

Faith & Fellowship

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Day of the Lord



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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

When the Hour Comes

H.E. WISLØFF



Photo by Natassem Azavedo on Unsplash

The Bible often refers to the time when we shall stand before the Great White Throne. No one can escape that hour. Time is no more. Eternity has set in. In the breathless stillness, the books are opened by the Lamb.

It is an awesome moment. All eyes are turned to the lips of him who will pronounce the eternal verdict.

That day there will be sounded out, “Enter into the joy of your Lord.” And they who hear those words will rejoice with blessed joy.

But there will also be heard, “Depart from me... I do not know you.” And those who hear those words will tremble in anguish and distress.

This is the great and eternal division. It is the echo of what we answer Jesus here in life.

Where will you be standing that day? That depends on how you answer him now. Are you in Christ, or outside of him?

Hans Edvard Wisløff (1902—1969) was a Norwegian theologian and writer. He was also the Bishop of the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland from 1959 until his death in 1969.

Wisløff, H.E., Quiet Moments on the Way Home. Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 1993.

In the Blink of an Eye

TROY TYSDAL

On June 20, 2007, I was working a trade show in Dallas with a good friend. We are both big baseball fans, so we decided at the last minute to buy tickets to the Rangers game. We knew before purchasing our tickets that the game could be historically significant, and we wanted to be a part of it. Sammy Sosa, the designated hitter for the Texas Rangers was sitting at 599 career home runs. In the 110-year history of Major League Baseball only four others had reached 600.

With excitement we went to the ballpark, but we knew our chances of seeing history made that night were slim. A year earlier Sammy had retired from the game—to be honest, he was forced out. His numbers had declined, and teams weren't willing to pay him the kind of money he had been used to making, so he retired. As he reflected on his career, he thought about the fact that he was twelve home runs shy of 600. He wanted his happy ending. He swallowed his pride, and the following year accepted a contract for just over baseball's minimum wage. Sammy hit 10 home runs in the first two months of the season, but quickly cooled off. On the day we arrived in Arlington to watch him, he had hit just one home run in his last twenty-two games.

It appeared obvious to all that Sammy's career was quickly coming to an end, but that didn't dampen the excitement in the ballpark that evening. When Sammy stepped to the plate in the first inning, the stadium burst to life in ovation. With the swing of his bat, the stadium appeared to sparkle as cameras flashed in hope of catching the historic moment. The ball, however, trickled off Sammy's bat toward the third baseman—reminding us all that his best days were behind him.

By the fifth inning, my friend had grown impatient. He was tired from a long day at the trade show, and while the opposing team was up to bat, he decided to go out in the concourse to stretch his legs. I warned him, "Sammy will be up in the bottom of the inning." He just smiled, and said, "I'll be back."

A few minutes later, Sammy stepped to



the plate, and my friend was nowhere to be seen. With every pitch the crowd roared, and the cameras flashed. And then, with one ball and two strikes, Sammy Sosa connected. The baseball popped off his bat, ripped over the centerfielder's head and into the stands. The moment was over in an instant—the blink of an eye, and my friend had missed it.

We often live our lives as if the story of Jesus is over. IT'S NOT! Time and time again in Scripture we are told that Jesus Christ will come again, and that we must be ready. The Apostle Peter tells us, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief" (2 Peter 3:10), and the Apostle Paul writes, "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Make no mistake, the story of Jesus is not over. He will come again. We might not know the day or the hour, but he is coming. We are simply told to watch... and to be ready.

MATTHEW 25:1-10, 13

Jesus said, "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for

both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. ... Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

As Sammy Sosa crossed home plate, my friend appeared from the hallway holding a frozen lemonade. As I had been watching history, he had been standing in line. He later confessed that he had heard it announced when Sammy came to the plate, but he did not *believe* it would happen. When it comes to Christ, *believe... and be ready*.

My illustration breaks down, because it really won't matter where you are when Jesus Christ returns. You won't miss it! The Bible tells us the whole world will watch when the Son of Man comes on the clouds in glory, and believers and unbelievers alike will be raised from the dead and every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that he is Lord. "In a flash... the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

This is terrifying news for those who are not prepared, yet there is still time. The *Bridegroom* has not yet come, the door is still open, and your invitation to the banquet remains.

For those who are prepared, do not lose heart that he is a long time in coming. The *Bridegroom* is faithful and true. You will get your happy ending.

Be patient, and be ready.

Rev. Troy Tysdal serves as editor in chief of Faith & Fellowship magazine.



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The End of the World?

SETH LEIVESTAD

“**D**ad, come quickly; you have to see outside!” My daughter yelled breathlessly from the front door. I said, “What’s up honey? What’s going on outside?”

With great exuberance she shouted, “The sky is on fire!”

“What? The sky is on fire?” I wondered as I made my way to the front door. Before I got there, I saw light shining through the window, painting the living room burnt orange. I made my way outside and looked at the sky in wonderment and fear. The sky truly looked as if it were on fire. The smoke from the Bobcat wildfire near Pasadena mixed with the sun to create a scene one might see in an apocalyptic science fiction movie. I felt as if I were with Matt Damon in the movie *The Martian*.

As I continued to stare up, I thought for the first time, “Is it the end of the world?” Since the quarantine began in Southern California on St. Patrick’s Day, people in the congregation, friends, family, and acquaintances have continually asked if we are living in the end times. They are searching for answers and comfort, and why wouldn’t they be? 2020 has been a scary year, with little encouragement that it will get better.

Jesus says in Revelation 22:20, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Ever since these words were recorded nearly 2000 years ago, believers have been fascinated with the end times. Christians of every generation have believed that Christ will return in their lifetime. At the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the fall of Rome, the Dark Ages, World War I, and World War

II—in each era people looked for signs of “the end of the age.” Now in 2020, we ask the same question.

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 24, Jesus teaches about the end of the age. One only needs to read through the chapter once to see that this world is going to get worse, much worse, before it gets any better. He speaks of the political realm: “...wars and rumors of wars... nation will rise against nation... kingdom against kingdom” (24:6-7). The earth will show signs of distress: earthquakes, hurricanes, famines, pestilence and more (Mark 13; Luke 21). These distresses of the world are compared to birth pains. Jesus says that, like a birth, the end will certainly come. But it hasn’t arrived yet.

There will be lawlessness and immorality. People will reject authority,

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Titus 2:11-13

and the love we should have for our neighbor will grow cold. The Apostle Paul tells us what this decline of morality will look like:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God... (2 Timothy 3:2-4).

Our culture today mirrors the immorality prophesied by Paul.

The Church will suffer. Jesus gives us the sad news that there will be an intensification of persecution against the Church, Christians, and God’s Word. This will lead to false teachers (prophets and religions) that will deceive people into rejecting Jesus and God’s Word. These teachings will fool many non-believers. Unfortunately, it will also cause some who proclaimed Christ as the Son of God to reject the faith.

California has certainly seen many of these apocalyptic signs of the end of the age: disease, drug abuse, sexual immorality, homelessness, hunger, earthquakes, wildfires, drought, lawlessness, oppression, protests, riots, vandalism, false teachers, false religions, idolatry, and political malfeasance. (Plus, a lot of the beaches and Disneyland are closed!)

Therefore, as I looked up at the burnt

orange sky, I thought of these signs and wondered, “Is it the end of the world?”

That thought led to some fear, yet the feeling passed quickly. Why? People in North America and throughout the world are seeing these same signs. It’s only natural that our first emotion is fear. However, for Christians these signs shouldn’t bring fear. Rather, we find joy and comfort because these signs are indicators that God is truly faithful to his Word.

Current events are a call to open our eyes and see these signs as promises that Christ’s return is imminent. Not necessarily imminent in our timing, but imminent in God’s timing:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness... (2 Peter 3:8-9a).

Jesus tells us that no one will know the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36). When we think about the end of the age and Christ’s return, we ought to adopt the Boy Scout motto: *Be Prepared*. Live as if it might be today. It could be tomorrow, two weeks, two months, or 2000 years. No matter, we should be prepared and live each day as if it will be *the day*.

This does not mean that we are idly waiting. We are to continue to follow our Lord’s Great Commission despite distress, suffering, even persecution. We must keep going, teaching and preaching

God’s Word, even though it’s hard to live in this distressed and suffering world. For there are people who still haven’t called Jesus their Lord or even heard his gospel. Therefore, every day when we wake up it’s a new day to love and help our neighbors by leading them to Christ.

After all, that’s why God gave us another day, “[The Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9b).

“Is this the end of the world?” No matter how many times we may ask the question, God’s answer is always the same: “It is not for you to know.” What is for us to know is that we can trust God that these signs, these birth pains of the world, are proof that God’s Word is true, and that he keeps his promises. If we love God, let us open our eyes to these signs and look forward to his Son’s promised return. As Paul tells us, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people... [So] we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11,13).



Rev. Seth Leivestad is Pastor of Calvary Community Church in Fullerton, California.

It's Time to Repent

ROGER VIKSNES

The Advent season isn't Christmas, however much we forget that. Christmas causes us to look back in awe and wonder at the greatness of our Lord, who made himself nothing. But the Advent season looks ahead to the fact that the manger baby is coming back—this time as a mighty warrior king. And that leads to one important question... “Are you ready?” It is a question we each need to ask ourselves and a question that is not new.

The question of readiness runs through the whole Bible, from the people living before the Flood to the nation of Israel in Egypt. Unfortunately, the people of Noah's day weren't ready for the coming of God's judgment. But the people of Israel, who lived under Pharaoh's thumb, were able to make themselves ready in the face of God's judgment by trusting in God's provision of a Passover lamb.

But perhaps the most obvious place that we find this readiness question is from the mouth of John the Baptist. Two thousand years ago, before the lame walked or the blind received their sight, before Jesus raised the dead or preached to thousands, there was a man named John who lived in the desert, told people that the time was coming, and asked that same question... “Are you ready?”

We are asked that question plenty of times in our lives: “Are you ready to leave for school? Are you ready to eat? Are you ready to present your proposal?” And there are times when the answer is “yes” and times when the answer is “no.” There are also times when we have taken good advantage of the allotted time to be prepared and times when we have procrastinated far too long. Sometimes the failure to be ready does not come with particularly grave consequences, allowing us to be a little sloppy in using our time. But when this readiness question is asked during Advent, we should not overlook it or take it lightly.

People in John's day knew that the Messiah was coming. So when John came on the scene asking if people were ready, they came flooding out to the desert to hear him preach and to be baptized. They felt unready and they desperately wanted to be ready. That wasn't true for everyone, of course. Some thought that John was a quack, or a menace. But many were cut to the heart and they wanted to make sure that when the King of kings came, they were indeed ready.

That sense of urgency John's listeners felt is all too often missing today. Maybe it's the length of time that has passed since Jesus promised his return, or perhaps we have just gotten too comfortable. Whatever the case, in our day Christmas has swallowed up Advent, and we need to again hear John say, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is near.” In fact, the concepts of readiness and repentance are at the core of the Advent season, and they are an imperative of the Christian life. Yes, we all have a whole host of things we need to do to prepare for Christmas parties and Christmas services, but none of those hold a candle to the need for us to be ready for the return of Christ.

Now, to the Christians reading this article, you would be right to be thinking that you have been forgiven of your sin. You have been redeemed by that baby in the manger, who years later suffered and died on the cross for your sin. And you would also be right to claim that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). These are the true and perfect promises for all who believe. But that does not do away with the call of repentance in our lives. We don't live in despair or in doubt of God's ability or desire to forgive us. But we are still called to honestly and humbly approach our holy God to confess and repent of our sin and the sin of our people.

You see, repentance doesn't just have a “me, myself and I” focus. It also has a

“we and us” focus. We see this modeled for us in Daniel chapter 9, where we find Daniel on his knees confessing not only his own sins but also the sins of his people Israel.

In the US, we have just gone through an election season where people were all too willing to point out sin and also point out those who are to blame for it. But did we see people stand up (or kneel down) to confess that sin as their own before the holy God and to ask for his forgiveness?

Let this Advent season stand apart from Christmas this year, as it always should, as a time for the people of God to repent, and to do so both individually and corporately:

- To repent of our inherited sin and our actual sin
- To repent of our sinful thoughts as well as our immoral acts
- To repent of our hard-heartedness and our lack of faith
- To repent of the things that we have done that we shouldn't have
- To repent of the things that we have not done that we should have.

But let us also repent of the injustice in our nation and of our shared wickedness:

- To repent for how life over and over again has been devalued in all sorts of ways
- To repent of the walls of division that we have built up
- To repent of how we have individually and collectively fallen short of the glory of God and have grieved the heart of God.

In the Christmas season, we celebrate how God put on flesh to come to be our prophet, priest, and king. And that is absolutely a reason to celebrate. But let us not rush so fast to get there that we miss the season of Advent. Looking

forward to his coming again, let us take up the mantle of the priests that Jesus has made his Church to be, that we may stand in the gap and talk to God about our sin and the sin of our people.

This year, let us not rush to Christmas and forget what Advent is all about. But also, let us joyfully remember that Christmas does come after Advent. The message of John and the message of Jesus (and subsequently, the message that the Church should continue to proclaim as well) is “repent and believe the good news.” There is good news for those who repent. There is absolutely forgiveness of sins for all who confess and believe, for all who repent of their sin and trust in the Lord.



Rev. Roger Viksnes is Pastor at Bethany Lutheran Brethren Church in East Hartland, Connecticut.



Vienna - Fresco of Jesus Christ as King/sedmak/iStock



Remains/Stock

Christmas Heartbreak

CATHY BARLOW

On Christmas Eve 2019, a new friend of mine had a medical emergency and was rushed to the hospital. I was in shock. I cried, I prayed, I felt helpless, even though she is a believer. My heart broke for her family and friends. My heart broke for my loss at work, that we would not be giggling over funny movies or other crazy things that just happen in her life, that I wouldn't have time with her at lunch every day for a while.

The tears and prayers continued throughout the night as we awaited news on her surgery. Christmas Day was strange following the insane emotional roller coaster I'd been riding all night long. Christmas Day was spent with some other new friends and was a nice, quiet day. During the conversation, a

son's turning from God came up. As he was growing up, he decided he could not believe in God anymore.

I am ashamed to admit I made a pretense of appearing saddened by this, but I was so absorbed in my own wallowing that I did not realize the gravity of the statement. Two days after Christmas I started thinking that I should be just as brokenhearted about a friend, stranger, or any other person not being saved as I am about a friend who is saved but sick. Sin is a sickness to which we are all prone, and it is much more deadly than physical illness if Christ is not your Savior.

Death is permanent. Eternal life after death is permanent. Eternal damnation after death is permanent.

My friend's illness is temporary. If she were to pass, I would be extremely sad,

but she would be rejoicing and sitting at the feet of Jesus, praising his name for eternity.

If my friend were not a believer, how much sadder would the situation be? If she were not a believer and didn't recover, she'd have sentenced herself to eternal punishment, eternal separation from God, from others who love her who are believers. There would be nothing left for me to do. There would be no time left to talk to her.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16:19-31, the rich man realizes his decisions have led him to eternal anguish after he dies. He begs Abraham in heaven for a drop of water, for someone to talk to his family, for intercession on their behalf so that they don't experience what he does.

“There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Luke 15:7

“Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment” (16:28). Abraham replies in a blunt but true statement, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if [Lazarus] rises from the dead” (16:31).

This was a foreshadowing of the response to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection as well. Jesus *did* die and rise again, but how many people still rejected him? The people who still do not believe are the rich man and his brothers in this parable.

If I hear that someone is not a believer, why do I not pray as hard for their salvation as I do for the physical healing of a Christian? Is not healing a relationship with God much more important? Jesus says in the three parables preceding this in Luke 15 that “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents” (15:7), “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (15:10), and “we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (15:32).

My friend started pulling through a couple of weeks later and was even taken off her ventilator, and I rejoiced in that. Shouldn’t I rejoice in other people coming to Christ and turning from questioning? Shouldn’t I feel as much happiness and shed a tear for the new believer with a *sincere* heart?

Jesus, in his abundant love and mercy, has given himself as our savior and intercessor. When we believe in him, we become inheritors of eternal life with him. God does not want *any* of us to be separated from him, but he does give us the opportunity to follow him or not. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). But we are not promised tomorrow either—God could call you or me home today and our chance to feel the joy of another person coming to eternal salvation will be lost.

You may ask, did that realization change everything about my life? Have I changed drastically and become an evangelist totally on fire to share the gospel with anyone I meet? Am I praying for all unbelievers in a way I never did before? The honest answer is no. As a sinner, I have not changed that much. I have asked for a heart to share and a heart to learn, and God is teaching me. Now, almost a year after this realization, I am in a Bible study where we are learning ways to better share and show God’s love.

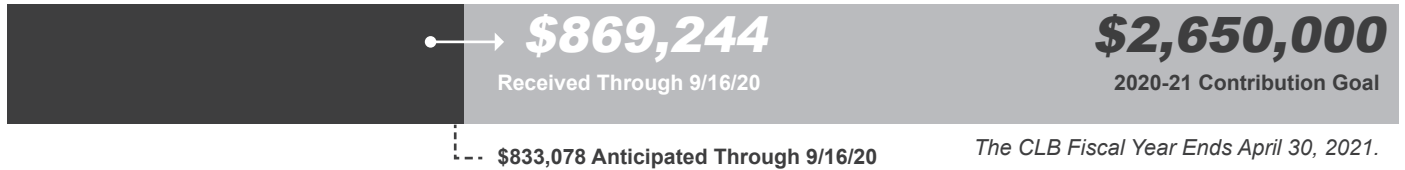
It is a process and I encourage you to join me in earnestly praying for the unbelieving hearts around you, that God may use you. I ask for prayer for myself and others like me who may not have realized this issue until now. I ask for prayers for grace for myself and my

fellow believers who struggle with this. If this convicts you, do not let it turn into guilt or a question of your worthiness. None of us are worthy of anything Christ has done for us! Pray for a change of heart! Pray for God’s leading in this area of your life! Praise God for every lost soul that has been found!



Cathy Barlow serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as the Administrative Assistant for Lutheran Brethren International Mission.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report



When He Shall Come

ROY HEGGLAND

I have always loved the hymn *When He Shall Come* by Almeda J. Pearce. I love it in part because it has a great crescendo in the middle of each verse which resolves into a finale that sounds as if there is more coming. And there *is*!

*When He shall come
resplendent in His Glory,
to take His own
from out this vale of night,
O may I know
the joy at His appearing,
only at morn
to walk with Him in white.*

1 Thessalonians 4:17 says this: “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (ESV).

In recent weeks, the last surviving family member of my mother’s generation (my aunt) and four of my Hillcrest Lutheran Academy schoolmates were taken “to walk with him in white.” None of their deaths were COVID-19 related. I am sure all of them thought a lot about the dangers of COVID and staying as safe as they could during this strange time in which we find ourselves. I know

I had many conversations with my aunt, who was in a nursing home in Florida, about the precautions the home had taken (including no visitors for many months). Yet the Lord took her through different means than COVID. The same is true of my four schoolmates.

That doesn’t mean that COVID isn’t a real danger, especially to those who are in high risk groups. A good friend of mine died from COVID. It makes sense to be careful and avoid exposure. But, depending upon what part of the country or world you live in, the fear of contracting COVID has brought everything to a standstill, so that almost the only focus in life for some is avoiding this virus.

I am reminded of the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. All ten appeared on the surface to have done the right things to be in the right place at the right time to meet the bridegroom. They are like many people today whose primary focus is avoiding COVID, yet they also avoid the one thing they truly need to be safe. Five of those virgins did not bring enough oil to last until the bridegroom came, so they missed the wedding.

When Christ returns at the end of the age, or when he comes for us individually

like he did for my aunt and four friends, there will be many who lived life trying to be safe and believing that they had done everything needed to be ushered into heaven. Tragically they will be caught unaware that of all of the things needed to be safe, they missed the only truly important thing—oil for their lamps. This is the Holy Spirit, given to all who believe in Christ, so their lamps will never go out. Time is short for all people, whether Christ returns this year or in a thousand years. For many, their struggle to stay safe and be ready for the end will be futile because they never received oil for their lamps.

Will you join with your fellow members and friends of the CLB to pray that God would add many more to his family of those whose lamps are filled and ready? Will you give so that many more will hear and receive the Good News that Jesus Christ has already come once to give them all that is required of them to be ready to meet him with joy “when he shall come” again?

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While We Wait for His Return...

CHERYL OLSEN

Is it difficult for you to wait? We've been waiting with the whole world this year: waiting for the end of the virus; waiting and hoping we won't get the virus; waiting to get back to work, to school, to see loved ones; waiting to be released from restrictions. Some wait patiently; some become frustrated, overwhelmed, even distraught. But amazingly, some have been productive!

The women of the Lutheran Brethren Church of Nampa, Idaho live hours away from any other CLB church, but they still made plans to have a women's retreat this October, despite the unknowns of COVID. They connected with Barbara Heggland, WMCLB Chairman, who connected them with other women who were willing to present several video sessions on *Women of the Bible*.

So, avoiding the unknowns of traveling a great distance in the time of COVID, nineteen women were able to meet at a nearby retreat center, keeping social distancing protocols. They received outlines, discussion guides, and access to the teaching of three speakers who never left their homes in New Jersey (Janet Spencer), Minnesota (Cheryl Olsen), and Alberta (Bethany Dittman)! They responded with thanks, concluding that "God worked in many ways this weekend renewing and refreshing our ladies."

How about us? Varied circumstances affect our responses to waiting. Long ago, circumstances also varied for those awaiting the promised Messiah, and later, those waiting for his promised return. What should our response be as we wait?

Look at the response of people waiting for his first appearing. Mary humbly replied, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38, ESV). Anna fasted and prayed in the temple; Simeon waited trusting; Isaiah prophesied, though he didn't understand the full extent of



Nampa Women's Retreat 2020.

his words; Jeremiah told God's truths, though they threw him in a cistern, and burned his words. Later, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:10-11).

So in our current circumstances, women are encouraging each other in our faith by connecting "outside the box." A virtual prayer meeting happens Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m. (eastern time), when mission concerns are lifted to our mighty Savior, with special prayer for local officials to grant approvals for a much-needed airstrip in Chad.

You can pray with women from different states, provinces, even overseas, led by Barbara Heggland and Jean Wilsdon, WMCLB co-directors. A women's Bible study taught by former WMCLB chairman Janet Spencer is also streamed each Wednesday at Hillside LBC, Succasunna, New Jersey, and is available live or recorded. Other local Bible studies are being held on online platforms. A WMCLB Speakers Bureau

List connects available speakers and leaders for group meetings or retreats.

Without large regional meetings, we can still donate to our projects by mail, or securely, through our website, www.WMCLB.org. Our Annual Report is even available through email or online! We continue to pray privately and together for last year's Focus Project to Japanese students in Seattle, and this year's Focus Project for an airstrip for missionaries in Africa.

God is still at work through us, as we wait and allow him to use us, teach us, expand our horizons, and bring his Word to more women who will join us in his heavenly home some day!



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

Visit WMCLB online: www.WMCLB.org
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Boonyachot/Stock

Restored Creation

ROGER OLSON

What's your perspective? Observing our globe and its inhabitants, it takes no imagination to be gripped and made despondent by the obvious flaws, constant crises, and human horrors. Living with an outlook of hopefulness and even anticipation is a rare thing. Yet for people like Maltbie Babcock there is every reason for it.

During the years he made his home in Lockport, New York, he would often go hiking in the natural beauty of the Niagara Escarpment. He would announce to his wife Katherine as he left, "I'm going out to see my Father's world." Captivated by the wonder of creation he wrote:

*This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hand the wonders wrought.*

Babcock was not simply caught up in some naive romantic opinion. Though he lived prior to the ravages of two world wars and the mass brutality of twentieth century revolutions, this Presbyterian pastor did not live with his head in the clouds. In the same hymn crafted from his poem he notes "the wrong seems oft so strong." One hundred years later, we can't help but agree. It so often is.

What fueled his positive outlook? No doubt it was firmly rooted in the promises of God the Creator. He pronounces, "Behold, I am making all things new" Revelation 21:5 (NASB). The Apostle John (and Maltbie) saw what Jesus was showing them—something for the comfort and encouragement of pressured Christians in the first century and for those longing for hope in the twenty-first:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of

heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:1-5a).

A new earth! A place of LIGHT—no darkness, no sin. Our new home is SECURE from everything that messes up life—it is kept safely away. And where today's world is shot through by death as lives are taken before birth, destroyed by substance abuse, domestic violence, war, and the mistreatment of the elderly and weak, God's creation is teeming with LIFE. Nothing but eternal life.

It seems obvious. Who wouldn't gladly

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

embrace this pristine new creation? An earth where the natural environment and the people in it interact flawlessly? A world without corruption. It is what every social justice warrior fights for, what every philanthropist, every politician and every good neighbour would have to agree is a fitting conclusion to world history! Wholeness—fullness of life in every way!

Indeed, the cry of the bride of Christ, the Church—suffering the scorn of the world, fighting against our own flesh and the sly attacks of the evil one—the cry moved by the Holy Spirit within is, “COME, Lord Jesus, bring this new day about! Rescue us, come live among us. Put all things right and make all things new!”

However, many (along with our first parents) continue to boldly shout, “I know what’s good for me and I alone know what’s bad for me. I do want a healed world, but I want to be the center of it and I really don’t want God to ‘dwell with me.’”

The King of this new earth is not dissuaded by such attitudes. Jesus waits and pursues the lost. Jesus promises, “I am coming!” And no, he is not slow. He is patient, not wanting any to perish, but all to be recreated.

Living in this hope and anticipation, we share in our Master’s mission. What could be more important than announcing forgiveness and new life in Jesus—a new perspective and a solid hope for a bewildered world? What could be better

than celebrating God’s new creation with new friends in the presence of our God and Savior Jesus? Nothing!

But what is valuable is costly. Living out God’s call is often not easy. It is hard work. Babcock writes elsewhere:

*We are not here to play,
to dream, to drift,
We have hard work to do,
and loads to lift,
Shun not the struggle;
face it; 'Tis God's gift.*

It’s God’s gift. It’s worth it. After all, the creation we anticipate and long for is not the remote garden home, but a CITY OF NATIONS, filled with God’s enemies made friends, dead made alive, joyfully devoted to the service of the One who has given them life:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9-10).

We have everlasting life! Jesus’ victorious battle over your sin, death, and the devil gives you every reason for a new perspective, living life to the full

in hope and anticipation of our Father’s restored creation.

This is my Father's world.

*O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong
seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.*

This is my Father's world:

*the battle is not done:
Jesus who died
shall be satisfied,
and earth and Heav'n be one.*



Rev. Roger Olson is Pastor of Living Faith Church in Watford City, North Dakota.



Dan and Claire R. visiting our CLB mission field in Chad, Africa.

The Depth and Breadth of Grace

CLAIRE R.

God changed the course of our lives just three weeks after we began attending Hillside Lutheran Brethren Church in Succasunna, New Jersey. Nathanael and Carrie S. came to present the work God was doing in and through their lives in Chad, Africa. Since I had sensed God’s call on my life as a young teenager to go to Africa as a missionary nurse, my husband and I prayed. We agreed that God was calling us to pursue this path.

Looking back, we see that God was preparing us. He had opened doors for me to become a registered nurse and to pursue a master’s degree in International Public Health. When I didn’t think I could take small children to the mission field, Nathanael and Carrie, with an eight-month-old baby at the time, were the embodiment of raising a family in that setting. God answered the questions and doubts that I had during this journey with

a clear response: “Trust and follow me.” Even our children, ages five and seven, had not been overlooked by God. They are excited to go to the mission field. They have such a joy for this journey. God paves the way, and we try to be faithful to follow where he leads.

The next step—seminary. We moved from New Jersey to Fergus Falls, Minnesota to deepen our biblical preparation. In Romans 1:4-5 (ESV), Paul greets the church in Rome with words that directly apply to this step: “Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...”

Why am I at Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS)? My husband and I are here “for the sake of his name among all the nations.” We are studying and prayerfully preparing to serve as missionaries to an unreached people

group in Chad—those without access to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is this knowledge that we are so blessed to know and continue to grow in during our time at Seminary.

The scriptural basis for attending Seminary is stated through a question in Romans 10:14 (ESV). “How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” God desires all the nations to know and praise his great Name. I am here to learn more about our God who loves us and knows us intimately, so that I can share that love with those who do not yet know him.

How am I doing it? At Seminary I have received an unprecedented amount of grace and mercy. Grace: God’s unmerited favor; God giving me what I don’t deserve. Mercy: God’s sparing me from what I do deserve. All this for me, an unworthy sinner. Seminary has helped me to examine who I am as a fallen human

“How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?”
Romans 10:14 (ESV)

being at the feet of a holy God. And more importantly, who God is: unchanging, forgiving, gracious, merciful, just, yet loving. Why would God bestow this unmerited favor and mercy on me? Because of who Jesus Christ is and what he did on the cross. Because of Jesus, I can stand before an amazingly holy God, and be seen as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 7:14).

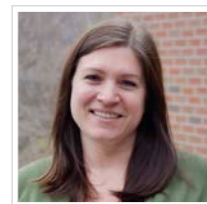
I did not understand the depth and breadth of this simple word *grace* until very recently. I have never known God as intimately as I have come to know him through my studies and life here. God’s grace has blown my faith out of the water and taken it to a whole new level. God is using this time to reveal himself to me, to deepen my faith in him, and to take me on an incredible journey of trusting him. I want to think that I have it all together, and that I can make the “right” or “best” decisions for my life, but my time here has shown me that the only One who truly knows what is in my best interest is God. The closer he draws me to himself, and the more faith he grows within me, the more beautiful the journey becomes. I have had to face things about myself that were not pretty, things I did not want to admit to. However, coming out on the other side of confession and repentance, my faith is stronger, and I have a fuller, more complete picture of the God my faith is in. It is out of his agape love for me that he creates within me a response of faith in him.

At Seminary we receive a sort of apostleship. While I would never consider myself an apostle like Paul, in a sense all seminarians are training as apostles to go out into the world to share the message of Jesus with those who do not know him, and to encourage and edify those who already do. What is taught in the classroom is the most practical education I have ever received—it truly shows me how to live out my life in Christ. Each year at Seminary is built upon the years prior, with this year proving to be the culmination of all I have been learning to date. It is so amazing to see how all the pieces fit together. I am continuing to learn who God is as I study what he has revealed about himself in his Word. Knowing I will never have a full understanding, it is a joyful journey I can take the rest of my days here on earth to get to know him better, ultimately to truly know him one day in glory.

LBS is faithful to the call to train workers for the harvest. They are faithful to what God has called them to as professors and leaders, and they are faithful to the students they enroll. Learning from both their instruction and example has proved to be the most meaningful part of my time at LBS. Their faithfulness encourages my faithfulness. Being around and witnessing the faculty and fellow seminarians traveling God-honoring journeys encourages my faithfulness to live a God-honoring life.

It is out of this “received grace,” that

I could never earn of my own merit, and the “apostleship” that I have received at Seminary, which has grown and brought about “obedience of faith,” so that I may be able to share that life-giving and life-changing faith with the nations that God calls me to, “for the sake of his name among all the nations.” The source of this truly amazing grace and apostleship that creates obedient faith within me to share with the nations? The answer is found at the beginning of the passage: Jesus Christ our Lord.



Claire R. and her husband Dan are currently studying at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in preparation for mission work in Africa.



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A Spoiled People?

NICK MUNDIS

I was recently asked the same question by two people I love. One is a follower of Jesus and the other I would categorize as an agnostic. But the question on both of their minds was this: “Why are so many Christians spoiled?”

It is important for us to hear this question. Are we a spoiled people? Is there something in our thinking or in our lives that needs to be addressed?

So often in Scripture we read about Israel operating before God, their Father as “spoiled brats.” They are very quick to forget his gifts, to be discontent with God’s care and simply want things their way. Inherent in this mindset is—“I know better than God!”

This problem wasn’t exclusive to the Old Testament. We see the disciples frustrated with Jesus when he described his upcoming suffering and death (Matthew 16:21-23). The early Church was reminded repeatedly to stop acting like “self-absorbed kids” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Sadly, it seems this issue of spoiled or immature followers of God is a recurring theme. From Genesis to Revelation we see a gracious and loving God patiently bringing his people back to what is right,

good, and true. I believe we need God’s perspective once again today.

In Matthew 22:36-40 we read that Jesus was confronted by an expert in the law with the question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

A paraphrase of Jesus’ response: “In 2020, with all of its uniqueness and complexities, it still boils down to this. Love God with all you have and are. Also, just love people like I would if I were in your place.”

You might be tempted to say, “But, Nick, we are not saved by the Law. We are saved and live by grace.” I would agree whole-heartedly, but the Law is still accurate and beautiful as a guide for our lives as followers of Jesus.

My wife Barb and I, while on vacation, studied together Gary Thomas’ book, *Cherish: The One Word that Changes Everything in Your Marriage*. In a nutshell, it addressed the fact that many

of us in our marriage vows declared that we would love and cherish our spouse. His premise is that most of us declare our love, but do we cherish our spouse? Does it show up in how we live out our days together? I was confronted with the thought that I can say I would die for Barb, but will I live my days showing it?

Jesus has with perfect clarity declared his love to us through his life and death. The Church is the bride of Christ. We are given this glorious position by grace alone. It is pure gift and we are invited to respond in thankfulness, worship and love. We are called by God to cherish Jesus as we live out our days.

When we cherish Jesus, we are transformed in the process. The position we have been given permeates all we think and do. Our hearts and our minds see things differently than the world does. We see hope and possibility where others see hopelessness and dead ends. When those around us tear down, we look to build up. When others choose to be spoiled and grumpy, followers of Jesus look to deliver grace and truth.

So now we return to the issue of spoiled Christians. Jesus wasn’t selfish or a brat. He didn’t claim that he deserved better

“I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.”

1 Corinthians 3:2

when he had to put up with imperfect people day in and day out. He didn't complain as he lived his life for others. We learn what drove him to such an extraordinary life in Hebrews 12:1-3. In this passage we are also given the key to our following Jesus down this path today.

“...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

I encourage you to see Jesus today. Look to him and through him at others. Be filled with the joy that has been set before you as you follow Jesus!



Rev. Nick Mundis is Director of North American Mission for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

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What is the Welcome Center?

SALLEE S.

The Welcome Center, located in N'Djamena Chad, is so much more than a guest house and conference facility. I could fill pages and pages with what goes on at this station, but here are three of the reasons that this place is such a blessing:

First, the Welcome Center is home. Jeremy and I live on the property in a house that was built for the managing family. It has been home to us for over four years—since August 2016. The center has been home, at one time or another, to most of our other LBIM missionary families as well. When our missionaries first arrive in Chad they live at the Center for a time of orientation, language learning, and cultural acquisition. This can last up to a year. During that time, we want them to feel like they can truly settle in and start to figure out how it works to live in Chad. Jeremy and I are there as an emotional and practical support system, helping with tasks such as paperwork, learning where to buy groceries, and introductions to Chadian contacts.

The Center has also been a temporary home to our missionaries during transitional periods and seasonal hardships. For example, Nathanael and Carrie S. and family live at the guest house during the rainy season when the roads to their village are impassable. Paul and Teresa S. lived there with their two youngest boys while their new training facility was being built. Jeremy and I are so grateful for these times when other families are living so close in community with us! We love the opportunity to build relationships and bond with our teammates, and just have some fun. They all soon learn how much we love board games.

Second, the Welcome Center is a hub. Because of its location in the capital city it is often a pit stop on the way in or out of the country. It has been a comfortable, cool, and clean place to stay for missionaries and pastors from dozens of organizations. It is also a central place of operation for the LBIM ministries that are happening in Chad. Our office sees a daily flurry of activity. It may be that Terach (the director of



Sallee and Jeremy.

the school in Boudamassa) stops in to get funds for school supplies or Pastor Malloum (a southern Chadian pastor) arrives to pick up paperwork for grain he is transporting south for famine relief. Our ministry comes with the privilege of seeing and being involved in so many of the other amazing ministries of LBIM in Chad.

Lastly, the Welcome Center is a gathering place. Within the guest house building there is a conference room (with accompanying kitchen and dining area) that can host up to 50 people. Groups have used the room for as little as two hours or as long as a week, with conference guests using every available bed. Our LBIM families gather at the Center once a year for a time of retreat and fellowship. It is a time to pray together, seek God's will, and regroup. The Center's role of gathering place is profound, because whether we are hosting Samaritan's Purse doing training for Operation Christmas Child, or Chadian Lutheran Brethren leaders coming together for teaching and prayer, or just a pastor seeking some time to meet with God... we get to facilitate people meeting together in the name of Jesus!

Sallee S. and her husband Jeremy serve the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as managers of our Lutheran Brethren Welcome Center in N'Djamena Chad.

**WHO'S
NEXT?**

*Is the Lord calling you to International Mission?
Contact: dvenberg@LBIM.org*

Werdal Called Home



Marion Grace Kivley Werdal, 96, of Fergus Falls, MN died on Tuesday, September 22, 2020. Marion was born June 20, 1924, in Bellingham, WA. She married Morris Werdal on March 13, 1943. Marion and Morris served as ministers of the gospel, both in North American churches (Staten Island, NY; Fullerton, CA; Eau Claire, WI; and Seattle, WA) and on the international mission field. The Werdals were the first Lutheran Brethren missionaries to Japan, starting in 1949. They served in Japan for thirteen years planting churches and starting the Tohoku Bible Institute.

Olson Called Home

Evelyn Louise Sather Olson, 92, of Shoreline, WA died Tuesday, September 8, 2020. Evie was born August 19, 1928. She grew up in Bigfork, MN. Evie accepted Jesus at a young age and felt called to be a missionary. Evie graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, MN, then attended Lutheran Brethren Bible School where she met James Olson. They were married in Seattle on September 6, 1952. They were commissioned by the CLB as church planter missionaries to Japan, leaving in January 1954. They lived mostly in Tohoku, Japan until "retirement" in 1989. Returning to Seattle, they started and pastored Japanese ministries of Rock of Ages LBC for over 20 years.



Collins Installed



L to R: Rev. Troy Tysdal, Rev. Rodney Venberg, Rev. Tim Collins, Elder Derrick Lathrop, and Elder Mike Anderson.

On September 13, 2020, Rev. Tim Collins was installed as pastor at Inspiration Lutheran Brethren Church in Breckenridge, Minnesota. Rev. Troy Tysdal officiated.

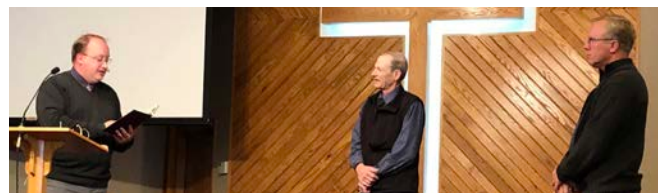
Bradford Installed



L to R: Elder Tim White, Elder Rob Burden, Rev. Peter Bradford, and Rev. Ryan Nilsen.

On September 27, 2020, Rev. Peter Bradford was installed as pastor at Hope Community Church in Nanuet, New York. Rev. Ryan Nilsen officiated.

Elders Ordained



L to R: Rev. Kevin Skaret, Elder Charlie Winkels, and Elder Eric Swenson.

On October 18, 2020, Charlie Winkels and Eric Swenson were ordained as elders at Hope Lutheran Brethren Church in Barnesville, Minnesota. Pastor Kevin Skaret officiated.

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Prepared for Lightning

We never saw it coming. It was a beautiful summer day near Chetek, WI, so as we entered the restaurant, we asked the server if we could sit out on the deck, close to the lake. Miles away, across Lake Chetek, and far beyond the town of Chetek, we could see the clouds. But they were such a great distance away that there should have been plenty of time to enjoy our meal. We, and the others on the deck that day, were 99.8% confident that we would fully enjoy the occasion—that there was no danger.

That's when, without warning, we felt the explosion and simultaneous flash of brightness. "What was that?" We were all in shock. The smell of ozone permeated the air. With clear skies overhead, lightning had shattered a huge tree right in front of the restaurant, about 100 feet from where we sat.

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other" (Luke 17:24). You don't have to know the science behind it to know lightning is dangerous, and to grasp the point Jesus is driving home. Lightning is sudden. You don't see it coming, and you cannot quickly prepare yourself or protect yourself once it flashes. That's too late.

So how do we prepare for the lightning of Christ's return? In the same passage, Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it" (17:32-33).

This is a strong warning against us forfeiting eternity by investing too much in this life. When the Son of Man is revealed, there will be no time to retreat to get our prized temporal possessions. Lot's wife looked back and lost her life. She longed for what she could only leave behind, for things of no value in the Kingdom of God.

We must be prepared in advance. External events these days are causing many to wonder if the Lord is near. Let these external signs function as a call for internal preparation. Hold this life and all its good things loosely, as a gift that is to be appreciated while it lasts—a gift intended to draw us to the Giver. But hold his Kingdom tightly... the kingdom among us, and the kingdom to come. How do we do that? Know the king, and long for his appearing.

Rev. Brent Juliot serves as contributing editor of Faith & Fellowship magazine and is Pastor of Living Hope Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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