

The EVANGEL

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“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 that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” *Matthew 28:19-20*



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Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This edition of *The Evangel*, like the previous edition, comes to you in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope that you are all safe and that your churches and communities are safe. It is incredibly hard to write to all of you knowing that many of you are suffering, many of you are grieving, and many of you are more lonely and isolated than ever. I hope that this edition of *The Evangel* gives you some hope, and some sense of connection to our TAALC fellowship.

The theme of this edition is “Sharing the Gospel.” So how does this relate to this particular point in history? Mortality is increasingly becoming a part of the consciousness of our world. It can be easy to ignore the reality of death, to feel invincible, when not daily confronted with death counts on the news as we have been since March of this year. People who have never considered death are now seeing and hearing its reality daily.

The phrase *Memento Mori* which means “remember death,” or “remember that you will die” is a phrase that was popularized in the early Christian church. Though it may sound morbid, this is a main tenet of our faith: we know that the “wages of sin is death,” (Rom 6:23a). We receive ashes on our foreheads and hear the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” on Ash Wednesday. This is a good example of how we embody this remembrance in our church calendar. However, we have hope that through our death because we are united to Jesus, we will live eternally with him. Paul writes, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5).

The answer to fear of death is faith in Christ. Through him we have eternal life (1 John 4:9). Through him we have access to God the Father (Eph. 2:18). Through his Spirit, we have new hearts, new desires, and walk in newness of life. This is the solution that so many are seeking in our society right now. If we have the precious gift of the good news of Jesus that we can share that will not only provide comfort in this world, but also eternal life after death. Why would we not share it with those around us?

In Christ,

Lisa Cooper

If you would like to submit an article to *The Evangel*, please send it and any pictures along with author and photo credits to theevangel@taalc.org. If you would prefer to send things via snail-mail, please send to Lisa Cooper at 117 Cedar Lane, Groton, NY, 13073.

Spiritual Conversation

by TAALC Presiding Pastor, The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

Have you ever tried to share your faith in Jesus with someone else? Have you wondered how to move from superficial small-talk to meaningful, spiritual conversation? It is not easy to engage people in deep and personal dialogue, especially regarding their spiritual health and life. Are there some guidelines that might help us to share our faith? Today, we are going to look at a passage in the Holy Bible that offers terrific guidance for sharing our faith: Acts 8: 25-35.

This passage is about Philip the Evangelist. You may remember that Philip was one of seven men who were set apart to serve the Lord and His Church as the first deacons, see Acts 6. Soon after his installation as a deacon, Philip had a successful faith-sharing mission in Samaria. Then, in the text before us, Philip had a spiritual conversation with an Ethiopian Eunuch. What were the steps that Philip took in order to share his faith?

First, Philip listened. In Acts 8:25-35, the Lord led Philip to a certain place, the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Then, the Holy Spirit told Philip to join a certain chariot that carried a chief official from Ethiopia. Philip did as God had instructed him. He went to the certain road, and he moved beside the particular chariot. Philip listened to the leading of God and then, Philip listened to the reading by the Ethiopian in the chariot. Notice, so far, Philip has said nothing. He has only listened.

Listening is important when sharing faith with others. We must remember that it is Jesus who is the Lord of the Church. Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith. It is the Word of Jesus that actually causes and creates faith; as Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." We do not want to get ahead of God's leading. We do not want our own agenda or our own need to talk, to interfere with the plan and purpose of God. So, we want to be good listeners as we converse with all others, especially those who may be coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, Philip asked. It is exciting to see how often in Holy Scripture the right question, at the right time, is used by God to create faith. That is the case here. Philip simply walked beside the chariot of the Ethiopian. He listened, until the right moment came to ask the right question. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

What follows is a wonderful dialogue between Philip and the Ethiopian. Each one has opportunity to speak; each one has opportunity to listen. The Ethiopian shares who he is and where he is in his walk of faith. He expresses his desire to grow in faith. He expresses his need for teaching from Holy Scripture. The Ethiopian has opened the door, and Philip is free to take the next step.

Third, Philip preached. In Acts 8:35, we are told that Philip, "[O]pened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, he preached Jesus to him." Philip started where the Ethiopian was. This is important because Philip focused upon the Ethiopian himself, carefully listening to him. Then, Philip began preaching Jesus. Luke, the author of Acts, chooses an important word to describe Philip's preaching. The usual word for "preached" does not appear here. Instead, Luke uses a term derived from the word "evangelized." The text literally says that Philip, "evangelized" Jesus to the Ethiopian, or Philip "good news-ed" Jesus to him.

You see, Philip does not appear to be using a sophisticated, theological, preaching technique. He is simply expressing the Good News of Jesus. Luke says that Philip is "good news-ing" the Ethiopian, using the Scripture that is in his hands. In this way, we see that every Christian can preach. This happens when we share the good news of Jesus with our children, our friends, and with those around us. The pastor preaches in the public arena; every Christian preaches in his or her private life.

As you know, the story ends with the Ethiopian declaring, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!" The Word of God has done its work, by the

power of the Holy Spirit. Philip has “good news-ed” Jesus to the Ethiopian, and the Ethiopian has believed!

In the simplest terms, this is how we can share our faith in Jesus Christ! We listen to the Spirit as He leads us, and we listen to the person who is before us. We ask the right question in God’s good timing. If a door is opening for us to share our faith, we preach the good news of Jesus Christ, sharing the Good News with the

one with whom we are speaking! The rest is up to Jesus and the one who has received His Good News.

During these summer months, let’s keep our eyes and ears open to the leading of God and the needs of those around us. Perhaps, God will use you to listen, to ask, and to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ! Are you ready for a Spiritual Conversation???

— SAVE THE DATE —

Virtual Hold The Line Conference

A Virtual Hold The Line Conference will be held the evenings of September 8th and 9th, 2020. There will be presentations and Q&A, all held online. For updates and more information, please watch the TAALC website (www.taalc.org) or the TAALC Facebook page.

— *In Memoriam* —

Rev. Ernest Swenson *October 9, 1939 – May 6, 2020*

The Rev. Ernest L. Swenson, Pastor Emeritus, entered the Church Triumphant on May 6, 2020 at the age of 80. He graduated in 1987 from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, MN and was ordained in June 1989. He served the dual parish of Clam Falls Lutheran Church and Zion Lutheran of Bone Lake in Frederic, WI from 1990 until his retirement in 2005.



Rev. Dennis G. Schlossin *November 10, 1926 - May 27, 2020*

The Rev. Dennis G. Schlossin entered the Church Triumphant on May 27, 2020 at the age of 93. Dennis graduated from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa in 1947 and from Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa in 1950. He served as pastor of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Aurora, Iowa from 1951-1955, Trinity Lutheran Church in Hawkeye, Iowa from 1955-1961, and Christ Lutheran Church, Duluth, Minnesota from 1961-1991, at which time he retired from the ministry.

GENERAL CONVENTION POSTPONED

New Dates are October 26-28, 2020
Grace Ev. Lutheran Church, Wayzata, MN

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The current situation in our nation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic continues to remain fluid and making long term plans proves challenging. With that said, the Joint Council of The AALC met to discuss upcoming TAALC events scheduled over the next few months. It has been decided that our **27th General Convention of The AALC**, which was originally scheduled for June of this year, be rescheduled. The Council has agreed to change the date of the Convention to Monday, October 26th, 2020 through Wednesday, October 28th, 2020. The location of our event, however, will remain the same: **Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Deephaven of Wayzata, MN**. The theme of the General Convention is "Come and See." We encourage you to make plans to join us! For those who are unwilling or unable to travel to the convention, there will be a virtual component to the convention. More details on this will be available soon.

The Convention will take place the same week as The AALC **Annual Pastors' Conference**. Please note that the duration of both of these events have been shortened by one day. Upon arrival at the hotel on Monday afternoon, convention attendees will be able to stop by the Registration Table (1-4:30 p.m.) to pick up their Name Tags and Convention Binders. Dinner will be served at 5 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church followed by a Divine Service at 7 p.m. ALTS Graduation Ceremony will take place on Wednesday morning. Convention will conclude at noon on Wednesday.

The Pastors' Conference will begin Wednesday, October 28th with dinner at 5 p.m. and a Divine Service at 7 p.m. It will conclude at noon on Friday, October 30th. Convention Registration Packets, containing a revised General Convention schedule and registration form and other pertinent information, was mailed to each congregation and rostered pastor. These items are also available on our website.

The AALC National Office will be booking rooms at The Country Inn & Suites, 210 Carlson Parkway, North Plymouth, MN for all convention attendees unless attendees choose not to stay at our designated hotel. All convention events, including lunches, dinners and worship services, will be held at Grace Ev. Lutheran Church, 18360 Minnetonka Blvd., Wayzata, MN. Country Inn & Suites will be serving breakfast each morning during attendees' stay. Starting late Monday afternoon a shuttle bus will be available to transport attendees from Country Inn & Suites to the church for the dinner/worship service and back to the hotel following the evening worship service. The Shuttle Bus will then be available bright and early each morning for those needing a ride from the hotel to the church and again at the end of the day (to bring Convention attendees back to Country Inn & Suites) following the evening worship services.

Cost: The Basic Registration Fee is \$225 per person. This amount is based on 2 people sharing a room with two (2) Queen-size beds. Registration Fee includes two nights lodging (Mon & Tues) at our designated hotel, meals served during the Convention and administrative costs. Transportation cost to Minneapolis will be the attendee's or congregation's responsibility.

Registration form can be downloaded from the website. Please submit all registrations and payment to the National Office by Saturday, August 15, 2020. Keep in mind that our supply of available rooms is limited so be sure to register early.

Note to those who had sent in their convention registration for the June scheduled date: your original check was marked void and returned to you. Please complete a new registration form on the website, or in the packet mailed to your church.

We look forward to seeing you in Minneapolis!

Rev. Dean A. Stoner

Administrative Assistant to The AALC (pro tem)

American Lutheran Theological Seminary

Seminary News

July 2020

by The Rev. Dr. Tom Stover, President Pro Tem & Mr. Duane Kleven, Administrator

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Seminary continues to grow in many ways. The Fall quarter saw the completion of studies for Vicar Andrew Virkus who was recently called and ordained as the shepherd of Poplar Lake Lutheran Church, Fosston, MN. The Spring quarter welcomes Mr. Mike Callahan, Vicar of Our Redeemer's Lutheran in Williston, ND, under the supervision of The Rev. Steve Lundblom. Vicar Callahan completed his studies and is eagerly looking forward to the next chapter in serving our Lord and the Church. The Winter and Spring Quarters brought us three international students and a student from the US who recognize the value of Confessional Lutheran education and the quality of online training offered by ALTS. Two of our students are from Ecuador and one from Wales. One of our international students is in the Master of Arts in Religion (MAR) program and two of our students are in the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program on a journey to pastoral ministry. Additionally, our US student, is registered in the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program as well. Growth is also occurring through refresher training by our Ministerium and Colloquy Candidates—their maturity and experience offer our students varied real world experience in Church Service through support and participation. The presence of the Ministerium and Colloquy Candidates enrich our programs and our students in ways too numerous to explain by mere words. We are surely blessed.

Seminary administration continues to grow and strengthen the Seminary itself.

The Seminary has engaged Dr. Kathryn Helleman DMin., Director of Institutional Assessment & Planning, from the Winebrenner Theological Seminary, as a consultant. Dr. Helleman is assisting the Seminary administration in developing a strategy and assessing our preparedness to seek academic accreditation. Accreditation is a long and detailed process that can take five to ten years to complete with many waypoints and milestones along the way. We are exercising our due diligence with Dr. Helleman's expertise to ensure we begin on the right path in this journey of institutional self-reflection and ultimate recognition of our programs.

In the Fall issue of *The Evangel*, we announced that we were reviewing our Marketing and Advertising of the Seminary. Our laity recognized our need and through a very generous gift, we were able to contract with Wild Fig Marketing, Farmington, MN, and Church Plant Media our website provider, to create an entirely new website for the American



Lutheran Theological Seminary! Our website team, Lisa Cooper, Duane Kleven, Bonnie Ohrich, Rev. Dean Stoner, and Rev. Dr. Tom Stover have been working diligently since December with updated content and visual improvements. Our new site is live! Check us out at: www.alts.edu

July 1, 2020 marks the beginning of a new two-year budget cycle for the Seminary and The AALC. In collaboration with Dr. Dan Kruger, The American Association of Lutheran Churches (TAALC) Treasurer, The AALC and ALTS National Staff, and others, we have conducted a detailed analysis of “the genuine cost of tuition” at the seminary. Tuition and fees paid by our students cover only a portion of the total actual costs of instruction at ALTS. The difference in costs comes from gifts by individuals, congregations, and the general fund of The AALC. Our analysis showed that in order to sustain low tuition to our students, ALTS must identify the actual cost of tuition to set quarterly fundraising goals to project the long-term health and growth of the Seminary to those individuals and congregations who directly support ALTS. The analysis focused only on those costs causally related to conducting classes and student administration—the “true” cost of tuition at ALTS is \$2,500 per student per class. The assessment is on par with other similar institutions and academic expectations.

The Commission for Higher Education (CHE) approved an increase in student tuition from \$400 per class to \$500 per class beginning July 1, 2020. The CHE also retained the cost for continuing education for qualified candidates at \$50 per class. The detailed budget for ALTS will be presented at the next National General Convention.

Fundraising Goal the First Two Quarters of 2020	
Winter Quarter 2020	Spring Quarter 2020
19 students 9 Continuing Education	21 Students 6 Continuing Education
Goal: \$60,050	Goal: \$60,000

The American Lutheran Theological Seminary is Christ Centered and Cross Focused on training future pastors for The American Association of Lutheran Churches, providing for sound Biblical education for the laity of our member congregations, and a beacon of light for the secular world. We welcome your support.

In humble service to our Lord

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Women of L.I.F.E.

by Laurie O'Brien

What is Women of L.I.F.E. and what is our purpose? Recently, your national Women of L.I.F.E. board members discussed this very question.

If you have been around for a while you probably know that L.I.F.E. stands for Lutherans In Fellowship & Evangelism. For those who are newer to our TAALC, this may be new news. Most of the women's groups in our churches took on the Women of L.I.F.E. name when their churches joined The AALC but likely continued to meet and operate as they always had which is absolutely O.K.

We have women in our local churches doing some wonderful ministry, but what does our national Women of L.I.F.E. do? Well, we do our best to provide an annual Bible study for you. These have been written by women in our churches as well as a couple studies that have been written by pastors. We support missions and missionaries. All the profits from the sale of the Bible studies, along with whatever money that your local women send to the national Women of L.I.F.E., is divided amongst the missions and missionaries that we vote to support when we meet at convention.

It should also be the purpose of the national Women of L.I.F.E. to offer support and encouragement to the local women's groups. Some of this happens through the Bible studies. In years past, leaders stayed in contact through letters and articles in *The Evangel*. As one of your current Women of L.I.F.E. leaders, I want to apologize for not doing a better job of sharing and encouraging you, as groups and as individuals. In the last few years there has been a complete change in leadership on your national board and it has left us newbies floundering more than a little. This is not an excuse, but I offer it as an explanation for what has been lacking. We ask your forgiveness and for your prayers as we seek to learn and do a better job.

Finding Peace in a Pandemic Storm (Some of that encouragement we want to share!)

The world we live in today is not the world of two or three short months ago. Life has changed. People have lost jobs, lost loved ones, and some have even lost hope. Maybe you have been dramatically affected by loss. Some say we are all in the same boat. Another description is perhaps more appropriate—we are in the same storm, but different boats. Yes, some are in yachts, some are in houseboats, and some are in lifeboats. We are all in the same storm, but the storm affects each type of boat differently.

This brings to mind the account in Mark 4:36-41, of Jesus asleep in the boat with his disciples:

And leaving the crowd, they took him (Jesus) with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

In that storm, there were a number of boats. It doesn't tell us how many or what kind. But there were other boats. And when Jesus calmed the storm, the storm was calmed for all the boats and for everyone in them. And then Jesus asked them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Whatever is happening around us, we need not fear. We may be sad about what is happening. We may not like what is happening. We may even be angry

about what is happening. BUT WE NEED NOT FEAR! Why? Because we have faith. We know that God is with us in our boat. And HE IS in control!

The county in California where I live has seen just over 1,100 confirmed cases of COVID-19 but, thankfully, only 47 deaths. Unfortunately, one of those deaths was the best friend of one of our church members. Our stay-at-home order in California has been extended to May 22, though I just read that some retail business will be allowed to reopen on Friday if they meet certain guidelines and mainly for curbside pick-up.*

Life has changed. We have cancelled trips. Two of our granddaughters were to be confirmed over that past couple weeks, but that couldn't happen. Seniors who are set to graduate high school or college are stuck at home and everything is cancelled. We even watched a friend's daughter get married via video because there could be no guests.

We do go out for walks and I go to the store for groceries but have also relied on curbside pickup or delivery because going into the store, even with a mask, is uncomfortable. I have tried to help by making masks for some of our church members and for friends and family who still must work or go to the store. We clean everything that comes into the house so as not to let the virus in. In all of this we do our best to trust God and not be afraid.

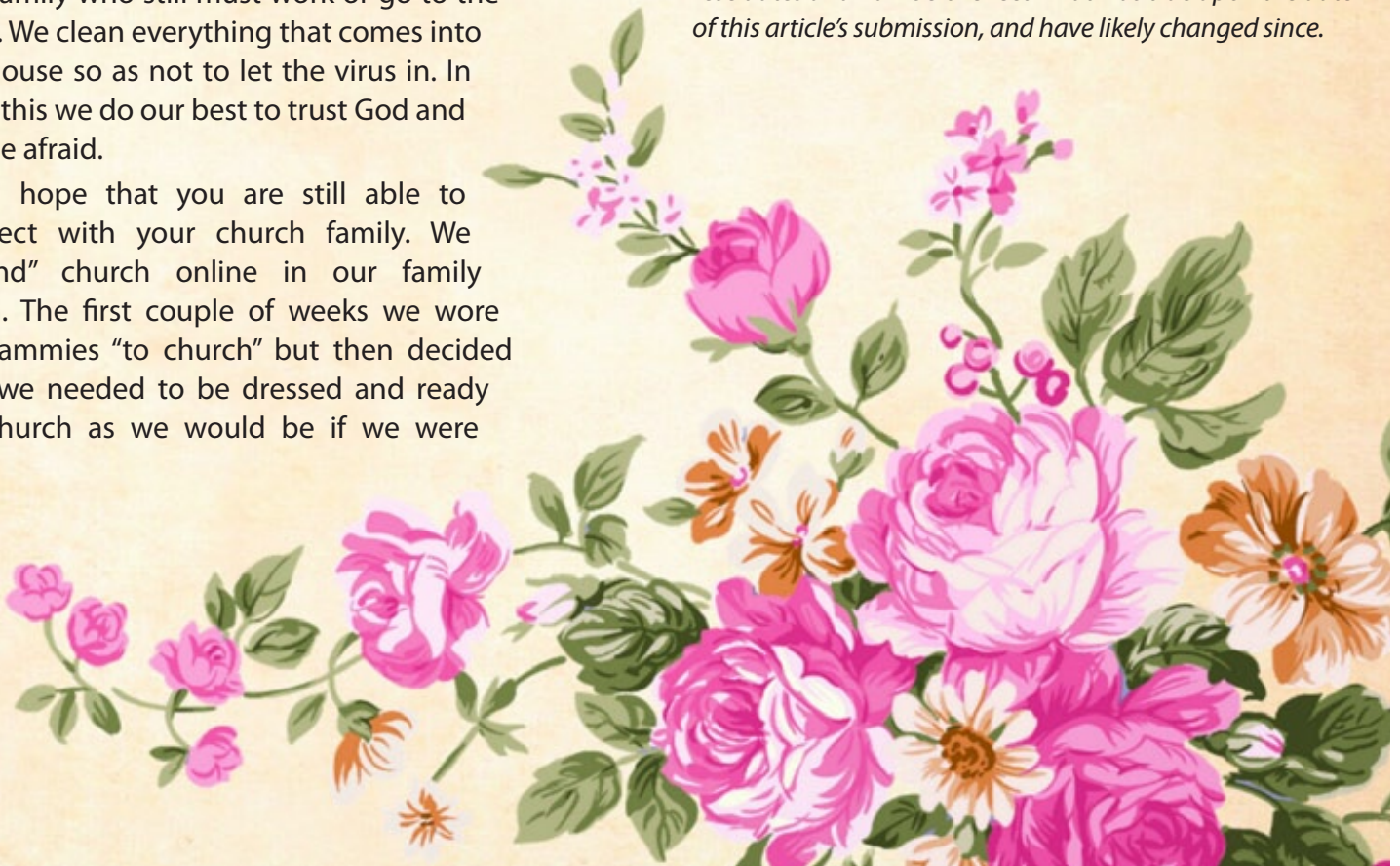
I hope that you are still able to connect with your church family. We "attend" church online in our family room. The first couple of weeks we wore our jammies "to church" but then decided that we needed to be dressed and ready for church as we would be if we were

actually gathering normally. We just started an adult education class via Zoom on Wednesday nights. We watch devotionals from our pastors and from pastors of other churches that are posted on Facebook. Thanks to technology, even in isolation, we have been able to bring the church community into our home.

Perhaps by the time you read this the world, or at least where you live, will have returned to some semblance of normal, whatever that looks like now. Wherever you are in the storm – still floundering, calling on Jesus to wake up and help you, or awed by God's mercy and grace in calming the waves of virus and uncertainty – I pray that you find peace in the storm because God is with you.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

**These dates and numbers reflect what was true upon the date of this article's submission, and have likely changed since.*



Expectantly Waiting!

by The Rev. Dean R. Johansen

Who having been given the gift of a baby cannot recall the expectant joy? Surely, for a time our focus might be on the baby's room: the color of the paint, the bassinet or crib or bedding, and even the toys. Yet, our gaze might be considered astray if our focus remained on the externals, while neglecting the soon to be born baby.

The End Times! The Day of the Lord! What will our focus be? How should we prepare for persecution? Jesus addresses these questions in Luke 21:5-28. There are three key verses. They are: verses eight, nineteen, and twenty-eight.

The Background/Context: In verse five the disciples are enamored of the world. They look at the temple, as they are religious Jews. They follow Jesus. Yet, their focus is drawn away from Jesus who is our true temple and sacrifice before God the Father. Jesus shocks them by stating in verse six, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." These events were fulfilled in 70AD when the Romans put Jerusalem and the temple under siege. The disciples being fallen humans, ask when these things will happen? (v7) They might be asking; how do I prepare? How do I remain faithful?

The Answer: And He said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in My name, saying, I am he!" and, "The time is at hand! Do not go after them." Jesus speaks of two things that tempt humans away from Christ: 1. False Christs; this would include those who do not overtly claim to be Christ, yet preach another gospel. (Gal 1:8-9) They are antichrists; 2. False prophets; those who claim to know the timing of these events. At that time, Jesus quoted in Matt 24:36, even Jesus the Messiah did not know. Since His death and resurrection, He knows. "All authority has been given unto me..." (Matt 28:18) There is nothing withheld from Jesus' authority, which means He knows when He will return. However, the main point is stressed in verse eight. *Do not be led astray by false christs and false prophets.*

"By your endurance you will gain your lives." (v19) At first reading, it seems that the focus is on enduring the persecution of the world and satan. We are called to endure, yet what is our focus to be? How do we endure? The N.T. Greek word is: "hupomone", which can mean endurance or constancy. It can also mean waiting, or even expectantly waiting. An illustration might be parents waiting for a new born baby. Is this an accurate interpretation that we await our Savior Jesus Christ; not merely endure the persecution or earthly circumstances?

Verse twenty-eight says, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Who is our redemption? Jesus the Christ our Lord and Savior. Sandwiched between verses five and twenty-eight, it is clear that to endure, to not go astray; our expectantly waiting is for Jesus Christ our Beautiful Savior. We shall behold Him, our Savior and Lord!

Grace and peace to you from our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!



Photos by Duane Kleven

Special Prayer Request

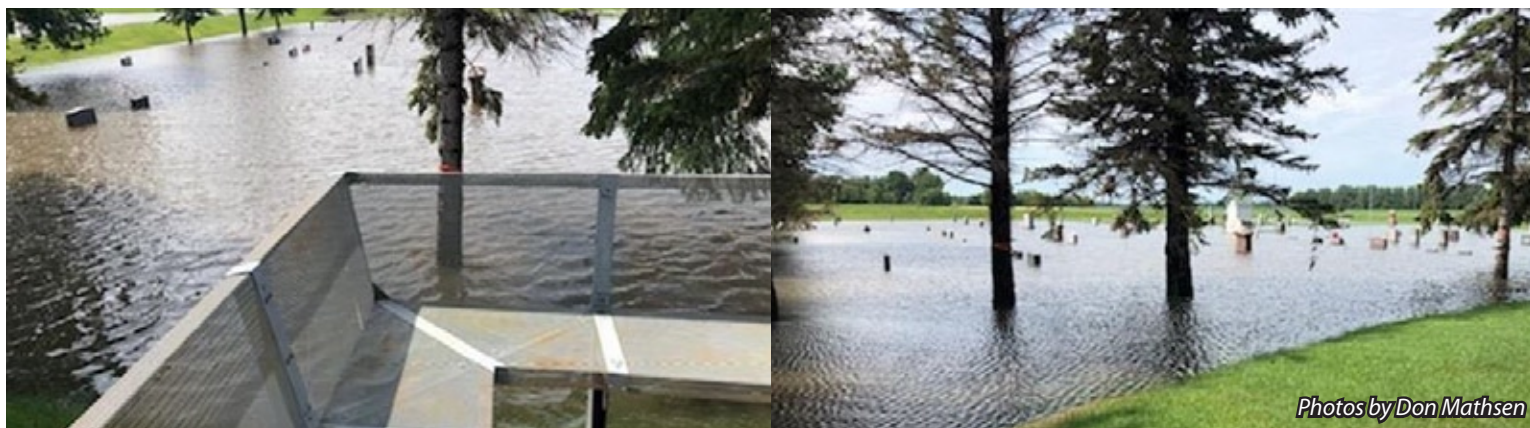
Kongsvinger Lutheran Church, Oslo, MN

Our area has suffered with economic loss resulting from the global pandemic and over the last week torrential rains have inundated the area. Many of our farmers have lost their crops, for the second year in a row, their fields look as if they are lakes. We need your prayers and support. Lord have Mercy!

Please pray with us...

Heavenly Father, I know Your greatness and my weakness, Your majesty and my unworthiness. By this present storm of the last two weeks, and the unrest in our country, You call us to the knowledge of our sin and to true repentance, lest we forget Your just judgment against sin. Do not let us be condemned with this wicked and evil world. O Lord, I am helpless and need Your protection. For Jesus' sake abide with me. Lift up Your face and be gracious to me in this fearful time of danger, and do not test me beyond my strength. Protect my home and my dear ones, especially those who are weak and helpless. Send Your holy angel, that I may continue safely to my journey's end. Give me faith to cast my anxieties and cares on You, who still storms and guides the souls of men through every danger; in Jesus' name. Amen.

This prayer is a modification of "In a Storm or Natural Disaster" Kinnaman, Scot. Lutheran Book of Prayer: Fifth Edition (Kindle Location 1401). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.



Photos by Don Mathsen

Cocoa Connections

by Nic Cass, Youth Director
Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church

Jesus's ministry on earth was built around reaching out to save those who were lost in sin and the ways of this world. As Christians, we are not only saved by this ministry, but now called to take part in reaching the lost. Ministry is built around relationships and engaging with those who need God's saving grace. Romans 10:13-15 says, *for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?"* We are those who are sent. We are sent to deliver God's grace to everyone in our lives.



In August of 2016, I moved to Sidney, MT to be work as the youth director at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church. The pastor at Shepherd of the Valley described my role as "middle school missionary." From the time I started in Sidney, I worked to meet the middle and high school students where they were. Knowing that kids spend 7 hours a day at school, this was an obvious entry point. In my time in Sidney, I have subbed, coached, attended games and concerts, and visited kids during their lunch and recess time. All of these have been wonderful opportunities to engage with teachers and students, but I want to focus on the most recent ministry we have taken part in.

As mentioned earlier I would often visit middle school students during their recess time. In Sidney the middle schoolers are given a brief time outside at the park immediately across the road from the school. Nearly every time I stopped by to chat with the kids, they would ask if I had brought them any snacks, to which my answer was always, "no." Out of this simple need from the kids was borne a wonderful ministry opportunity. Beginning last fall, once a week I have been bringing hot chocolate to the kids during their recess time. Every week we serve hot chocolate to approximately 200 students. This simple act has opened up a many doors with students and teachers alike. It is amazing the goodwill and 10 cent cup of hot chocolate will earn you with a middle schooler. Through this ministry we have been able to connect with students, learn about their lives, and share the hope we have in Christ.



This has provided us with opportunities to meet kids and build new relationships we would otherwise not have had. As Christians we are called to share the love of God with those around us. Often there are opportunities staring us in the face that we simply need a new perspective to see. For me that perspective was hungry middle schoolers always desiring a snack. I encourage you to look around your lives and see where God is asking you to show his love. Sometimes that love may come in a form as simple as a cup of hot chocolate.

Amber's Smile

by *The Rev. Joseph Christina*

My wife showed me a video the other day on her phone. It was a little girl named Amber. Amber had gone through the rather remarkable effort to memorize the 23rd psalm. And she was reciting it in that video. She kept a straight face throughout right up until the “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” part of the psalm. It was right there where she broke into such a beaming smile, it brought a tear to my eye.

Oh and while she was reciting it...Amber was also dying.

Yesterday, dear Amber entered the gates of eternal life and is now in the comforting arms of her tender Good Shepherd. She knew during her earthly pilgrimage that she was walking through the valley of the shadow of death, perhaps more than most of us ever will. But she knew she was never alone. The Good Shepherd who laid down his sinless life for his flock was always by his lamb's side. And because of that same Savior, we will one day be reunited with Amber and all the saints on the Last Day when Amber will finally get a perfect and ailment free body.

We've had quite a half of a calendar year, have we not? A pandemic that has yet to subside. Murders and civil unrest unlike any I've experienced in my lifetime. Looting, violence, and political madness. Even the soil of the church has not been free from the seeds of discord as Christians across denominations spar over seemingly everything from the reopening of churches to the wearing of masks. We live in a tomb. Or, as Amber liked to say, we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. But also like Amber, we are privileged to know the One—the only One—who can and will safely lead us through the valley. And for those who quake with fear over a virus, those who feel the burden of injustice, those who loot, and even the violent: He is their Savior as well.

Evangelism and the Great Commission of Christ are tasks the church is to carry out until our Lord reappears. Now, more than ever, the Christian church has the one thing the world needs more than anything else: grace and forgiveness in Christ. Even if the world doesn't even know it needs it, we know it most certainly does. Paul quotes the Sons of Korah in the book of Romans when he says, “for your sake we face death all day long” (8:36). The early church was faced with constant persecution and many were under threat of death. But they knew the Way the Truth and the Life. And they not only faced those grim realities with confidence, they continued to spread the gospel so that many generations later, we'd be privileged to share in its message of peace. May all of us pray for boldness and courage to share Christ crucified with our neighbors. May each of us be prepared to always give reasons for the hope that we have. Because, like Amber, we know that we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

But also like Amber, we know Who tenderly leads us. May we continue to be His lights in this dark valley.

Prayer Bookmark

1. Faith Lutheran *Columbus, ND*
2. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Presiding Pastor
3. Commission for Higher Education
4. Faith Lutheran Church *Holstein, IA*
5. Rev. Joseph Christina
6. Women of L.I.F.E. groups
7. Faith Lutheran Church *Watseka, IL*
8. Your local community
9. Dss. Brigitte Gassman
10. First Evangelical Lutheran Church *Parshall, ND*
11. Rev. Len Brokenshire
12. Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church
San Diego, CA
13. Dss. Kathy Awtrey
14. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church *Franklin, NC*
15. ILC, Den Lutherske Kirke I Norge
16. Prison Chaplains
17. Rev. Larry Juergensen
18. Hospital Chaplains
19. Grace Ev Lutheran Church of Deephaven
Wayzata, MN
20. Rev. Michael Badenhop
21. Nigel Brown, seminary student
22. Grace Lutheran Church *Nunda, SD*
23. Rev. Michael 'Myke' Main
24. Nathan Rinne, seminary student
25. Local TAALC Church
26. Rev. Nathan Hoff
27. Hope Lutheran Church *Brighton, IA*
28. Rev. Norman C. Hoffeld
29. Dss. Susan Scott
30. Seminary professors
31. Hope Lutheran Church *Hampton, VA*

Prayer Bookmark

1. Rev. Norman R. Beighley
2. TAALC Foundation
3. Kongsvinger Lutheran Church *Oslo, MN*
4. Rev. Jordan Cooper
5. Rev. Paul Hueter
6. God would raise up church leaders
7. Lake Madison Lutheran Church
Rutland/Nunda, SD
8. Michael Callahan, seminary student
9. Rev. Phillip Hofinga
10. Light of Christ Lutheran Church *Williston, ND*
11. Association Council
12. Lucky Mound Lutheran Church *Parshall, ND*
13. Rev. Poul Erik Norgaard
14. Rev. Thomas Baumgarten
15. Mighty Fortress Ev. Lutheran Church
Seward, NE
16. Kris Johnson, seminary student
17. Rev. Ray E. Lorthioir, Jr.
18. Mountain View Lutheran Church *Thornton, CO*
19. Parish Education Commission
20. New Hope Lutheran Church *Newfolden, MN*
21. Rev. Robert G. Snitzer
22. Rev. Scott Neumann
23. Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church *Williston, ND*
24. Janet Price, Master of Arts student
25. Rev. Rusty Phillips
26. Those who are grieving
27. Our Savior Lutheran Church *Piqua, OH*
28. Rev. Lawrence Bradt
29. Peace Lutheran Church *Defiance, OH*
30. Rev. Dr. Tom Stover, Seminary President,
pro tem

Surprised by Oxford

One Woman's Journey to Faith

by Martha Spotts

Stories of young people losing their faith in college are all too common, but is it possible for a person to find faith in Jesus during the college years? Yes! One such person is Carolyn Weber, the author of the thoughtful and engaging book, *Surprised by Oxford*, a memoir of her three years at Oxford University and journey to the Christian faith.

What began as an idyllic childhood in Canada became marked by brokenness and pain as her father got into legal trouble and became an unreliable and irregular presence in the family. Moving from house to house with her mother and siblings and without money enough for the basics, Weber became accustomed to hardship and insecurity. Still, she worked hard, got her bachelor's degree from the University of Western Ontario, and then attended Oxford University on a full scholarship, eventually earning master's and doctoral degrees in English literature.

Like so many in the post-baby boom generations, Weber reached adulthood with the assumption that God, if he existed at all, was irrelevant, most especially for an intelligent, enlightened, and sophisticated person such as she. She was too smart to believe in God and too used to depending on herself to need him. "Magnificently self-sufficient... I would have said I had no need of a redeemer," the author declares on p. 33. Her first serious contact with a thoughtful Christian came during her senior year of college in the form of an elderly English professor, a popular teacher whom Weber greatly respected. Thus, the first hole in the armor of her unbelief was created.

Eventually, the entire suit of armor was dismantled and removed through Weber's friendships with other Oxford students who were practicing Christians, particularly one she identified only as "TDH," short for "Tall, Dark, and Handsome." For most of three years, Weber argued with and interrogated her friends about the Bible, God, and faith, trying to find a way out of the conclusion she was coming to: Jesus is the savior of the world and she desperately needed him.

Surprised by Oxford is the captivating, winsome, and highly readable account of one young intellectual's pursuit of, and pursuit by, God. Carolyn Weber asks real questions often posited by other young doubters and offers real answers. Her spiritual journey from unbelief to faith during her years at Oxford is indeed surprising.

COVID-19 2020

Poem by Joan Sedlacek

The days are alike in their sameness
The rhythm and pattern of life is gone
The days fly by with nothing to mark their passing
Winter leaves, Spring is gone
Summer proves no different
Births, Deaths

The Want, the Need to celebrate or mourn together is not allowed
The weather is warm and people are emerging from their isolation
Once close friends are nodding acquaintances
We are divided

Essential/nonessential, positive/negative, healthy/unhealthy
needed/unneeded, loved/unloved

Someday we will smile without a mask to hide it
Someday we will shake hands or hug without fear
Someday we will gather nearer than six feet
All in God's own time

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