African Republic. When ethnic and religious violence broke out in her country, her father was killed. She and her mother have little more than the clothes on their backs. They have fled to Chad in search of safety. LBIM is helping refugees like them find hope by providing grain, tarps, blankets, and mosquito nets.

# WHO'S NEXT?

[www.LBIM.org](http://www.LBIM.org)

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

*Romans 10:14–15*



The Church of the Lutheran Brethren has identified three people groups in south central Chad: the Bagirmi, the Bilala, and the Fulbe. These people groups do not have a church planted among them and are 99% Muslim. We are looking for missionaries to join those already called to this crucial task. Who's Next?

Contact LBIM at: [LBIM@CLBA.org](mailto:LBIM@CLBA.org)

## CHAD



- 14 Million People
- 37% Literacy
- 141 People Groups
- 72 Unreached People Groups  
Unreached People: an ethnic group without an indigenous, self-propagating Christian church movement.



FIX YOUR EYES ON CHRIST  
HAILEE MAY

I grew up in a tight-knit Christian home. I was a very energetic, giggly little girl, because everything to me seemed perfect... until eighth grade. I had a big group of friends, but after a misunderstanding within my friend group, I began to be bullied. At first, I labeled it as “drama” because I couldn’t imagine that I would be bullied. It felt like, one day, everything just randomly flipped upside down. Even as the problem escalated, I didn’t believe that something like this could really happen to me. I just kept calling it drama, because I didn’t want to get my school involved.

In my freshman year, many of the girls who had been bullying me were on my soccer team. They would refuse to pass the ball to me. I got locked in a bathroom. If I sat by them, they’d move away and say, “Do you not get it? We don’t want you here. You shouldn’t be here.” They told me they didn’t want me on the team and one girl told me they wished I’d freeze to death. That’s when I really started to feel very sad.

I decided to talk to the girl who seemed to be the leader—the meanest of them all. I asked to talk to her alone and I said, “I’m sorry for whatever I’ve done to you. Can you tell me what I did wrong, and I’ll try to explain myself?” And she said, “You haven’t done anything wrong. It’s just what we do. It’s fun.” She told the rest of the girls and they all started laughing. I went to the bathroom and called my mom to pick me up. The girls banged on the bathroom door, laughing,

so I waited for my mom in the pouring rain. We both cried on the way home.

What I’ve really struggled with over the past couple of years is the things they said to me: “You shouldn’t be here, you don’t belong here, no one likes you. You’re just not loved. You’re not someone who can be loved.” The school administration “tried” to help, and when nothing worked, they just said that I wasn’t being bullied.

I was sure my sophomore year would be different. But the bullying continued, and I continued to get sadder. My parents prayed with me every night. They sent me texts and Bible verses throughout the day. But finally it was too much. I was tutored until I was able to transfer. My new school was fine, but I wasn’t able to open up to my new friends there. I didn’t want them to know that I’d been bullied because I was afraid that it would change the way they saw me, that it would determine my worth in their eyes, too.

This past summer I was a camp counselor at Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center. As I was praying one night, the name of Hillcrest Academy popped into my head. I didn’t mention this thought to anyone else, but over and over again God confirmed that I should pursue it.

I was nervous about asking my parents if I could go to Hillcrest, because they had worked so hard to get me into a new school the year before. Plus, it was only

two weeks before school would start. We filled out the application, and God just did one amazing thing after another to work out the details. When I found out I was going to Hillcrest, I had only 48 hours to pack.

Arriving at Hillcrest, I learned the theme for this school year was “20/20 Vision: Fix Our Eyes”—then everything clicked for me. This is how I had made it through those hard years of bullying. During those years, as I cried myself to sleep, I would pray, “Thank you, God, for what I do have right now in this time. I am very sad, and I want you to make this stop, but you have a bigger and better plan... and I’ll just have to wait for it. I know you’ll do great things. I am very sad, but I have you, Lord.”

In the school hallways, in the bathroom stall crying, I’d pray and talk to God. It’s shocking to think of how sad I was, but I knew I was okay. I’m so glad I had the hope I did. It scares me to think about all the people who are just as sad but feel they don’t have any hope. I can’t stress enough how important it is to *fix your eyes on Christ*. That’s definitely what helped me, and honestly, it changed my life to just fix my eyes on him in everything.

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# CORONAVIRUS

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## LORD OVER THE CORONAVIRUS REV. ADAM KROG

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**A**s I sat in my office on Thursday, March 12, the news was coming fast and furious. I could visit traditional news sites, but I didn't have to. Scrolling through Facebook, nearly every post was related to the coronavirus. Link after link to various news sources, videos of our leaders laying out plans, and abundant toilet paper memes—presumably to break the tension. Closing the social media windows didn't help. My phone was blowing up with texts, every one of them about the virus. It was without a doubt the biggest news day of my life, after 9/11. And the crazy part is, that was just the beginning.

Through all this, I was trying to write a sermon. And I found the situation in the Old Testament text shockingly familiar. In Exodus 17, the Israelites are in the midst of their wilderness wandering. God has brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, but they have not yet entered the Promised Land. They are in the process of learning to follow God, learning to trust him with their future.

This learning takes place through times of trial and testing.

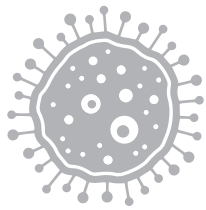
The test in this particular chapter is a lack of water. That, obviously, is a serious need. How will they respond? Faith? Humble prayers for God's provision? Hardly. This is now the third time they've been tested within three chapters. And their reaction is like a skipping record. In chapter 15 the only water they can find is bitter. So they immediately begin grumbling to Moses. Moses takes their complaint to God, who immediately supplies sweet water for them to drink. Lesson learned, or so you would hope.

But then in chapter 16, their food runs out and they turn to grumbling again. But they go even further this time, accusing Moses of leading them out of Egypt just to starve them. This is really a complaint against God himself, since their Exodus from Egypt was God's plan from the beginning. Attacking Moses is akin to "shooting the messenger." But despite their faithlessness, God once

again miraculously supplies for their need by raining manna and providing quail from heaven. He does this day after day, teaching them to depend on him daily, specifically instructing them not to hoard up food in a selfish attempt at self-reliance. But again, they're slow to learn.

So we come to chapter 17. Again, a shortage of water. And their response, again, is perfectly predictable. Rather than trusting God or asking him to supply their need, they fly completely off the handle. They repeat again their accusation that Moses must've brought them out of Egypt simply to kill them. And it goes beyond grumbling this time. They "quarreled with Moses." It quickly escalates to the point where Moses cries out to God in fear for his life (17:4), saying, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The Israelites' fear and subsequent hysteria is easy to criticize. But if we stop to reflect on our current situation,



Coronavirus



Fever



Shortness of Breath



Cough



No Symptom



Stay at Home

we'll find that we haven't done much better. It's true that the coronavirus represents a real threat to our health, safety, and financial security. In that sense, our fears are not unwarranted. But certainly our situation is no worse than wandering in the desert without water, right? So if panicking and rising up against their leaders with threats of violence was the wrong response for them, then certainly the same can be said of us. But if we examine ourselves these days, I bet we'll find a fair amount of grumbling in our mouths, perhaps even some quarreling with our leaders too. Because this is what fear does to us. We jump to the worst possible conclusions in our minds, so that we become very critical of one another, and think only of ourselves.

So what is God's response to all this? Does he get fed up with the faithless Israelites and abandon them to their delusions of self-sufficiency? Absolutely not. If their grumbling before God was predictable, his response to it was even more so. God responds in grace, a third time. As the hymnist once wrote, "He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again." Despite their terrible manner of requesting it, God gave them water from the rock and met their need, just as he had done countless times before.

These instances of God giving food and water were hardly the beginning of God's care for them. Prior to all this, God had come to them while they were slaves in Egypt. He used ten plagues

to break the will of Pharaoh, and they were set free, and they went out. But Pharaoh quickly changed his mind and pursued them with his armies. The Israelites were trapped at the Red Sea with nowhere to go, seemingly no hope whatever. But God rescued them again, parting the waters so they could pass through safely, then bringing the sea crashing down on the Egyptians.

God has proven that everything necessary for life is provided by him. Even their daily food and drink. He's the Lord of Egypt. He's the Lord of the Red Sea. And he's the Lord also of the desert.

As we consider all that God has done for them—all his gracious saving works—their fears and faithlessness seem ridiculous. And they are. But then so are ours. Because as we look back on our lives, we see that God has faithfully provided for us all along the way, as well.

While we might not have come out of Egypt or passed through the waters, we have something even greater. We have the fullness of God's grace revealed to us in the One who was sent: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's clearest revelation of himself, and his work at the cross is the epitome of God's grace.

So we find ourselves asking along with St. Paul in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also,

along with him, graciously give us all things?" The cross of Christ assures us that we have a God who will never leave us or forsake us. As Jesus rises to life on the third day, we recognize him as Lord over the grave. Lord over death. Jesus Christ is Lord over all our fears and faithlessness. He's Lord over the coronavirus, too.

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