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REFLECTIONS



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CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION

The title of this booklet originated in the theme of the 1984 Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The Convention theme which gave impetus to the 25th Anniversary celebration of the CLC was, "STAND STILL ... GO FORWARD." (Exodus 14:13-15) These essays, written by clergy members, appeared as monthly bulletin inserts.

This booklet will remind members of the CLC that the Lord has blessed our church body from the beginning. We also appreciate the responsible position our Lord has granted us as a confessional Lutheran church.

Friends and inquirers are hereby invited to examine our history and the continuing purpose of our existence. We trust that they will see that we are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20) We are always eager to share the message of the Lord Jesus with others, and to join with all who are blest with us in our faith and confession drawn from and established unequivocally upon the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

REFLECTIONS

OUR BACKGROUND

Since the formation of our Church of the Lutheran Confession in 1960 a whole new generation of pastors and laymen has arisen in our midst. It can only be of benefit to them and to us to recall the background from which we have come.

Most of us who found it necessary to organize a new church body had our roots in the Synodical Conference, whose constituent synods included the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS), the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). The Synodical Conference at one time confessed and upheld all the doctrines of Scripture, including the doctrine that for the establishment of church fellowship full agreement in doctrine and practice is necessary.

But in the late 1930's the LC-MS, the largest synod of the Synodical Conference, began to express a willingness to enter into fellowship with other Lutherans without first arriving at agreement in all doctrines of Scripture and in matters of practice. Human reason and emotions began to play a deciding role rather than clear statements of Scripture, such as 1 Cor. 1:10, Rom. 16:17-18, and 2 John 9-11.

The WELS and the ELS repeatedly pointed out to the LC-MS that this new course was unscriptural, but without success. Eventually, however, the WELS and ELS themselves succumbed to error in this same doctrine of fellowship. Instead of heeding the clear directive of Scripture to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned as soon as these become apparent, as now was to be seen in the LC-MS, the WELS followed the course set forth in the statement: "Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail." Thus termination of fellowship with an erring church body was made a matter of subjective human judgment rather than one prescribed by plain statements of Scripture.

We who founded the CLC regarded this as disobedience to the scriptural directives concerning the termination of fellowship with errorists. Since the synods to which we belonged at this time insisted on following this unscriptural course, we in conscience bound by the Word of God and out of concern for the preservation of the Gospel were constrained by obedience to Rom. 16:17 and 2 John 9-11 to sever fellowship with our former synodical affiliations. These are the roots from which our church body sprang.

THE ORGANIZATION OF OUR CLC

In the late 1950's numerous pastors, teachers, and congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod had become very much disappointed and upset about the departure from the Word of God in the actions of their respective church bodies. At one time these three church bodies had confessed correctly the biblical teaching of termination of church fellowship, but then they changed their position to teaching and defending error. Many of these spiritually distressed Lutherans of the Synodical Conference soon discovered each other and began to meet and consult with each other on what action to take under these conditions that would be in keeping with the Word of God.

At these meetings, which were held intermittently over a number of years and at various locations in the midwest and the western parts of the United States, they diligently applied themselves to the task of formulating a document that clearly stated the biblical teaching of CHURCH FELLOWSHIP and under what circumstances such fellowship must be terminated. A second teaching of Scripture which in their opinion likewise needed clarification and scriptural definition was the doctrine of the CHURCH AND MINISTRY as a part of the Ministry of the Keys.

As the Lord progressively blessed their diligent efforts with success in accurately stating these teachings of His Word in their confession of faith, the participants in this task also experienced the joy of being drawn together into a new fellowship by the working of the Holy Spirit. The common bond which they had been sorely missing during the last years of their former church associations was now being graciously given to them in their new fellowship in accord with the Word of God: *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* (1 Cor. 1:10)

The formal organization of their new church body under the carefully chosen and significant name CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION was accomplished as they were the guests of Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church at Watertown, South Dakota, August 9-12, 1960. As then, so also at this time, TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

--George Barthels

IMMANUEL LUTHERAN COLLEGE, "TORCHBEARER OF THE CLC"

What a playwright said about life could be said as well about the light of Gospel truth: it is not a "brief candle." It is rather a splendid torch for us to keep burning brightly before handing it to future generations.

Early on the CLC founders felt the absolute necessity of a school to "equip the saints for their ministry." Our own school, pray God, which could be free of the influences which had made the formation of the CLC necessary. Without such, it would be a "brief candle" matter. In 35 years or so the light would be out, so far as we are concerned.

Fortunately a group of Christians of Immanuel congregation in Mankato, Minnesota, with the blessings of the congregation, had earlier made a very bold move. With little visible support but a high sense of purpose they organized Immanuel Lutheran College. Though small, there was an instant enrollment that included like-minded students from other independent congregations. An old school building had been moved to a lot on the eastern edge of Mankato. The school was born. In September of 1959 the first term began with 28 students in the high school, 14 in college, and 2 in the seminary.

Five months after the organization of the CLC in 1960, the new school was given to the care and keeping of this parent body. The support group was now larger, but the resources to expand the campus and provide dorm housing were simply not in sight. But then a miracle of Providence took place. The beautiful 75 acre Ingram Estate in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, was offered to us for only \$85,000. In the summer of 1963 ILC took leave of its Alma Mater and made the move. Some of its character, some of the pioneering spirit of its youth stayed on in Mankato. The manner and the mission, however, carried on and soon blossomed in its new locale. That purpose was well stated in the motto of the school's twenty-fifth: *"One generation shall praise Thy Name to another."* (Psalm 145:5)

Immanuel Lutheran College has served us well. The congregations which now enjoy the ministry of its graduates will surely testify to that. There is, by the Lord's gracious provision, a new generation of leadership with the same commitment to the undimmed light of Gospel truth. They will, in their turn, hand it on...

--Rollin A. Reil

OUR MISSION EFFORT AT HOME

The Christians who organized the CLC in 1960 earlier chose the name INTERIM CONFERENCE for themselves. This name expressed the hope of eventual unity and the desire for a permanent organization. Although this early union was a loose one, obligations became evident at once. There were needs aplenty - pastors without congregations, pastors with too few members to support them, and isolated flocks without shepherds.

The INTERIM CONFERENCE appointed a Mission Committee in charge of distributing available funds. Where groups were very small or not yet organized, pastors sought secular employment. In several instances outside employment on the part of the pastor enabled teachers to continue full time in their day schools, thereby keeping them open. The Mission Committee also did its best to assist where need was greatest. The Eau Claire congregation was sent a monthly sum for a brief time, what with two pastors in its midst. None accepted more help than needed. For example, the Milwaukee group returned the checks it received. Their pastor had found employment, and they managed to pay the rental for their place of worship. Travel help was also given some pastors to assist in serving isolated and distant groups with occasional services.

Loosely organized, indeed! But what love and concern, Christian to Christian! Circumstances caused these earliest mission efforts to be turned inward. In retrospect they might more aptly be termed survival assistance.

When the CLC was organized in 1960, a Board of Missions was elected and an orderly budget and mission program was established. Among the earliest congregations on the mission roster were Winter Haven, FL; St. Louis; St. Paul; Winner, SD; Cheyenne; Phoenix; Bethsemane in Spokane; and Seattle. As these congregations became self-supporting, the Board of Missions was able to take on other newly founded groups. Our mission effort could at last turn outward. We were finally beginning to reach out with the light God had entrusted to us.

Over the years there have usually been ten or more congregations under the supervision of our Board of Missions. In fact, almost half of our 66 congregations were at one time, or still are, a part of this on-going CLC mission effort. Under the gracious blessing of our Lord the Gospel light is now shining forth through the CLC from coast to coast and from Alaska to Florida.

--Carl M. Thurow

OUR MISSION EFFORT ABROAD

Some scholars who study the histories of church bodies suggest that those who spend much effort maintaining a correct doctrinal position will have little inclination toward a vigorous Gospel outreach. May our gracious Lord grant that our CLC becomes a notable exception to such thinking!

Our statistical reports over the past 25 years indicate that we may not indeed be able to hope for strong numerical growth while working over the gleanings left by others in America's heavily worked mission fields. But our people have responded well to our Savior's call to lift up their eyes to fields abroad that are still white and heavy for harvest. When Oscar Erpenstein, a dedicated lay member of St. Stephen's congregation in California, reported that several Nigerian men to whom he had been sending doctrinal materials were interested in establishing CLC congregations there, our people decided to do all in our power to help them.

This developing interest in the potential of mission work abroad was given a severe jolt when one of the Nigerian members brought to the States to be trained for the ministry did not keep his promise to serve in the Nigerian CLC.

An additional call to share our spiritual treasures came from India through another layman, John Rohrbach, who had come to know V.S. Benjamin, a very zealous independent Lutheran pastor who agreed with our doctrinal position and was soon calling his group of churches the Church of the Lutheran Confession in India. After two visitations, Pastor Koenig was called to become our first missionary to that heavily populated land. He will assist Benjamin in training preachers and developing the orphanage. Scores of our members in the States are now participating in the harvest excitement by writing to Indians who are enrolling in increasing numbers in the Bible Correspondence Course offered in a Madras newspaper.

Our Board of Missions hopes to call a missionary for Nigeria. And now Kenya is calling for our help in spreading the Word about Jesus!

So the Lord has lifted our eyes to fertile foreign fields that we never would have dreamt of entering 25 years ago, and we find that those of our fellowship who worship the Savior abroad could soon equal the number of those in our congregations in the States. Praise Him!

--Norbert Reim

BUILDING PROJECTS AT ILC

The Interim Conference members wanted to reach out to others with the Gospel. "Christ's love compels us." Thus our Immanuel Lutheran College was established to instill Jesus Christ and His Spirit into our youth and the future workers in the Church.

The school started when four members of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Mankato assumed financial responsibility for the project. A private association was formed to operate the school through a Board of Directors from Immanuel Lutheran Church. A piece of property with an old frame building was made available. The members of the Interim Conference promised moral and financial support. Professors were called and the school year started in 1959 with 45 students in the high school, college and seminary departments. Out of town students were housed in private homes and later in two dormitory homes. Full responsibility for the school in Mankato was assumed by the Church of the Lutheran Confession when it was incorporated in 1960. During the fourth year of the school's existence over 100 students were enrolled.

Space limitations had prompted the 1961 Convention to choose an Expansion and Relocation Committee. In December, 1962, the Ingram Estate in Eau Claire came to the attention of the Committee. A special convention in January of 1963 decided to purchase the beautiful 75-acre property with the buildings for \$85,000. During the following summer, volunteers were busy with remodeling and converting the on-site buildings for school and dormitory use. Immanuel Lutheran College was moved from Mankato to Eau Claire. The buildings and campus were dedicated September 1, 1963. Professorages were added as the need arose. Today there are 12.

The "Cottage" (3 classrooms) was built in 1965. Reim Hall was added in 1969 and the gymnasium-auditorium in 1970. Northwest Hall was remodeled to serve as the men's dormitory in 1971 and the rotunda in Ingram Hall was enclosed in glass to serve as an additional dining area. The former president's residence was used as a dormitory for women in 1973 and called Birch Hall. South Hall, completed in 1976, was built as a dormitory for the ladies. The men's dormitory, North Hall, with the potential to house 80 students, was dedicated in 1981.

"The Lord has done great things, and we are filled with joy." (Psalm 126:3)

--M. J. Witt

OUR DOCTRINAL TESTINGS

With our Savior's charge "let your light shine" comes the heavy responsibility that as we present His Gospel to the world we say and do nothing that will dim or hide that Light. Guided by the Spirit, we have learned to accept the Savior's proposition that a "little leaven" of error can in fact dim and hide the truth of the Gospel. We have been led to the conviction that in the interest of that Gospel we will not indulge in pseudo-fellowship activities that in any way support or encourage the spread of error.

It has not been a simple matter to stand firm in this conviction. We are surrounded in the religious world with on-going pressure to be tolerant of those who are guilty of using "their voices" instead of teaching God's truth. Such pressure from the outside has served a healthy purpose. A restudy of the Word has assured us that our conviction in these things rests firmly on our Savior's Word.

Over the course of 25 years there have been internal testings also. There were times when doctrinal disagreement appeared among members of the CLC. On no occasion were these problems ignored. We turned to the Word. When agreement was there after discussion, there was joy in the work of the Spirit. When disagreement went unresolved, there was heartache when highly respected people felt constrained to leave our fellowship.

Certainly one of the most difficult problems was to recognize that membership in familiar fraternal insurance societies involved our members in promoting error. It was a subtle problem because we needed to recognize that the character and the benevolent programs of these societies had changed. The situation called for the most careful study of the Word and discussion of the problem. What a healthy experience that was! Strengthened in the conviction that we dare not be responsible for anything that would hinder the work of the Gospel, we determined to instruct those of our members caught in this problem and help them resolve the situation. But we again experienced heartache when some left our fellowship with the charge that we were legalistic and others with the charge that we were not faithful to the Gospel.

Other "testings" will come! We face the future with the urgent prayer that we remain strong in our conviction that we will be responsible for nothing that will dim the Light we are to let shine.

--Robert Reim

OUR PUBLICATIONS

The LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN is older than the Church of the Lutheran Confession. It was launched by a conference in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in May of 1958. The first editor, reporting the conference's action, commented: "Hereby pastors and congregations will find opportunity to exhort one another in the Word." Because they were so isolated geographically, they recognized the need to support and encourage one another by some means of communication.

The first issue was dated June 1958; the first press run was 200 copies in mimeographed form. After only one year, the number of subscriptions increased to 1000; today the number is near 2700. The LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN is now an official organ of the CLC.

One would expect those early issues to contain much news about congregations, pastors, and teachers rallying about the Truth. But there was also an abundance of spiritual meat for hungry souls. Over the years this periodical has addressed the concerns of Christians in practical matters pertaining to their individual, congregational and synodical lives. Doctrinally oriented articles have also enriched and bolstered the readers' faith lives.

A publication of a slightly different nature is the JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY, intended especially, but not exclusively, for those who are engaged in the teaching and preaching ministry. Indeed, many of the original 80 subscribers were laymen. Readers now number about 300, among whom are also those outside our fellowship.

Although the JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY did not appear on the scene until it was launched as an official organ of the CLC in January 1961, the need for a theological journal was recognized already in the early years of the Interim Conference. The first editor stated the need by listing the aims of this journal: to explain to interested parties the reason for the existence of the CLC, to touch on the questions in controversy from time to time; and, "through the positive study of Scripture and its saving doctrines," to widen the range of interest, deepen the measure of understanding, enrich the store of knowledge, and cultivate the practical skills of its readers.

It would be difficult to measure the blessings our Lord has granted the CLC through our LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN and JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY. May it ever be so!

--E. Hallauer

IN MEMORIAM

"FOR ALL THE SAINTS WHO FROM THEIR LABORS REST"

It is always in place for those still in the Church Militant to confess in wonder how much God can accomplish with so little. It is likewise in place to praise Him for those now taken to the Church Triumphant through whom He did so much.

Those were at once heady and lonely days back in the late 50's and early 60's when the CLC was beginning to form. To stand up and be counted on the side of God's Word was a joy and a privilege. To go through the heartaches of separations between families and synods, on the other hand, was not anything one would choose to repeat. Nevertheless the God Who promised to supply His gifts of men and women for the building up of the Church also in our beginnings certainly supplied us in rich abundance.

As the needs arose, there were people whom God raised up to meet every single one. Many of the flock of God found themselves without shepherds and applied time and talents to regroup and call anew. Some shepherds found themselves removed from positions of honor for the Word's sake and rediscovered latent construction skills that were much in early demand. Above all, what a privilege it has been to have worked alongside some of those who were a part of that first-love spirit which so zealously endured and enjoyed the chance to preserve the truth in all its purity.

Now many of those gifted and stalwart men and women have been taken to their eternal rests. We sincerely and dearly miss them. Yet we do not wish them back into this vale of tears. We rather join in praise and thanks to God Whom we will together worship forever and ever.

Thank You, dear God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for all those now sainted gifts to Your Church. Continue Your rich grace among us so that we, like they, may be faithful disciples indeed (John 8:31-32). Keep us safely in Your tender care until we learn how to praise You eternally for and with them. Amen.

--Bertram J. Naumann

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Let us remember the humble beginnings of our church body as we face the future.

Back in 1960 many of our fellow-Christians, bereft of their houses of worship, gathered in places not usually thought of as places for Sunday Services. Living rooms, double garages, store front locations, funeral parlors, and library basements were put into the service of the preaching of the Word.

Pastors and teachers, in many cases, took up secular employment in order to supplement the salaries their people were able to provide.

A deserted schoolhouse out on the "prairie" in Mankato became the location for the Christian instruction of our youth. Seminary classes were conducted in a room adjacent to the furnace room in Immanuel Church, while college religion classes were being held in the adjoining room. Students often walked to the school locations and wherever else the need required their presence.

Later, when the school was being set up in Eau Claire, we recall that only one student-owned car was on campus, and that one very seldom ran. In Ingram Hall the women slept on the floor for two weeks while waiting for the delivery of beds and mattresses. Classes and Chapel Services were all held in Northwest Hall (formerly a carriage house and horse stable) while some students were housed in the former hay mow. The chapel room in Northwest Hall even served as the locale for a synod convention one year.

Well, it was all very humble, but few complaints were heard from old or young. People were willing to bear these burdens for the sake of truth.

Today we find ourselves in more fortunate circumstances. Isn't there a danger that now we take too much for granted and forget the rock from which we have been hewn? Can we remain faithful in days of prosperity as was the case in days of adversity? When we do, it will be only by the grace of God, for easier days carry with them their own temptations, and people may so quickly fall by the wayside, especially when they leave home base. It is so easy to forget past blessings and the lessons learned from adversity.

Let us remember and be thankful and act accordingly in home, school and church.

--C. M. Gullerud

OUR PLACE AMONG LUTHERANS

What is a Lutheran? My old college dictionary (1953) gives two definitions: "1)A follower or disciple of Luther; 2)a member of the Lutheran Church."

When Martin Luther began what we now know as the Reformation in the 16th century, he had no intention of starting a new church organization or of making a name for himself. He wanted to find salvation for his own condemned soul. Once he learned the truth of justification by faith in Christ, he sought to proclaim and spread and teach this truth in any way he could, regardless of the costs. He wanted to be faithful to his Lord Jesus Christ and faithful to his calling as a teacher of Bible truth.

We believe that it was this same kind of motivation that brought about the formation of our church body in the late 1950's and the early 1960's. Lutheran Christians were concerned by the inroads the ecumenical movement was making in Lutheran circles. They saw their whole Lutheran heritage slipping away from them by compromises, concessions, and delays in dealing with what they knew to be contrary to Holy Scripture. They wanted to be faithful to their Lord and to their calling as teachers of Bible truth. So in great distress and with fear and trembling they withdrew (or were forcibly removed) from the Lutheran synods and fellowships they had previously cherished. They did not know what the future held in store for them.

But the work of preaching the Gospel had to continue. The work of supporting missionaries had to continue. The work of training pastors and teachers and the new generation had to continue. For these reasons the Church of the Lutheran Confession was organized. It was not an end in itself, but only the means to an end.

We may be tempted to carry out the programs of our church body with a wrong motivation, that is, to make a name for ourselves, so that we have a place among the Lutherans. Other synods have made this mistake before us, and the result has been that the truth was snuffed out so that the organization could be glorified and preserved. May our Lord help us see the folly of pursuing greatness for ourselves and the importance of faithfulness to our Lord and faithfulness to our calling whatever the costs may be. Then we shall be true Lutherans, followers of Luther, and not just members of the Lutheran Church.

--D. Lau

A SOLEMN LITANY

For enabling our founding fathers to give up comfortable homes, schools, and churches for the sake of the true doctrine . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For giving our founding fathers secular work, shelter, and a place to worship with their flocks . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For granting them the two-fold privilege of not only believing in Jesus the Christ, but also suffering for His name's sake . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For Thy forgiveness when they indulged in self-pity, indignation, and also desire for revenge in those early years . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For calming their fears, correcting their errors, and for causing good to come out of their labors . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For restoring and preserving the wholesome Scripture doctrine of religious fellowship in our midst . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For guiding us to strive for unity of doctrine and of our practice in an evangelical rather than in a legalistic spirit . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For our schools, college, and seminary which provide doctrinally sound lay members, teachers, and pastors to carry the work forward . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For the continued benefit we receive from the LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN, the JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY, and the MINISTRY BY MAIL . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For the Holy Spirit, who alone keeps us scriptural, evangelical, and mission-minded . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For allowing us to share the Savior with others here at home and in foreign lands . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

For these and all other undeserved blessings showered upon our Church of the Lutheran Confession . . .

We Thank Thee, Lord.

--Robert Mackensen

PROJECTIONS

OF THE LIGHT

This booklet is a devotional series used throughout the twenty-fifth anniversary year of the CLC. It is a review of the blessings we have received from our Lord, the Light of the world.

The Light came into the world in the person of Jesus. "The true Light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." (Jn. 1:9) John the Baptist knew of Jesus' birth. He saw the Holy Spirit like a dove come down on Jesus at His baptism, and he testified concerning that Light. Jesus referred to Himself as the "Light of the world." (Jn. 8:12) We are filled with joy in the descriptive revelation of Jesus as the Light. It is a profoundly beautiful name of God.

The festive excitement of Christmas is followed by the Epiphany festival. We are ready to hear of events which manifest the glory of the Light. Epiphany is the festival of lights, a time when we think of Jesus as the Light penetrating the heathen world.

Christ is the Light. Not only does He expose the darkness of sin, death, and the eternal curse of God which we all deserved as children of darkness. He also reveals God's work by which sin and death were defeated by the victory of the Light over darkness. The final battle took place on Calvary. There the forces of darkness were overcome. Light won the victory for us, and this victory is given to us as a free gift through faith. Christ is our Light and also our eternal salvation. Jesus not only gives us light as we go on our way through life; He also gives us strength to walk the enlightened way.

Jesus Christ has become our Light and Salvation! Throughout our years as a synod we have had the honor and glory to proclaim Jesus as the Light and Salvation for all mankind. May the Lord continue to bless us with the will and strength to glorify Jesus as the Light. Rejoicing "with exceeding great joy" (Mt. 2:10), we, too, as the wise men of old will continue to take Jesus the Light with us, letting His light shine through us for all to know and see. That is our prayer.

--M. J. Witt

OF THE GLORY

Young and weary from daytime interests, it was so hard to pay attention! During those somber Lenten services it was more natural to join the disciples in their Gethsemane slumbering.

But my ear was caught suddenly alive in surprise. The speaker had just declared that Jesus was glorified in His passion. Glory? In His transfiguration, yes. In His resurrection, most certainly. But in suffering and dying?

Truly. Just before exposing Himself to capture in the garden, Jesus was heard to pray, "*And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began!*" (Jn. 17:5)

We join the Father when we honor Jesus for His faithfulness in mission as He went "up to Jerusalem" with flint-like determination, willingly going to suffering and death. We join the Father as we speak of the perfect love of the Good Shepherd "laying down His life for the sheep." We join the Father when we proclaim that His blood "cleanses us from all sin." We join the Father when we see such things as most glorious, and honor Jesus for it. An answer to His own prayer.

Many religious voices today are silent when it comes to the passion of Jesus. The sight of a crucifix seems to offend. Stark portrayal of a suffering body on a cross seems out of place in an upbeat scene of "anything is possible." For the passion history speaks eloquently of human fault and failure. No glory for humankind here!

Yet our Church of the Lutheran Confession, with such as the apostle Paul, remains committed to a preaching of "Christ crucified." (1 Cor. 2:14) It is still our glory to proclaim His glory in this. "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities." What a glory to share!

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive glory." (Rev. 5:12)

--Rollin A. Reim

DARKNESS TO SHARE

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land ..." Mt. 27:45)

When the Lord sent the plague of darkness over the land of Egypt in the days of Moses, it did not include the Israelites' homes. But when Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered all the land. This reminds us that, even as we reach out to share Christ with others, we already share with them some of the effects of sin in the world.

The same troubles and afflictions that came upon others in the past have also touched us, and we cannot expect it to be different in the future. The same diseases that torment mankind also invade our bodies, bringing them down to the grave. The same tornadoes and earthquakes, droughts and floods that sweep across the land, also come upon God's children.

We share the same basic human nature with others, too. We can all say with Paul: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." (Rom. 7:18) Even though we have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light, we still need to pray daily: "Forgive us our trespasses."

And it is just because we share these problems with all mankind that we can be so sure about what others really need! As one man put it: "I preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

Especially during Lent do we make a point of facing these realities in our lives. We can afford to face them, too, for we are looking forward to Easter. Our faces are turned toward the Light!

We know that the trials that overtake us are common to people everywhere, but we also know that God is faithful - uncommonly faithful! There is an end to suffering! We have His Word on it. And the darkness that we see in ourselves has already been punished on Golgotha. The gloom is doomed!

Now, in the world of darkness, we face the Light. We know that the Light is for us, because it is for all. We know we need it, because of the darkness we share with all. What a grace if God would use us to help another in the darkness to be turned to the Light!

--Paul Schaller

THE LIGHT OF LIFE

Listen! Two processions approach Nain's city limits. Laughter is heard in the first; the sobs of deep sorrow in the second. Leading the one procession is Jesus - He who came as humanity's Light and Life. Leading the other procession; a dead man in a coffin.

Look! A woman follows the casket. She has walked this same sad road before - once as a widow; now as a mother robbed of her only son and means of support. Perhaps he alone was the one person left to her that had brought happiness to an otherwise empty existence.

Behold! The two companies meet. Which shall give way and yield to the other? See how "The Life" faces Death! Jesus is now filled with compassion. To the widow He says, "Stop crying!" To the dead man He says, "Start living!"

View closely that funeral procession outside Nain's city limits. Is it not a solemn description of man by nature - dead and dying and lying in a casket? The procession keeps moving in the same direction - toward the cemetery. The characters never change; they merely change places. Someone or something is always being carried outside the city for burial. Someone always remains to mourn the loss. Where does the procession end?

The procession ends in a cemetery. But not yours. Not mine. Not even the musty tombs outside Nain's city limits. The funeral procession ends in that cemetery where Jesus Christ, the Light and Life, once lay -- "delivered for our offenses but raised again for our justification." (Rom. 4 :25)

Here lies His guarantee: No matter how often you find yourself walking the path of life's many cemeteries, He will not permit the processional to pass.

"Stop crying!" were the words spoken before the first Easter. But after the resurrection of Christ, He who has vanquished every enemy and brought life and immortality to light asks: "Why are you crying?" There is no longer a reason. JESUS LIVES AND REIGNS! HE IS THE LIGHT OF LIFE!

Share this Life with confidence. Why? To the widow Jesus declared, "Stop crying!" To the dead man Jesus commanded, "Start living!" What His Word accomplished in the one is accomplished for the other.

--Mark Weis

THE GREAT COMMISSION

When one is given a task to do, we might say that the person has been COMMISSIONED with this work. The person has been entrusted with the carrying out of the work.

One of the more familiar sections of Holy Scripture has often been referred to as the GREAT COMMISSION. On a mountain in Galilee some days after His resurrection Jesus spoke these words to His disciples: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

While commissioning the disciples of that day, and ages to come, with the work of the Gospel cause, Jesus reminds us that He has "all authority" and that He will be with us "always."

The same disciples who heard the words of the GREAT COMMISSION shortly thereafter witnessed Jesus' ascension into heaven, as recorded in Mark 16 and Acts 1. They were told by messengers sent from God on that occasion: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts. 1:11)

How dramatically the ascension of Jesus underscores His capability to properly equip the ones He has commissioned with the work of witnessing to Him as the Savior of the world, the One through whom the forgiveness of sins has been accomplished. The disciples soon saw what Jesus meant when He said: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Disciples of each age have been commissioned with the work of being witnesses for Jesus. Each believer has been given the Word and Spirit of God as equipment for this work of the Gospel. May God grant each of us renewed eagerness to speak to all, especially to those who know little of Jesus, about Christ, our Lord and Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

--D. A. Libby

ENABLED BY THE SPIRIT

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:4 NIV)

Shortly before the risen Christ ascended into heaven, He instructed His small band of disciples to go and share with the rest of the world the "good news" of the atonement made on the cross, the empty tomb, and the full, free salvation now available to all human beings.

Behind closed doors the disciples shuddered at the thought of coming out to share with the world what they had seen and heard. No doubt they remembered the price others had to pay for their bold witness. John the Baptist paid with his head. Jesus paid through His anguish on the cross. What would prevent the disciples from encountering a similar fate?

But the Lord enables His children to do what He asks of them. On Pentecost Day God sent His Holy Spirit to the frightened, cowardly crew of disciples, and they were all transformed. These men who once huddled behind closed doors for fear of the Jews now boldly shared the wonders of God, in foreign tongues no less!

Today the risen Christ's desire for us is the same as it was for the early apostles and disciples. He wants us to share - share boldly, share with everyone, everywhere!

Ah, yes, the obstacles are just the same as they were on the day of Pentecost. We face a world which hates to hear about its own sin, and which laughs at the Gospel of free salvation. We face a world which for the most part doesn't want to hear the clear trumpet signal of the Word of God. We are so few in number and weak in faith!

But THE LORD ENABLES US to share in spite of formidable obstacles. Even today He gives to us the same Holy Spirit who emboldened the disciples. He is available to us through Word and Sacrament. May our hearts always be eager to receive the Spirit when He comes to us through these means. Then, like those who went before us, we will be enabled to share!

--Kurt Luebke

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

When the apostles and the first followers of our Lord Jesus began to carry out the GREAT COMMISSION - proclaiming the "good news" of Jesus in the world - there were various matters that stood in their way. They had to decide what they were to do about these obstacles. Should they allow them to stand in their way even for a moment? Satan used a very powerful authority to keep them from the work given to them. It was nothing less than the government under which they lived. *"They commanded them not to speak or teach AT ALL in the name of Jesus."* (Acts 4:18 NIV)

No more shocking muzzle could have been put on the leaders of the New Testament Church. From now on the name of Jesus was to be silenced and never heard from again. What were they to do? Humanly speaking, this would be the end of their work - and that of the kingdom of God in Judea. Would they have to look for a new way and place and start all over again?

They had a powerful and simple answer: *"Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:19-20 NIV) Every obstacle from that day forward was met with one answer: WE HAVE THE COMMAND - THE COMMISSION OF THE LIVING GOD! What can change that?

In America today we do not have an antagonistic government like the Jewish and Roman government of that day. We still have freedom of religious expression. We can carry on the Word without hindrance in our land. Nothing should ever stop us. We as true children of God can well celebrate with patriotic fervor the blessings of a free land. And what better way to do it than by bringing the Gospel of salvation (the light) to the hearts of our entire nation?

When we look at the obstacles in a land like India or consider the possibilities of a hostile government within Nigeria, should we be stopped or give up in the fear of what we might have to face? We rather rejoice with the apostles and early Christians that we are privileged to hold up the Gospel light as the first and only message of hope to a world in need. WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

--R. E. Schaller

LOST AND FOUND

Jesus concluded His parable of the prodigal son by saying: "Your brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." (Lk. 15:32)

John says in his Gospel that Jesus would die "not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." (Jn. 11:52)

On Pentecost Peter said: "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39)

So we today look to those who are lost, to those who are scattered, to those afar off. We want to be of help, not only to those who are very close to us, but to those who are on the other side of the world. We want to reach out to a WORLD that needs to find the only Savior.

And yet it is a far more personal thing for us than just so many foreign faces in some distant land. It is a special gathering of our closest relatives. We are looking at the "family" of our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters. We know them as the "lost and forgotten" because we understand how wonderful it is for us that our Lord has "called us out of darkness into His wonderful light."

So we are praying, working, longing, and looking for that glorious reunion with our closest relatives the world over - yes, in India and Africa. It is not a matter of sending some money to a vague mission field and waiting to hear if it has grown in this year or that. No, it is this: My brother, my sister, needs to find the way home and I must be there to reach out and help.

It is a most personal thing with us. You and I cannot bear to see our "close ones" lost. We cannot bear to think of them wandering about in the darkness of sin's night. They belong to the Lord just as we do. They are a part of that wonderful family of our God.

So with urgent and burning hearts we call to the Holy Spirit: FIND THEM! With fervent prayers we assault the throne of the Most High. With great joy we discuss it with our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head.

MAY THE LOST BE FOUND!

--R. E. Schaller

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TO SHARE

Late August and early September bring the beginnings of a new school year. Education is an important part of life. There is so very much to learn about the world in which we live and our place in it.

When one speaks of education and learning, though, these are general terms. There are many philosophies of education and the foundations for these vary. If education is important, it is equally important that we have a proper basis for that education. The Word of God does not leave us without counsel regarding what should be our personal philosophy of education and the basis for that philosophy. If the education and its application are going to touch the most important questions of life, the basis will of necessity be Biblical.

It was for this reason that the apostle Paul spoke to the Greeks in the city of Corinth in this way: *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* (1 Cor. 2:1-2) Paul considered eternal salvation to be the most important question for mankind. And he knew there can be only one answer for that question: "JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED."

All learning that does not contradict the Gospel of Jesus Christ or any portion of the Word of God is valuable and can be useful. However, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ alone which is the power of God unto salvation. (cf. Rom. 1:16)

The Christian element of our education is its crowning jewel. Whether our education is obtained in a Christian school or a public institution, the home and the church will stand ready to undergird and to augment with the Word.

May we use our education to serve God and our fellowman. And may Paul be our example to prompt us to eagerly share the most important aspect of our education: the Gospel message which proclaims Jesus to be the Savior of the world.

--Douglas A. Libby

STEWARDSHIP IN THE END TIMES

Look at the record of Jesus' disciples and apostles. Note the urgency with which they set to work. They did not ask for a day when their resources would be so great that they could conveniently and comfortably "make disciples of all nations." After Jesus ascended into heaven, they immediately dedicated their resources and their lives to His work.

Take Paul for example. As a highly educated and capable Roman citizen, he certainly had the opportunity for a comfortable life according to the standards of the world. Instead, he lived from hand to mouth because he felt compelled to bring the power of the Gospel to all human beings everywhere.

All of them were living, in what was for them, the end times. They did not stop to ask whether the Savior's statement that "He would come again" meant today, tomorrow, or centuries later. They took at face value the Savior's words: "Look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest." (Jn. 4:35) They understood Jesus' urgent concern that all people must hear the Gospel. They asked no questions. They went when He said: "GO!"

For us, as a church body and as individuals, there really isn't any time to waste. We need to capture the feeling of the early Christians that the end times are NOW! We do not need to know if that means He will come today, tomorrow, or in the distant future.

We have the resources and the equipment to touch the hearts of those among whom we live with a power that will wrench them out of the grasp of Satan himself and bring them into the family of God with all the blessings we know that brings.

"Occupy till I come," said our Lord. Let us pray for the urgent spirit so obvious in the early Christians, a spirit that will direct us to a proper use of our time, our possessions, and our skills. May the Spirit of God work in us that kind of purpose as a church body and as individuals.

--Robert Reim

THANKSGIVING

I. TO BE SHARED

II. KNOWING WHAT TO DO WITH A LOT

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Pet. 4:10 NIV)

If we give a child a cookie, we expect the child to enjoy it. If, on the other hand, we give the same child a sackful of cookies, we expect it to be shared and passed around.

The greatest gift of all is God's love for us through Christ. Jesus died on the cross to bring this love to all. Like any other gift given to us, we are to use it. Use God's love by accepting it and enjoying it. Use God's love by loving God. Use God's love so you won't be lonely or afraid. Rejoice and be glad that God loves you and has paid for all your sins.

But God did not limit His love to just a select few. He gave a whole sackful of love. His love goes far beyond the love which we need. *"But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." (Rom. 5:20 NIV)* God's forgiving grace covers more than our sins. It gives hope greater than our fears. What are we going to do with that great love which Christ has given in overflowing measure?

Peter suggests that "each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." Peter suggests that we are to minister, that is, to serve others with God's love. Christ has given us His love beyond our own needs, but that doesn't mean it is wasted love. He tells us to pass it on to others.

Thanksgiving means thanksgiving! Tell others of Christ's love. Share this love by spending time with the lonely, by cheering up the sad, by giving of your means for mission work.

It is easy to know what to do with a little love, but see if you can use the unlimited love Christ has given to you!

--Arvid G. W. Gullerud

IMMANUEL - GOD WITH US

How we humans would love to draw aside the curtain and take a peek into what is to come! What do the next years hold in store for the Church of the Lutheran Confession? Will this old world still be in existence after another quarter of a century? If it is, will the CLC be around to help proclaim the Gospel to its inhabitants? If so, will it still be faithful to the confessional position to which we have been led by the Spirit through the Word? Will there have been growth? What of our foreign mission efforts?

Our gracious Lord, of course, continues to veil the future from us. He has given us prophecies which tell us what we need to know to be prepared for the end times and the life of the world to come. He has assured us that while this earth endures, the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. But He does not tell us how any specific church body or its members will fare. This He lovingly withholds from us because such knowledge would not be good for us.

But this does not mean that the future is veiled in fearful uncertainty for us. We know much about what will happen because we know what has happened. We know that our Heavenly Father loved us enough to keep the promise He made through the prophet Isaiah: *"The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel."* (Is. 7:14)

IMMANUEL - GOD WITH US!

As we look again into the Bethlehem manger and rejoice in the pardon and salvation God has given us through this Child, and think about what it really means that God is with us, we have all the assurance we need about our future. *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31) Has He not promised: *"I will not leave you nor forsake you?"* (Heb. 13:5) *"He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?"* (Rom. 8:32)

Do we need to know anything more about the future as we plan our Gospel proclamation for the years to come?

--Norbert Reim

