



The Lutheran Herald

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The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep

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Sermon for *Misericordias Domini* (2nd S. after Easter)

The sermon is on the Gospel appointed for this day, St. John 10:11–16.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. Amen.

Last Sunday, in the appointed Gospel for the day, we heard of Jesus' sending forth of His holy apostles. As He declared to them, "*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*" "*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'*" (John 20:21–22) The office of the keys is foundational to the office of the holy ministry; as our Lutheran Confessions plainly teach: "And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God, according to Luke 10:16: 'He that heareth you heareth Me.' Wherefore the voice of the one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven." (AP XII:40)

Last Sunday we heard of Jesus' *institution* of the New Testament ministry, in His call for His called servants to bind and loose sins. Today we learn more about the *character* of that office.

Jesus speaks of four categories: the good shepherd, sheep, hirelings, and wolves. As pertains to the "Good Shepherd," Jesus immediately declares: "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*" (John 10) This is foundational to His being the good shepherd: that Jesus gives His life for the sheep. And He further declares, "*As the Father knows Me, even so I know*

the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

Jesus declares His equality of nature with the Father, for as the Father know Him, so He knows the Father. As Jesus is, according to His divine nature, the eternal Son, the only-begotten of the Father, He is one divine nature with the Father—"...the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one" (Athanasian Creed). But Jesus also proclaims His humanity, as well, testifying again that He will "lay down" His life for the sheep. Thus we rejoice that Christ Jesus did lay down His life for the sheep, being crucified for us, that through His death He ransomed us from death and hell, and in His resurrection gives us the hope of eternal life with Him. **Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for His sheep, to make them partakers of His Resurrection.**

The sheep are not only of "*this fold*" — that is, of those of Israel, who lived in anticipation of the Christ who was to come — but are also "*not of this fold*," those born Gentiles, who would come to faith in Jesus. The character of the sheep is that they hear the voice of the shepherd.

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Conservatives and Crypto-Protestantism

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The historical critical method of Biblical interpretation grew out of the Renaissance, which saw a revival of learning based on classical sources. Nevertheless, the Renaissance's emphasis upon returning to sources and unquestioning reliance upon the superiority of reason led some theologians to question the history and truthfulness of the events presented in the Holy Scriptures. According to the historical critical method, each Scriptural claim needed to be tested by reason to determine its reasonableness—as you would any other book. Trusting in human reason and this new “scientific method,” these theologians would not accept many parts of the Scriptures as God's Word, especially those which presented miracles. Therefore, the historical critical scholar claimed that he could use certain “scholarly” methods to determine what actually happened. This method was championed by German protestants (e.g. Karl Heinrich Graf 1815-1869) and Lutherans (e.g. Karl Eichhorn 1752-1827, Julius Wellhausen 1844-1918).

Over time American Lutheran theologians and synods began to make use of this illegitimate method of Biblical interpretation. The Seminex controversy on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in the 1970's was a direct result of professors who were using and teaching their students to make use of this method. Those who held to the historical critical method of interpretation were called liberals. *Liber* is the Latin word for book. They were not liberals because they were immoral, but because they used a scholarly/book method of Biblical interpretation, whose presuppositions just so happened to deny the inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures.

The Seminex controversy ended when the professors, who taught the historical critical method, left their teaching positions, along with the students who supported them. Ever since the 1970s, the terms ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ have been used to divide up and distinguish between Lutherans. In order to show that one is not a liberal, one usually says something like, “I believe in a six day creation. I believe Adam and Eve were real people.”

Someone who denies the inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures is certainly not in agreement with the Formula of Concord (Rule and Norm) which states, “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps 119:105, “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.” Nevertheless, simply because you believe that the inspired Holy Scriptures are without error, does not mean that you are a Lutheran. You might be a Southern Baptist, Methodist, etc. We need to remember that the old proverb, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” is not necessarily true.

Although the conservatives claim to have an inspired and inerrant Scriptures, they don't agree on what the Scripture teaches. Some conservatives use the revival-style contemporary worship of American Evangelicalism in order to attract new members, while others follow the Law and Gospel teaching of God's Word in the liturgy. Some conservatives have laymen doing “ministry” without a divine call, while others still maintain that God uses called and ordained ministers to teach and administer the Sacraments to create and strengthen faith. Some conservatives are following “40 days of Purpose” for spiritual renewal, while others are using Private Confession and Absolution. **Though conservatives won the battle for the Bible, they lost the war over Lutheranism.**

The battle lines have shifted. The terms “liberal” and “conservative” are no longer helpful, in determining who is holding to the Lutheran Confessions. If only it were as simple as identifying those who are using an illegitimate and scholarly method of interpretation! Today's battle is a bit more complex, for it involves the right interpretation/meaning of the Holy Scriptures. The presence of contemporary worship, revivalistic evangelism methods and the denigration of the pastoral office is only a symptom of a greater problem—the spirit of American Protestantism. These conservatives may believe Adam and Eve were real people, but they are not Lutheran in their message and practice; they are Protestant.

Just observe whether your pastor is preaching Law and Gospel, or whether he is only entertaining you with cute stories. Check and see if he preaches the stern Law which reveals your sins and the wrath of God or whether he preaches some rules which you can keep. Note whether he is preaching the sweet Gospel of forgiveness to comfort your conscience and give you the hope of salvation, or whether he is constantly exhorting you to tell others the Gospel. Consider whether Baptism, holy Absolution and Lord's Supper are continuing sources of strength and forgiveness or only an occasional event. Although many Protestants use an inspired and inerrant text, they do not see that the justification of the sinner by Christ is the doctrine by which the Church stands and falls.

The other reason that today's battle is so tricky, is due to denial and deception. Rather than admit to marginalizing justification in exchange for protestant methods, **many so-called Lutherans hide behind their conservatism.** After all, they believe Adam and Eve were real people. Some even use the term confessional (as if it were synonymous with conservative). If I had to coin a term to accurately describe those who are conservative by 1970s standards, but have adopted Protestant revivalism, **I would call them crypto-Protestants.**

This is not the first time that Lutherans have dealt with people hiding (crypto-) their true allegiance. Soon after Luther's death, Phillip Melanchthon and the crypto-Calvinists began to suppress the teaching of Christ's real presence in the Lord's Supper, while all the time claiming to be loyal Lutherans. The terms and language which these crypto-Calvinists used was intentionally vague and could be interpreted two ways. It wasn't until the 1574 Torgau Confession and the Maulbronn Formula that the crypto-Calvinists were unmasked as those who denied the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament. Thankfully, the rejection of the teaching of the crypto-Calvinists was included in the Formula of Concord of 1580.

The battle between A.D. 1546 and 1580 was confusing for many Lutherans, but the war for the truth was won by clinging to the pure light of the Word which judges all doctrines and teachers. An inspired and inerrant Holy Word is a pre-requisite, but it is not an end in itself. It is the message of justification which that Holy Words teach that will need to guide our pastors and churches. The Formula of Concord states, "This article

concerning justification by faith (as the *Apology* says) is the chief article in the entire Christian doctrine, without which no poor conscience can have any firm consolation, or can truly know the riches of the grace of Christ, as Dr. Luther also has written: *If this only article remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian Church also remains pure, and in goodly harmony and without any sects; but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted*" (FC, III, 6).

Easter at Redeemer Lutheran (Cambridge, Minnesota)



Delivering What's Most Important

Dr. Kent Heimbigner
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“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . .” *1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NASB)*

“Christ died for our sins ... and ... was raised ... according to the Scriptures.” This is what St. Paul had received. This is what he preached, what he “delivered” to his congregations. There are two things that come to mind as I ponder these words, and either one of them would merit an article all by itself, so grab something to drink and kick your feet up, because this article will likely be longer than what I would normally write.

First, Christ died for our sins and rose again. “Yes, Pastor, you only tell us that *every Sunday* ... so why is *that* such a big point?” The reason is because so many churches either *do not believe* it, or else *ignore* it!

I am not making this up. There are a great many churches where, if you asked the Pastor if Jesus died *as a payment for sin*, they would launch into one of many different “theories of the atonement” floating around out there. Some say He died strictly as a demonstration of God’s love, not as a payment for sin. Others have a view of His death as a conquest of the devil. And still others argue against the whole idea of Christ’s atoning sacrifice as a Scriptural glorification of child abuse (since the Father forsakes the Son and allows His cruel death). Lost in all of this, of course, is any sense of God’s perfect justice, and the absolute necessity that His justice be satisfied. If Christ hadn’t died for us, the satisfaction of the Father’s justice would have remained an “every man for himself” issue, and we would have all spent all eternity paying the price that divine justice demanded. That is “of first importance,” according to St. Paul, and sadly much of Christendom treats it as a thing of little importance, as a pawn in some theological debating game, or worst of all as a bad idea that needs to be rejected outright!

The second thing “of first importance” that St. Paul mentions is Christ’s resurrection. It is important

first, because it proves that His death has been accepted by God the Father as full payment for the sin of the whole world. It is also important because, as the “first fruits of them that sleep,” the resurrection of Christ demonstrates that we too shall rise, and live forever. This is our great confidence that we will in fact live, bodily, forever, in heaven!

Once again, sadly, there are plenty of churches and theologians who do not believe that Christ rose, bodily, from the dead. In the interest of being enlightened people, they speculate that, since we all know dead bodies don’t come alive again, Jesus must not have really been dead. Or, if He was, it must have been a “spiritual” resurrection. Really? Just “spiritual”? How is that any different from what a die-hard supporter of David Koresh could claim today? How does it demonstrate that the curse of death, pronounced upon Adam, has in any way been overturned? How, in fact, is this any different from the hellenistic or oriental philosophies which say that when your body dies, your spirit lives on? Where Christ’s physical resurrection is denied, the faith is forsaken, and what remains is an odd sort of unbelief with the trappings of a Christian heritage still hanging around. But that is where many, many, many Christian churches stand today.

Easter was glorious at Charity Lutheran Church ... not just because of the breakfast and the lilies and the new Easter dresses and the up-beat singing, although we had all of that too. No, Easter was glorious because we heard once again that Christ truly is risen, and that we too will rise and live forever because of Him!

We live in a world where many people do not have that hope, and where many churches treat Easter as nothing more than some sort of nebulous assurance that “life goes on.” For many of the more “conservative” churches, the death and resurrection of Jesus is a nice thing to celebrate once a year, but it’s awfully esoteric. They believe in being “practical.” So, while they may take a break from their normal “self help” messages for Easter Sunday, rest assured the remainder of the year will show that, even if they still believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is far from being “of first importance.”

And when we have Church Council or voters' meetings or heaven forbid even a church service where it doesn't look like the death and resurrection of Christ are of first importance to us, we too need to repent, receive forgiveness, and refocus on first things (like the fact that we *have* that forgiveness on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus!).

On Easter, we gather to celebrate all that this life has to offer, and to celebrate that even all of *that* is nothing compared to what will be ours in eternity, on account of Jesus' death and resurrection! How very much more meaningful that makes what goes on at orthodox Lutheran Churches, than what goes on where Easter bunnies, bonnets, and egg hunts are the real focus, rather than a mere sideshow!

Finally, notice that St. Paul says this doctrine is "according to the Scriptures." Now, when we think of "the Scriptures," we all know what that means ... the 39 books of the Old Testament, and the 27 books of the New, right? Well, that's not what St. Paul meant when he wrote these words. Much of the New Testament had not yet been written! St. Paul was speaking particularly of the Old Testament. So, where does the Old Testament speak of Christ dying and rising again?

That depends on whether you read it believingly, or unbelievingly. An unbeliever can read the Old Testament, and not see anything about Christ. But a believer recognizes that the Old Testament Scriptures testify to Christ (John 5:39). So, when he reads Genesis 3:15, he sees a prophecy of Christ coming to crush the serpent's head, and the pain Christ will suffer in accomplishing this. He sees a prophecy of Christ in Abraham's "almost sacrifice" of his son Isaac, when it was said that the Lord would provide the lamb for the sacrifice (Genesis 22). The whole history of Israel ... born in the promised land, sojourning in Egypt, passing through the waters in the Exodus, wandering in the wilderness of temptation for a period of 40 (years), and then entering the promised land again so God could use them to accomplish His saving purposes ... this whole history prophesied Christ's life ... born in the promised land, fleeing to Egypt, passing through the waters of Baptism, wandering in the wilderness of temptation for a period of 40 (days), and then entering the promised land to accomplish His saving work (see St. Matthew chapters 2-4). And so on with the prophecies of Isaiah 52 and 53, the "death" and third day "resurrection" of Jonah from the belly of the

fish, the promise at the conclusion of Malachi and all the rest of the Old Testament. Christ is the point of the Scriptures, including the Old Testament Scriptures. If we do not see how, then we are not reading it correctly.

Which brings me to what really ought to be a separate article, but here it is, all rolled into one: I was reading an article by Todd Wilken in the *Issues, Etc. Journal* vol. 4 no. 2. It is a publication that I highly recommend acquiring and reading ... upon reading it, you will see why some more "progressive" types might have wanted to see the show cancelled! Pastor Wilken begins his article (entitled "Bible-Believing Liberals"!) with two quotes. First:

"When a thing grows weak and out of date, it is obviously soon going to disappear. That's also true of churches. If a church cannot change, it will eventually die."

Now, the second one:

"Clearly change in both liturgy and structure is inevitable, and this change will probably be radical, if not total ... the forms the Church assumed in the past inevitably must die."

Then, Pastor Wilken issues the challenge:

"One of these statements comes from a famous Christian liberal, the other comes from a famous Christian conservative. Without peeking at the footnotes, which statement belongs to the conservative and which belongs to the liberal? You can't tell, can you?"

For the record, the first quotation is from Rick Warren, author of all the "Purpose Driven" material that's been such a hit with evangelicals (and entirely too many Missouri Synod Lutherans) of late. The other comes from John Shelby Spong, Episcopal bishop and liberal extremist *par excellence*.

Pastor Wilken continues:

Many Christians today think of themselves as conservative. They are pro-life, pro-family. They listen to Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity. They watch FOX news. They vote

Continued on next page

traditional values. But can you be *politically, socially* and *morally* conservative without being *theologically* conservative? Oh, yes you can!

Meet the Bible-believing liberals. While they believe that the culture needs to return to its historic traditions, they think the Church needs to abandon her's. While maintaining that the Flag should be proudly displayed, they fear that a cross in church might offend seekers. While they believe men and women have defined roles in marriage and family, they don't see why a woman can't replace a man in the pulpit. While outraged that our schools cater to the lowest-common denominator, they think our churches need to be geared toward the unchurched. They believe that public policy should be based on objective facts, but preaching should be based on felt needs. They want "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, but omit the Apostles' Creed from the Sunday service. They want the Ten Commandments in the public square, but are unconcerned when those commandments are replaced with "principles for living" in the pulpit. To the Bible-believing liberal, the ceremonies of a Presidential inauguration are meaningful and inspiring, but the Sunday morning liturgy is boring. For the Bible-believing liberal, the differences between political parties are serious, but the differences between Christian denominations are petty. While they insist on a strict literal interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, they play fast and loose with the Bible and its theology, even while maintaining its inerrancy and inspiration. These are the Bible-believing liberals. (pp. 5-6)

St. Paul hands on to us what he has received ... he does not concoct something new. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11:2 he writes, "I praise you because you ... hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." I don't care what you think of Rush Limbaugh or Sean Hannity. I'm not that concerned about whom you vote for for President. I do care that we treasure what we have received, that we keep first things first, and that we hand on the Gospel of salvation as we have received it. The traditional forms of the church have delivered salvation to the children of men for two thousand years now ... by

what arrogance would someone think they could throw all that out, and, starting from scratch, do better?

No, God grant us grace to receive and deliver what is of first importance: the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and His resurrection and His bodily appearance to many, all according to the Scriptures. This message is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:15-17), it is clear (especially to the faithful, 2 Corinthians 4:2-4), and it is absolutely reliable and true (2 Peter 1:20-21). Most of all, this message will save our souls; "principles for living" may not. God grant us also to receive with joy and gratitude the forms, the liturgy, that have delivered this salvation for two millennia, and to pass them on, such that two more millennia of souls may be saved, if the Lord should tarry so long. God grant us to be theologically "conservative," or better yet "confessional," believing the ancient faith of salvation by grace through faith in Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture and summarized in the Lutheran Confessions. This is the treasure we have been given. Giving it on is our reason for existence as Lutheran congregations. Therefore, God the Father grant us His Holy Spirit that we would ever keep our focus on the whole point of the Scriptures: the forgiveness of sins and the everlasting life that are ours on account of the perfect life, the atoning death, and the glorious resurrection of Christ Jesus our Savior! Amen.

***New Life in Christ—
Shannon Rhoads
and her daughter,
Haley, received the
Sacrament of Holy
Baptism on the Feast
of the Resurrection
at Salem Lutheran
Church (Malone, TX).***



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Herald and The ELDoNA!***

Help us continue to be a voice to, and for, confessional Lutherans in the U.S. If you want to support our efforts, contributions may be made to: Salem Lutheran Church, 718 HCR 3424 E , Malone, TX 76660.

Book Review

Juris Rubenis, *Finding God in a Tangled World: Thoughts and Parables*, (Paraclete Press: Brewster, Massachusetts, 2007) 184 pages.

The Rev. Juris Rubenis (b. 1961) is the pastor of Martin Luther Church in Riga, Latvia. He has a certain amount of notoriety in Latvia as a best-selling author, and these parables have sold hundreds of thousands of copies there. And He was also a member of the Popular Front of Latvia (Latvijas Tautas Fronte) organization which led Latvia to independence in 1991. "Juris achieved national prominence early in his ministry. In 1986 he took an active role in Helsinki-86, the first above-ground human rights organization in Soviet Latvia, and in the following year he helped found Rebirth and Renewal, an association of Latvian Lutheran pastors calling for religious freedom in the Soviet Union." (p. viii)

Besides pastor Rubenis' biography, there were several other factors that caught my attention. The Latvian Church is episcopally ordered like ELDoNA. Latvia is still culturally more conservative than its western European neighbors. And this was a book of devotions, which should always be appealing to pious Lutherans. The introduction itself refers to the book as a collection of "pithy observations about the world." (ix) And, in fact, most pages are filled with one or two sentence reflections. This makes for easy and light reading, perfect for fifteen-minute blocks of time.

There are some clever and profoundly true reflections in the book. One clever little conversation that the author creates, is in a chapter called "Jesus." Adam asked God, "What do you want to do with me?" "Turn you into Jesus," God answered. "Who is Jesus?" Adam asked. "I am Jesus," God said. "But I can't become God!" Adam exclaimed. "I can become you," God explained. (p. 29) This little imaginary conversation is typical of the material in the book. And the book does contain some truly thoughtful and concise statements. For example, "Self-knowledge brings happiness only to God." (p. 47) "A nation is a group of people who venerate the same icon." (p. 105) And, "Socialism is a foolish dream. Capitalism should not dare to exist without a dream." (p. 108) There are also a few delightful references to Latvia in the book, the resort town of Lielupe and the Daugava River.

But, unfortunately, there is much to criticize about the book and the author. While Pastor Rubenis may be a celebrity and an honored man in Latvia for his work on Latvian independence and religious freedom, he has come up short as a faithful teacher of Christian doctrine. The fundamental problem with the book stems from the author's belief that dogmatic truth is unattainable for humans. No teaching of the Church based on Scripture can be declared true. At least this is the impression the translator has of the author's work. He says, "Our authors repeatedly stress the impossibility of capturing theological truths in any sort of system, even a system of church dogma crafted by the most saintly teachers in the world. God is just too big, Jesus too paradoxical." (p. x) This assessment by the translator is easily established by the author's own words; "Dogma is necessary to begin with. For paradise you need your own ideas about God." (p. 79) And again, "The world rests on the dogma, God exists; there is no other dogma." (p. 61) Pastor Rubenis is far from Christian teaching with such statements, and far from Lutheran teaching which includes the perspicuity of Scripture and the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the Church through Word and Sacrament. Once he has thrown objective truth overboard, he is free to speculate about the One who is the Truth to his heart's content. Rubenis denies Christ's omniscience when he puts these words in the Lord's mouth: "I cannot say for sure what a creature should or should not know." (p. 119) This denial of omniscience is compounded by wild, unfounded speculations about Jesus; "A girl fell in love with Jesus. Her name was Mary Magdalene. Jesus did not quite understand her. They were together for a long time and developed feelings for each other. 'Do not abandon that girl,' God had told Jesus. 'You should not abandon a girl who loves you.'" (pp. 34-35) There are plenty of other doctrinal problems with this book beyond what I have cited here. These examples are sufficient.

The real trouble with this book as a source of spiritual inspiration is its detachment from truth. For the clergyman or layman who would want to use this book as devotional reading, he or she will be constantly hounded by doubt about what the author says. There will constantly be the nagging question as one reads these "parables," is this true? When one is constantly in doubt about the teaching in a book, it is ruined for devotional

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The Word we Study— The Word we Live—A Genesis

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You are what you eat. You will believe the way you worship. You are a product of your environment. You will worship the way you believe. These are all, to varying degrees, familiar sayings and likewise all true to varying degrees. But I would like to add another phrase to this list: You are what you study. Virtually any subject that you study in detail will change you. And this ultimately is the reason that any student goes to grade school, high school, college, even seminary. The goal is the transformation of the student into something that he was not prior to the study required by the given learning experience.

Now the study of various subjects and materials in these previously mentioned programs and institutions has the goal of imparting information or knowledge about a subject or subjects, but the study of the Word has a far greater goal: The transformation of the soul and body from judgment to justification and from degenerate to regenerate—from death to life. This is the reason the catechumen/disciple goes to Sunday School, Bible Study, Catechesis/Confirmation class, and even Service (regardless of whether it be Matins, Vespers, Divine Service, etc.). A Catechumen is a “learner” or student, just as a “disciple” is a pupil or follower of the Master. A “disciple” as described in Holy Scripture is one who desires to become a perfect copy of the Master or Teacher. The Christian does not simply study or learn the Holy Scriptures, but instead lives them, is catechized by them—discipled by them. And what does it mean to be “catechized” by something? Many of us are familiar with the word “catechize” in relationship to something that happened to us as young confirmands, or as the Bible puts it “little” believers. But mostly unbeknownst to us, that experience of the past has continued to function in our lives and, if we are truly blessed, even shaped and become our lives.

Let me try to explain. The word “catechize” means more than simple imparting of knowledge. This word of Greek origin, when utilized within the context of the Church, implies a kind of transformation of the student by the study process that far exceeds anything

expected in any other realm of learning or teaching. Within this context, the Holy Scriptures become more than simply the word we study, for the Scriptures become the Word we live and the living Word in us. In this reality of Christian Catechesis, I become the word which I study, because through the power of the Holy Spirit and God’s inspired inerrant word, I am imparted with faith. In much the same way that Christ is in me and I am in Christ, the word is in me and I am in the word. And that word of God, which is preserved in the Bible for our eternal benefit, tells us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”¹

Another way I like to think of the study of God’s Word being a truly life-changing, life-giving and life-forming experience is to relate the power of God’s word to the awesome, miraculous power of the Creation. Now let me be very clear about what I am speaking of here. I am not talking about the majesty of Mount McKinley or the power of a 1200 pound brown bear, for those are nothing more than a thing and a creature of the Creation. I, on the other hand, am speaking of the power of God to create everything we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, etc. by the simple act of Him speaking it all into existence at the moment of Creation as recorded in Genesis. A Word that has that kind of power is truly life-giving and life-changing in every sense of the word. If we fully comprehend and appreciate that one reality of our universe and temporal, as well as eternal, existence, then we can fully appreciate the power of the Word we study. This reminds me of a certain professor at the Seminary who it seemed was continually telling us students, when we failed to demonstrate adequate knowledge of the Word of God, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know not the Scriptures nor the power of God contained there within?” And he was correct with his quote of Jesus Christ from Mark 12:24, because our ignorance could almost always be attributed to our lack of

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The 2008 ELDoNA Synod— A Brief Summary

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This year's synod (convention) of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America was hosted by Christ Lutheran Church in Richmond, Missouri, where Rev. Hudson serves as pastor. Nine ELDoNA clergy were present— our largest attendance to date— with two excused absences (Pastors Raitz and Totten). There were also members of Christ Lutheran in attendance, as well as several visiting pastors (including three independent Lutheran pastors) and laity.

This year's synod met with a somewhat abbreviated schedule, being limited to a single day, May 22; we did not have a colloquium (formal theological papers) at this meeting, as we have the previous two years.



4H Building where Christ Lutheran Church meets

The synod opened with a Matins led by Pastor Hudson, who also preached. The service tied in well with the theme of the week, as the synod fell within the Octave (eight day liturgical observance) of the Feast of the Holy Trinity, and Pastor Hudson's sermon was a powerful reminder of what it means to confess the "Catholic faith"—as we say in the

Athanasian Creed each Trinity Sunday.

The pastors and deacons gave reports of the various congregations and missions in which they



R. Hunter, Anthony Oncken, C. D. Hudson, James Heiser, Mark Mueller, Douglas Handrich, John Rutowicz, Jeff Ahonen

serve, and the bishop reported on his labors which have transpired since the last synod. Each pastor has an opportunity to report on the life of the parish entrusted to his care; baptisms, deaths, marriages and

confirmations are reported, as well as significant issues which



Pastor Hunter giving his report

arise in the life of the Church (e.g., decisions such as building plans). Such reports and discussions help the members of the diocese better understand the respective challenges which each congregation (and her pastor) is facing, and helps them to better aid their brethren.



In his "Bishop's Report," Pastor Heiser reported in his visitations to St. Boniface, Christ our Redeemer, and Holy Cross Lutheran churches, as well as his installation of Rev. Mark Mueller at Redeemer Lutheran Church. Pastor Hudson reported on plans for *The Lutheran Herald* for the rest of 2008. Bishop Heiser also gave an update on seminary plans: the pastors and deacons have been helping with course descriptions, and textbook recommendations. A Seminary Committee, chaired by Dcn. Oncken, will continue this work, hopefully assisting the diocese to complete a seminary catalog within the next several months.



Reception of new members

Rutowicz, Ahonen and Heiser reported on their recent meetings with the STLK, and the diocese agreed that the bishop should attend the next synod of the STLK and sign a fellowship agreement, if no insurmountable issues arise between now and then.

Four new members were formally received into the diocese: Douglas Handrich, Mark Mueller,

Anthony Oncken, Tim Tolar. Rev. Tolar has requested that the bishop install him in his call to St. Luke Lutheran Church (Kenai, Alaska), and it is hoped that details for this installation will soon be arranged.



The synod concluded with a Vespers service, with Pr. Hudson conducting the service, and Bishop Heiser preaching. The text was the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6, a text which powerfully reminds Christ's Church of the power of the Word of God to overthrow the kingdoms of men.

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purposes. It becomes an object for analysis. This is Pastor Rubenis' failure. It may be appropriate for a philosophy professor to spark debate with his writings, but a pastor's vocation is to bring the comfort and assurance of the Gospel to his hearers and readers. This book does not do that. It is a shame. We need more modern devotional material that is intelligent and pious. And it would be nice to hear an orthodox Lutheran voice from Latvia.

This book also contains drawings by the "graphic artist" Maris Subacs at the beginning of each chapter. These drawings are confirmation of the fact that most modern art is a fraud. They are nothing more than stick figure drawings that any six-year-old could produce in two minutes. I don't know if Mr. Subacs makes much money as an "artist," but if he does, he is indeed an artist, but it has nothing to do with his drawings. Save the nineteen dollars this book costs. Buy a good beer and read Johann Gerhard's *Sacred Meditations*.

—Rev. John Rutowicz
St. Boniface Lutheran Church (Niles, MI)

ELDoNA and STLK Representatives Meet in Finland

After roughly a year of discussions *via* the Internet, three members of the ELDoNA met for several days of talks with clergy of the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland (STLK) at the STLK's camp at Siitamaja, Finland. The pastors addressed a number of key topics, including the doctrine of fellowship, the office of the holy ministry, and the Lord's Supper. At the conclusion of the discussions, the representatives of both groups concluded that they were in complete doctrinal agreement. The participants in the discussions were President Kimmo Närhi, Dr. Markku Särelä, Rev. Ned Brockwell, Bp. Heiser, Pastor John Rutowicz, and Dcn. Jeffrey Ahonen.



Speaking with Rev. Ned Brockwell

The STLK has existed since 1928 as a synod for confessional Lutheran congregations which were organized beginning in 1923 (when it became legal for to establish congregations which are independent of the state churches of Finland). The STLK was originally in fellowship with the LC—MS and other churches of the ILC until 1970, because of the LC—MS' fellowship with the ALC (which was approved in 1969). Fellowship was restored after the



Rev. Rutowicz, Rt. Rev. Heiser, President Närhi, Dr. Särelä, Dcn. Ahonen

LC—MS/ALC fellowship was terminated. However, fellowship was again broken in 1998 when the LC—MS established fellowship with the Ingrian Lutheran Church, a member of the liberal Lutheran



Discussions at Siitamaja

World Federation, which is also in fellowship with the Lutheran State Church of Finland. When it became clear that no other synod within the ILC would take a stand against Missouri's unionism, the STLK recognized in 2003 that fellowship had been broken with the rest of the ILC. Since then, the STLK has recognized fellowship with churches in Germany, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The discussions at Siitamaja gave ample evidence for a concern for true doctrinal agreement by both parties on all issues. Such a shared commitment for true unity, rooted in God's Word and our

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Lutheran Confessions, was quite refreshing and consoling—during that Octave of the Feast of Pentecost—that all true unity in God’s Word is worked by the Holy Spirit through the means which the Lord has given.

The STLK clergy will now recommend fellowship to the synod’s Board of Directors. The STLK will be able to act next year at their biannual convention. The ELDoNA, meeting in synod in Richmond, Missouri, agreed that the bishop would plan to attend the STLK synod and, if nothing arises which stands in the way of fellowship, sign such an understanding between the ELDoNA and STLK.



Our gracious hostesses at Siitamaja

On a personal note: Our Finnish hosts extended a generous hospitality to us throughout our visit. In addition to helping with our transportation from Helsinki to Siitamaja, and back again, throughout the visit, several ladies of the STLK made sure that all participants were very well fed, and never lacked for coffee.

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filed, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. (3) And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity.

We concluded with these: *This is the Catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.*

St Hilary of Poitiers, the “Athanasius of the West,” spoke most correctly when he declared:

We must learn from God what we are to think of God – for He is the only source of knowledge—about Himself

Annual Plenary of the Augustana Ministerium

The 2008 Plenary of the Augustana Ministerium (TAM) met this year at Trinity Lutheran Church in Kearney, Missouri (not far from Kansas City). Over fifty pastors and laymen gathered to hear a series of presentation on various topics of “life in a post-synodical world.” Dcn. Ahonen spoke on the topic of “Home Missions” and Bishop Heiser on the topic of “Ecclesiastical Oversight.” (This year’s conference was the largest for TAM since its founding three years ago.)

Presentations were delivered over the course of two days, May 20 and 21, with reports, elections and other TAM business on the afternoon of May 20. Rev. Bruce Ley was elected as the new Superintendent. Revs. Stefanski, Hein, Heiser, and Schulz were reelected to their current positions, meaning that their offices are now a ‘lifetime’ appointment. (Several others— Heimbigner and Newman— were reelected, but had not previously served a full term in their position, and thus will face reelection in three years.) Deacon Ahonen was also elected to the Administrative Council, and will serve as Dean of Pastoral Recruitment.

Reports by the deans explained that, among other things, TAM presently provides \$17,400 a year to five mission pastors, and has provided approximately \$24,000 in support to pastors in various crises since the time of TAM’s founding.

TAM now has a “lay auxiliary” organization, the Augustana Confraternity. To learn more about TAM and the Augustana Confraternity, visit augustanaministerium.org on the Internet.

Meditation for the Opening Matins of the 2008 Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

Rev. C.D. Hudson

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, who continues to abide in your life and mine.

The text that is the basis of the meditation this day is from the Gospel account of St. John, chapter 17, verse 5: “*And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the Word was.*”

And we once again join our hearts together in that great privilege the Triune God has given each one of us as His fully forgiven and redeemed child, the great privilege of praying unto Him. *Sanctify us in they Word O Lord, Thy word is truth. In the name o the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.*

Not very long ago we as “historic” Lutherans engaged in a liturgical practice that was, I dare say for many people, both challenging and at least a little uncomfortable. No, it was not beginning to learn a new liturgy, nor even a new hymn. In fact it was not learning something new at all, and yet, when many people noted this change in the Divine Service folder they quietly sighed and said to themselves something such as the following: “Oh, that again,” or, “here we go again.” Perhaps you have already figured out what I am speaking of. It was our confessing the third of the ancient, Catholic and Apostolic Creeds on Holy Trinity Sunday, that which was not authored by, but is so appropriately named after, the great fourth century Bishop of Alexandria, St. Athanasius.

Now, much of great theological value can be said about his life as a Bishop that is most applicable to our theologically troubled time. We know that his service as Bishop extended beyond four decades, and that about 22 of those 40 plus years were spent in five different exiles because he refused to compromise on the issue of doctrine, in particular the doctrine of the relationship between God the Eternal Father and His only-begotten Son, formulated for the first time in creedal form at the first ecumenical council convened at a place called Nicaea.

Interestingly, Athanasius did not initially present his understanding of this all-important doctrine where

we might well expect, in his *Contra Arianos*, but in what is considered his first work, *Contra Gentes*.

In that first work Athanasius put forward his first reflections on this divine relationship. As He did so he strove to show that the divine attributes which are God the Father’s by nature are the only-begotten Son’s as well. To support this contention he made a list of terms applicable to the only-begotten Son in CG 46.8 contending that the only-begotten Son is in fact, “Wisdom, Word, Power, Light, Truth, Righteousness, Virtue, Holiness and Life of God.” What Athanasius was asserting is that these are not simply descriptive terms, but in fact attributes which are not the only-begotten Son’s by derivation, but are His in and of Himself. Athanasius’ use of the phrase “The Father’s own power in itself” is of special significance. What he was already asserting was that there are not two separate sources of divine power. Athanasius was contending that it is not the case that God the Father has “power” and then “bestows” that “power” upon His only-begotten Son; rather, that the Father has His power, and that power is no less, and more importantly, no different, from that of the Word Himself. They are not two divine powers, one absolute and one derivative, but rather one divine power. Thus the only-begotten Son’s divine attributes, save one, and that is the order of procession, is always equal to that of God the Father’s. I suggest that in its essence, this is what we confessed last Sunday under St. Athanasius’ name: “*Such as the Farther is, such is the Son*”.

We also made bold to confess these words last week: “*The Father eternal, the Son eternal...*” This doctrinal assertion would soon became the truly consuming focus of Athanasius’ life, as that which has at least “traditionally” been known as “Arianism” began to intrude itself to an ever-increasing degree, into the life of the Church Catholic. The fundamental question of this great and all-important theological (not political) controversy was, “what was the nature of the relationship between God the eternal Father and the only-begotten Son”? Athanasius was moved by theological conviction, not

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political aspirations, to defend the Catholic doctrine of the Church by building the most coherent case possible, on the basis of Holy Scripture, for the eternal Sonship of the only-begotten Son in the most significant of his Christological works, *Contra Arianos*. Of necessity the foundation for his argumentation was none other than the Biblical witness itself. He began one phase of this apologetic by quite appropriately referencing John 1:1, the content of which clearly declares the eternal nature of the Word “with” God, and “as” God. He then continued by citing Rev. 1:8: “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,*” says the Lord, “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty,*” which is the witness and testimony of the Christ Himself. To further support the eternal nature of the only-begotten Son he cites John 8:12, “*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’*” In addition he cited John 10:4; 13:13 and 14:6. The use of John 14:6, “*Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,*” is of particular significance, for Athanasius used this text to assert that the Lord did not “become” truth, but “exists as” truth. It is also of great importance to note that the “*I am*” statements do not have temporal qualifiers, nor does the language indicate a reference to a beginning.

Athanasius’ goal in the use of these particular verses (among others) was to show they support the opening statement of the Gospel account of St. John, that the Word is in fact, eternal. Thus once again we recur to the words we so recently confessed to be both Godly and right: “*The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate*” and “*The Father eternal, the Son eternal*”. This saint contended, and quite properly so, that the only-begotten Son is eternally begotten from the Father who is Himself unbegotten. Contrary to what the Arians were contending, the only-begotten Son was not a “creature,” but the “Creator.” While in fact all things were created by the Father it is so because He created “through His only-begotten Son,” and the only-begotten Son was begotten without beginning. He also contended, *contra* the Arians, that the generation of the only-begotten Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, for He is inseparable from the essence of the Father. This means not merely that the essence (*ousia*) of the only-begotten Son is of the same essence (*ousia*) as God the eternal

Father, but in fact that there is an indivisible and “eternal relationship of being” between God the eternal Father and His only-begotten Son. Thus, the being of the Godhead is whole, it is not just in the Father but also in the only-begotten Son and God the Holy Ghost as well. The incarnated only-begotten Son of God, He whose name you and I make so bold as to confess is the only Lord and Savior of the world Jesus of Nazareth, is the same as the Father in all respects and in all things, except that He is not un-begotten, and is neither before nor after, but co-existent with God the eternal Father.

Consequently, the only-begotten Son did not exist because of God the eternal Father’s “will”! Their relationship is in fact of the most intimate of kind, for it exists by “nature,” but not by choice! This is why the only-begotten Son is the eternal Father’s supremely perfect “issue,” and thus His express image. Hence Jesus declaration: “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father;*” (John 14:9). Echoing what he had already formulated about this relationship in CG, Athanasius continued by asserting (yet again) that the only-begotten is the (*auto*) “very wisdom,” and “very Word” and the “very Power” that is in fact “proper” (*idios*) to nothing less than God the eternal Father. Whereas God the eternal Father is “light,” the only-begotten Son is the revealed “Radiance” of that same Godhead. Again, recurring to that which Athanasius had previously written in CG, he sums up what God the Holy Trinity is doing in this fashion, As God moves and supports His creation, and manifests Himself to it, He does so through His only-begotten Son, the Word. And, because of the most intimate of relationships which exists between them (and God the Holy Ghost as well), when thinking of the only-begotten Son, one must also think of God the eternal Father as well, for in reality, their will and thus their word – is one! Athanasius summed it up so well, and I quote: “In beholding the Son, we see the Father, for our conception and understanding of the Son are knowledge of the Father, because He is the proper Offspring from His being” (*Con. Ar. 1.16. De Syn. 48*).

We dared to begin that ancient Creed last week by confessing these words: (1) *Whosoever will be saved, before all things, it is necessary that he hold the catholic [i.e., universal, Christian] faith.* (2) *Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.* (3) *And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity.* We concluded that con-

fession with these words: *This is the Catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.*

Dear redeemed, the theological struggle of Athanasius was again I say a “theological” struggle for the proper understanding of the Word and thus of the Christ as well. It was by no means just another “historical sidelight” in the history of the Bride of the Christ. There is in fact a great and growing need for this kind of Christological struggle in our time as well. What is of importance for us to realize about Athanasius’ struggle is the fact that, in addition to the theological content, is the fact we that his adversaries vigorously and consistently contended they were Christian! What Athanasius was so blessed to recognize was the fact that the “Arians” had embraced a flawed hermeneutic, one which prevented them from interpreting Holy Scripture in a Catholic fashion. He understood, and quite properly so, that proper exegesis is to recognize and incorporate the relationship that Jesus has with Holy Scripture. Thus an attack on Scripture was, and in fact still is, an attack on the Christ. The divinely inspired Scripture reveals both the Person and the soteriological work the Christ, and to undermine the one is to destroy the other, in the life of the deceived believer. St. Athanasius put it so well in these words:

Let them understand from Scripture that the devil, that designer of heresy, on account of the peculiar ill smell of evil, borrows the language of Scripture so that with Scripture as a veil, sowing his own poison, he might outwit the guileless. How could he speak the truth about the Father, denying the Son who reveals Him? How could he think correctly about the Spirit when he slanders the Word who equips the Spirit” (CA I.69).

In concluding this morning, we briefly reflect upon another assertion which Athanasius made against the contention of the Arians that has great relevancy in our time. He contended quite clearly and strongly that, because of their “doctrine,” what the Arians believed, taught and confessed about the Christ was the fruit of their flawed hermeneutic, and thus their doctrine was not compatible with Catholic Christianity! More to the point, in a statement that would offend many who assert they are Christian in our time, he contended they, the Arians, could thus not interpret the Scriptures correctly. He asserted that the proper interpretation of Scripture belongs to the Christian alone. He declared:

We are Christians, O you Arians, we are Christians! It is natural for us to have a close knowledge of the Gospel which concerns the Savior and neither to join the Jews in stoning Him if we hear about His divinity and His eternity, nor to join you in being offended at utterances of a lowly sort, which, as a man, He voiced on our account.

I submit yet again that the Lutheran Reformers knew precisely what they were doing when they placed all three of the Ecumenical Creeds, which includes the one named after this faithful saint of the Church Catholic, at the “front” of our Symbols, the *Book of Concord*. And, it is not in the least by chance that the concluding document of our Symbolic Book is, again, not a document penned by “Lutherans,” but is in fact a list of quotations from a host of early Church fathers, including Athanasius, quite properly entitled, *The Catalogue of Testimonies*. The *Book of Concord* continues to properly explain the true ancient, Catholic and Apostolic faith, which is revealed only in the pages of an un-changed Holy Scripture. The *Book of Concord* is in fact not simply Lutheran, it is Catholic in the truest sense of the word, for it provides us with the proper hermeneutic to learn about “who” the Christ is, “what” He is, and “what” He has done!

In his decades long struggle against the false doctrine of the Arians Athanasius pointed out something of great significance, even for our time, about the Council held at Nicaea in A.D. 325. At that Council there were two different types of decisions rendered. The first concerned the question of when was the proper time for the celebration of Easter, and the Meletian schism. In reference to these kinds of questions Athanasius informs us that the Bishops at council wrote: “It seemed good as follows”, for it did then seem good that there should be general compliance. Then he continued by observing in regard to the second type of question, which was doctrinal in nature: “but about the faith they did not write, ‘It seemed good’, but ‘Thus believes the Catholic Church.’”

This is the ancient, Catholic and apostolic faith, found in its highest form among sinful men, that is in the doctrine of “historic” Lutheranism.

(1) *Whosoever will be saved, before all things, it is necessary that he hold the catholic [i.e., universal, Christian] faith.* (2) *Which faith except everyone do keep whole and unde*

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study regarding this most precious Word of God.

There should be no doubt in any Christian's mind and soul that God's Word has the power to change lives, defeat death, sin and the devil, and give life eternal. This is so clearly demonstrated in Genesis where we see the Lord literally speak into existence, into life, everything in the universe.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said,...."²

"And God said". Now there is something worth studying. God "said" and it was—a simple and straight forward reality. There is no debate or negotiation possible, for when God speaks all must listen in heaven and on the earth, because all are His creation and His creatures. All are subject to Him and His divine will, whether they wish to be or not, for He is their Maker. It truly is as we sing on the Lord's Day in our liturgy: "Oh come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." God said it, so it is true—that is the reality so joyously accepted by the Lutheran, and at the same time so desperately fought against by the world. The world that He created out of nothing, a cosmos that He literally spoke into existence simply with His Word. Throughout the Genesis account, we hear God speak one marvelous thing after another into existence.

"And God said, 'Let there be light....' And God said, 'Let there be an expanse....' And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered....' And God said, 'Let the earth sprout....' And God said, 'Let there be lights....' And God said, 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures....' And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures....' Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness....' And God blessed them. And God said to them....' And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."³

When we look at this reality of Creation, Creation out of nothing, there can be little doubt that God's Word has the power to transform a life—to create life where before there was only death. That is the reality of the Word that we study—the Word that we live. Just as that Word in the beginning of time spoke into existence things that were not, so it has the power to speak into existence an eternal life of bliss with the heavenly Father in His kingdom which did not exist before the hearing and study of that Word. The Word which we study has the power to transform lives, because it is not just ink on paper, as all other earthly human literature is, but is the very Word of God preserved throughout time for the benefit of all mankind, especially those who will hear and heed its divinely inspired, inerrant message of salvation—a salvation won on a cross two thousand years ago by God Himself and mercifully bestowed upon His people purely by grace. That is a power which is beyond the human mind and logic to fully comprehend, and must ultimately be taken on simple faith that what God says is fact by the undeniable reality that the omnipotent God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has said it.

This divine Word that we study and ultimately live has the power to deliver or carry us through all the trials and temptations of this fallen world just as the Apostle Paul proclaims in his second epistle to Saint Timothy.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.⁴

These words, which are the Word of God delivered through His chosen apostle who speaks by divine inspiration in this letter, can leave no doubt that the Word of God is indeed powerful and able to transform one from death to life. Saint Paul, in various other places throughout Holy Scripture, speaks unwaveringly about the ability of this Word to change His own life purely by grace, just as he recounts its life-changing impact on the young bishop Timothy in the text above. I am sure you remember the prior life of the great apostle Paul. A

life devoted to persecuting the bride of Christ, the church. A life of imprisoning and killing Christians wherever he found them. A life as Saul, the Pharisee among Pharisees. A life of death that was transformed into a life of grace and eternal promise by the Word on a dusty road and by the words of God spoken by a prophet at a house in Damascus.⁵

This is the effect that this spoken Word has on each of us as well, for before the revelation of Christ as Redeemer through that Word of God preserved in Holy Scripture, we were enemies of God and slaves of sin, death, and the devil. And left to our own devices, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves, to rescue and ransom ourselves from this dread fate, because we are dead in our trespasses. If I am dead, there is nothing that I can do for myself, because a dead person cannot perform CPR on themselves. It requires someone else, a force outside myself, to resuscitate—to return life to a dead creature of the Creation. This is equally true of being spiritually dead, for if I am dead in my sin, as Saint Paul proclaims in Ephesians 2:1, Colossians 2:13, Romans 8:10, etc., then on my own I can do nothing to change my state. In order to change my state, it is going to take someone outside of myself to facilitate that transformation from death to life. But through the Word which we study, it is possible for God to “create” life where before there was only death. Through the spoken Word of God, the same Word which spoke the entire Universe into existence, God is able to speak children of faith into existence. This all-powerful Word of God, which was with God in the beginning, is able to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit. The word which we study is also the Word which we live and the Word which transforms us from death into life. As John professes in his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.⁶

In this Gospel text just quoted we see John use the Greek word “Logos,” which in the Koine Greek of the first century carries a tremendous number of images into the mind of the average person of that era. The

word “Logos” can mean any of a dozen or more things separately, or some of them even simultaneously. But in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, it means first and foremost the full self-revelation of God through Jesus Christ the Word. And through this word, the Word, all who are saved are transformed/created by the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world and Redeemer of mankind. Through the death and resurrection of the Word, the Incarnate Son of God, you and I are offered justification before God the Father through grace. By the proclamation of the Word, we are given faith which has the power to bring about the new birth, the new creation within us. Through the study of the Word, that new creation within is fed and built up into a holy house, a temple of the Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Word, simple water, wine, and bread become Sacraments which instill and nourish faith, as well as bring about repentance unto forgiveness. Through the Word spoken in Holy Absolution, forgiveness is bestowed by Jesus Christ onto the repentant sinner. And through that forgiveness bestowed by the Word in its many forms purely by grace through faith, the old Adam is subdued and the new man comes forth into the light of life. The Light of Life, which is the Word we study, as well as the Word we live—and ultimately the Word of Genesis, which creates the new life within us. The same Word that created all that we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch in the Cosmos is the Word we study and the Word we live—and the Word of our Genesis here and now.

Endnotes:

1. Hebrews 4:12
2. Genesis 1:1–3a
3. Genesis 1:3a-b, 6a-b, 9a-b, 11a-b, 20a-b, 26a-b, 28a-b, 31.
4. 2 Timothy 3:14–17
5. Acts 9:1–31, 22:5–16
6. John 1:1–5

New Life in Christ—Tyler Henkel was baptized during the divine service on Cantate Sunday (April 20) at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, TX). Tyler is the third son of Todd and Shannon Henkel.



What of the hirelings and wolves? “*But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees*”. Simply put, the hireling is the one who fears suffering the cross for the sake of Christ, and abandons the sheep to be scattered by the wolf, rather than suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

At the end of Luke 9, there is a brief pericope of three men and the calling to follow Christ. We read, “*Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (v. 57–62) Any Christian considering these words— how much more, then, a steward of the mysteries of God— cannot consider these words without finding how easily he falls short of the calling. The calling to follow Christ is to follow One who did not even have a place to lay His head; the calling to follow Christ is often accompanied by great financial hardship, and this is something made all the more burdensome by the theologians of glory who teach as if the call to follow Christ was a means of gain. But the total character of the calling is something which may even frighten us: not the death of an earthly father, nor consideration for the guests of one’s home, may take precedence. It is a calling which proclaims, “*And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won. The Kingdom ours remaineth.*”*

But when the hour of trial comes, the hireling does not make his good confession, risk losing his call, by confronting the wolves and their false doctrine. He caves. How often I’ve heard men declare, in essence, “*Not in my backyard*”— ‘it’s not in my parish, so what do I care if the wolves are feasting on the rest of the circuit?’ They are silent before the face of the wolves, and thinking only for their own hides, flee the fight. Their motivation is simple: “*The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.*”

The wolves ever threaten the flock: “*... and the*

wolf catches sheep and scatters them.” Thus St. Paul gave commandment to the pastors of Ephesus: “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*” (Acts 20:28–31)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have seen what the savage wolves can do, who meddle in parishes, leading the weak in faith astray. I have wept for those who have yielded to the words of those who spoke perverse things to them, who allowed their hearts to become filled with resentment, greed, ambivalence to the doctrine of God. And as we survey our nation, everywhere it seems that the wolves hunt in packs, and the sheep are scattered.

Deacon-elect Oncken, brother in Christ and office, it is into the midst of this combat you are now called, both here, and in Northern Illinois. St. Peter wrote to Christ’s undershepherds: “*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*” (1 Peter 5:2–4) The service of the undershepherds as overseers of the flock is one in which they willingly serve, and which they serve not for the sake of dishonest gain, but eagerly out of faithfulness to the Chief Shepherd, Christ Jesus, and love for His flock, the Church. It is the hireling who serves for base motives, who desires dishonest gain, and flees before the wolves. St. Paul thus wrote to the Church in Rome: “*Now I urge you, brethren, not those who causes divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.*” (Rom. 16:17–19) False doctrine and offense bring division, but those who serve their bellies do not care, for their smooth words and flattering speech open wallets and feed their bellies.

We were lost, we were scattered. This season celebrating the resurrection of the Christ clearly teaches

and reminds us of our plight apart from the Lord, our Good Shepherd. But the Lord God declared, “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.” (Ezekiel 34) Thus are we all gathered by Christ Jesus. **Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for His sheep, to make them partakers of His Resurrection.** We had gone astray; we were scattered in our sin, and if the Lord Himself had not come to rescue us, we would have been eternally lost. Thus the Christ was born in Bethlehem, and in the fullness of time was baptized, and taught His disciples, before being crucified for us, paying for our sins through His suffering and death for us. On the third day, Jesus rose again from the dead and appeared to His disciples, calling them to be His apostles— His sent ones— as witnesses of His resurrection.

When the soldiers arrested Jesus, the had disciples fled. Peter even denied his Lord three times. Through repentance, Peter was restored, and as a holy apostle, preached with power on Pentecost, and by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, 3,000 were baptized in that day.

It is not through any worthiness in us that we are Christians, but because the Lord, in mercy, calls us through His Word to repent of our sins, and believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life. The third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, works through the Word which is proclaimed to us to call us to repentance and faith. Thus we have heard, “And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel.” Christ lead His sheep, feeds His flock, and they hear His voice and follow Him. As St. Peter declares, “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Pet. 2) The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens us through the Word, and by the grace we receive from the Lord, we stand steadfast in the hope which is ours in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Preached April 6, 2008 at Salem Lutheran Church, upon the occasion of the installation of Rev. Anthony Oncken as deacon of Salem Lutheran Church, and missionary to Northern Illinois.



Rev. Anthony and Caroline Oncken, Lynnea and Sarah, on the day of Dcn. Oncken's installation, April 6.



Following the divine service, the congregation had a potluck for Rev. Oncken and his family. Afterwards, the deacon briefed the congregation on prospects for a new mission in Northern Illinois.

**Congregations served by Pastors
of the
Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of
North America (ELDoNA)**

ALASKA

St. Luke Lutheran Church

meeting at:

Salvation Army Activity Center

401 N. Forest Drive

Kenai, Alaska

Pastor Tim H. Tolar

Phone: (907) 335-0036

Sunday: Bible Study 3 P.M.; Divine Service 4:30 P.M.

CALIFORNIA

Saint Laurence Evangelical Lutheran Church

meeting at:

16079 Via Harriet

San Lorenzo, California 94580-1919

Pastor Michael Totten, Ph.D.

Phone: (510) 481-7018

Sunday: Bible Study 9:00 A.M.; Divine Service 10:15 A.M.

ILLINOIS

Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church

618 S. Maxwell Road

Peoria, Illinois 61607

Pastor Douglas Handrich

Phone: (309) 697-4832

Sunday: Divine Service 9:30 A.M.; Bible Study 10:30 A.M.

St. Philip Lutheran Mission

Grayslake, Illinois.

Location and service times yet to be determined.

Dcn.. Anthony Oncken

Phone: (847) 548-0448

MICHIGAN

Christ our Redeemer Lutheran Church

2619 Superior ("Superior Place")

Trenton, Michigan 48183

Pastor Mark Raitz

Phone: (313) 278-4091

Sunday: Divine Service 9:30 A.M.; Bible Study 10:30 A.M.

Saint Boniface Evangelical Lutheran Church

meeting at:

104 N. 3rd Street

Niles, Michigan

Pastor John Rutowicz

Phone: (269) 683-5169

Sunday: Divine Service 9:30 A.M.; Bible Study 10:45 A.M.

MINNESOTA

Redeemer Lutheran Church

2560 South Main Street

Cambridge, Minnesota

Pastor Mark Mueller

Phone: (763) 689-2290

Sunday: Divine Service 9:00 A.M.; Bible Class 10:15 A.M.

MISSOURI

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church

4H Building

Ray County Fairgrounds

Richmond, Missouri 64085

Pastor C. D. Hudson

Phone: (660) 259-2728

Sunday: Divine Service 9:30 A.M.; Christian Ed. 10:45 A.M.

NORTH CAROLINA

Saint Paul Lutheran Church, UAC

323 First Avenue SW

P.O. Box 535 (mailing address)

Taylorsville, North Carolina 28681

Pastor Donald R. Hunter

Phone: (828) 632-2695

Sunday: Sunday School 9:45 A.M.; Divine Service 11 A.M.

TEXAS

Salem Lutheran Church

718 HCR 3424 E

Malone, Texas 76660

Pastor James D. Heiser, Dcn. Jeffrey Ahonen

Phone: (254) 533-2330

Sunday: Sunday School 9:30 a.m.; Divine Service 10:30 a.m.

WISCONSIN

Saint Henry Lutheran Mission

meeting at:

Winter, WI—Town of Winter Hall, N4680 Co. W

Saturday Evening Service at 5:30 P.M.

Bible Study at 6:30 P.M.

Tony, WI—'Paradise' Building, Intersection of North &

Maple Streets, Tony, WI

Sunday Morning Service at 9:30 A.M.

Bible Study at 10:30 A.M.

Ironwood, MI—**Sunday Evening Divine Service at 7 P.M.**

Dcn. Jeffrey Ahonen

Phone: (715) 403-1433