

The EVANGEL

A Publication of The American Association of Lutheran Churches

Issue No. 198— March/April 2021



Come and See *John 1:46*

The AALC General Convention & Pastors' Conference Edition



Letter From the Editor

Greetings, *Evangel* readers! This is such a privilege for me to be writing this as the new editor of this publication. I am both thrilled and terrified to be stepping into these shoes.

First, I would like to give a big thank you to the outgoing editor, Lisa Cooper, for all of her time and efforts to bring me up to speed on the process of creating each issue, especially for answering all of my follow-up text questions. Thanks Lisa!

I would also like to thank *The Evangel* "team" for being so supportive and encouraging as I learn this new role. Thank you, Pastor Dean, Dr. Larson, Bonnie, Dr. Leins, and Lynette!

To all of you who have contributed content to this issue and have already submitted items for following editions: thank you! Keep 'em coming! I hope to have themes and deadlines set very soon.

For those of you I haven't met yet, I grew up on a dairy farm in the north woods of Minnesota and now am wife to The Rev. Benjamin Baker who serves the saints at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church in Traer, IA. I'm mom to 13-year-old Meg (yes, just "Meg") and spend my days working at a local bank. How did an English major end up working for a bank? I ask myself that same question every day, as I walk through the doors. Don't worry: they have me tucked away in mortgage processing, where I make lists and tidy stacks of paper and am not responsible for anyone's finances. *Whew.*

It is such a delight that this first issue I get to work on is the convention edition. Attending the convention last year was one of the greatest blessings in 2020. Out of the frustration and loneliness and worry of last year, the convention brought the sweetness of fellowship with other believers and constant reminders that God is still actively working. He is present in our own lives, in our churches, in The AALC church body, and beyond.

So, if your heart and mind are weary after the events of the past year, I invite you to look through these pages to see how God is still at work in His Church today. He has not failed us, and we are not alone. Come and see!

Gretchen Baker

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Top: The altar of the host church for the convention: Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Wayzata, MN. Photo by Katherine Hofinga

Bottom: Photos of the TAALC Pastors' Conference by Karen Holst

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I Will Bless The Lord At All Times

The Presiding Pastor's Report from the 27th General Convention of The AALC

by The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

*I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; The humble shall hear it and rejoice.*

O magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together.

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me, And delivered me from all my fears.
They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces shall never be ashamed.*

This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him! Psalm 34

We have been through quite a lot this year! Our nation has been turned upside down with a world-wide pandemic, rioting in major cities, devastating effects on employment and the stock market, and enforced social distancing. But, *I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth... O magnify the Lord with me, And let us exalt His name together!*

In spite of the many difficulties that we have faced in the last year, our God has wondrously blessed The AALC with magnificent gifts of many kinds. I want to begin our General Convention with a list of our blessings from God in the last 12 months:

First, thank you all for coming! And, thank you to those who are joining us in the virtual General Convention! Though we had to postpone our Convention by four months, it is wonderful to be together again and to see beloved brothers and sisters once more.

In addition, we welcome for the first time, Christ Lutheran Church of Chetek, WI, into our church body. A formal motion for their reception will be made later this morning. Also, we welcome their pastor, The Rev. Tylan Dalrymple, onto our Ministerial Roster.

Also, we welcome for the first time, St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church of Jurupa Valley, CA, into our church body. A formal motion for their reception also will be made later this morning. We welcome their pastor, The Rev. Jon Holst, onto our Ministerial Roster.

We thank God that there are currently 10 more Lutheran congregations that are considering joining our church body! And, there are 19 other Lutheran pastors who are currently considering applying to our Ministerial Roster!

Last month, we hosted a virtual Hold the Line Conference that was attended by almost 100 people. Of course, today we are hosting a face-to-face General Convention with a virtual component. What the devil meant for evil, God has used for good. I think that this virtual format will become a welcome and regular component of General Conventions from now on! Especially, I want to thank Pastor Dean Stoner and Mrs. Bonnie Ohlrich for their incredible dedication, tireless effort, and detailed preparation. They have made this General Convention and its virtual format possible!

Immediately after this Convention, the Ministerium of The AALC will have our annual Pastors' Conference. Last year, we had a record number of pastors who attended our Conference, some 70 pastors. This year, in spite of COVID-19, we have 39 Pastors and 10 wives registered!

Continued from Page 3

In addition, during the past 12 months, we have received several extraordinary monetary gifts over and above our regular General Offerings:

- **\$100,000** pledged in \$10,000 increments, over the next 10 years, to finance an accreditation process for American Lutheran Theological Seminary.
- **\$110,000** in hand, to replenish and increase the General Fund of TAALC.
- **\$50,000** in hand, to fund 2 part-time positions for the next 2 years:
 - The Assistant to the Presiding Pastor. This is a personal assistant to the PP, not to be confused with the elected position, Assist.PP.
 - The National Home Mission Developer. We have moved Pr. Dean Stoner to the position of Administrator of The AALC. Therefore, we needed to fill his vacant post of National Home Mission Developer.
- **\$50,000** in hand, in order to fund 2 new ministries over the next 2 years:
 - Discipleship School. This is a program designed to help college-age persons stand as Bible-believing and confessional Christians in a post-Christian society.
 - Lay Academy. This is a program designed for laity of all ages, to help them serve better as lay leaders in their own congregations.
- **\$75,000** in hand, to fund ALTS Foreign and Domestic Seminary Students.
- **\$75,000** in hand, to fund CAM for Church Plants and Ministries.
- **\$10,000** in hand, to fund CAM.
- **\$5,000** in hand, to fund pastors/congregations hit by COVID-19 related issues.
- **\$300,000** pledged and anticipated to be received by the end of this year. (This gift was received in January 2021.)

In all, we have received, in pledge or in hand, some \$775,000, in addition to our regular general offerings. This is an enormous blessing of over 3/4 of a million dollars from God our Father, and from faithful and generous givers in our churches. This money will support our ministries, congregations, pastors, students, programs, expansion, and outreach.

So, as we begin our 27th General Convention, let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, whose hand is ever open to provide for the needs of your people, we give You thanks for Your great gifts and generous blessings to the pastors and people of The American Association of Lutheran Churches. Continue to supply this church body, O Lord, from Your bounteous storehouse of blessings, that we may evermore praise and glorify Your holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The AALC pastors sang "God's Word is Our Great Heritage" at the closing service of the General Convention. *Photo by Gretchen Baker*

The American Association of Lutheran Churches Meets in Convention

by The Rev. Dave Spotts

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40, NKJV). This very memorable teaching is sandwiched between texts speaking of the orderly exercise of spiritual gifts in worship gatherings and a discourse on the bodily resurrection of Christ. While the text applies most directly to the setting of the local church in the context of worship, we can safely apply it as well to larger gatherings.

At long last, after the General Convention of The AALC scheduled for June was postponed, our church body was able to assemble in Wayzata, MN, October 26-28. We had one less day to conduct business than we normally do, but the work proceeded apace. New to our gathering was the participation of numerous pastors and delegates via Zoom, alongside the face-to-face gatherings. Participants at the church in Minnesota wore masks, had a temperature check each day upon arrival, and had the ability to remain socially distanced from other participants.

In no way did this mean that the event was cold and impersonal. From the opening evening Divine Service with Communion to the closing celebration of seminary graduation, participants had the opportunity to drink deeply of the grace of God, expressed and shared with one another through solid biblical teaching.

It was a little different to care for the business of the church in a setting that included videoconference participants. Yet, as Christians have always done, we adapted our activities to allow for the not-quite-instant responses which Zoom made possible.

Leaving the convention, we could all say with a clear conscience that the Lord worked through the assembled body of The American Association of Lutheran Churches. Our boards and commissions are constituted according to our ruling documents. Our seminary has been able to welcome a new president and continue the work of training men and women for fruitful work in the context of the local church. We have retained our history of doing things decently and in order, even in a time of pandemic which could threaten to stop all our work. Christ’s kingdom is advancing. Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Dave Spotts serves college students, faculty, staff, and administration members in Columbia, MO, through Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry, a mission work of The AALC.

ALTS Graduation

The AALC Presiding Pastor The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins with the 2020 ALTS graduates: The Rev. Michael Callahan and The Rev. Andrew Virkus. The ALTS Graduation Ceremony was held during the closing service of The AALC General Convention on Wednesday, October 28, 2020. The Rev. Michael Callahan serves First Evangelical Lutheran and Lucky Mound Lutheran Churches of Parshall, ND; and The Rev. Andrew Virkus serves Poplar Lake Lutheran Church of Fosston, MN. *Photo by Vicki Neumann*



The AALC General Convention of 2020: A Glimpse from an Outsider

by Brian Ruuska

During October 26-28, 2020, I was invited to “Come and See!” the 27th General Convention of The American Association of Lutheran Churches (TAALC) held at the Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Deephaven in Wayzata, MN.

Events like this are usually observed through the lens of prior personal experiences and relationships. Have you even wondered how an outsider might view the convention? Since I am not a member of The AALC, everything and everyone was new to me, so perhaps I may be able to offer a unique perspective.

Challenges

The convention was held during chaotic worldly conditions – a global pandemic, civil unrest and violence, divisive political rancor – along with an underpinning of an ever-increasing secularization of education and the Church, the social deterioration of traditional marriage, gender roles, and the family estate. These all created challenges for the convention and participants, and they certainly test one’s faith. Due to government COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I understand the agenda and attendance was minimized as compared with prior conventions, and included a virtual presence for those unable to attend in-person using internet-based meeting technology.

Though these unprecedented conditions challenged the proceedings, it was remarkable to find an abundance of patience and graciousness extended to and by all participants. I also noticed there seemed to be a recurring message – a common thread – running throughout the convention.

Much of the convention agenda involved necessary business – commission reports, ballot nominations, amendments, voting, and the installment of new office holders for the association. An agenda highlight for me was the keynote speech.

Keynote

The keynote speaker, The Rev. Dr. Mark Mattes, presented how contemporary America cultivates the destruction of traditional Christian teachings.

He explained that prior to post-Protestantism, service in the world was grounded in the Word. Now, the gospel has been stripped of any need for Christ. Sin is denied. No one likes to be told they or their loved ones have done wrong. Traditional Christian teachings are puzzling to some and openly resisted by others. Much of the nation no longer believes we are sinners needing to repent, but instead a nation of victims who need reparations.

Dr. Mattes reminded us that faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ. Therefore, the antidote to all this chaos continues to be the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. We are called to share the invitation – “Come and See” – where the Word is truthfully preached through both Law and Gospel, and the sacraments are properly administered. It’s that same place where the conversation and consolation of the brethren is nurtured.

He noted the flowers of this world may fade, but God’s Word abides forever. As Christians, what captivates our hearts is fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Adoptions

Despite all the challenges, on the 33rd anniversary of its founding, the association was able to clarify with 20/20 vision the Church’s role within the world by approving a resolution reaffirming the full authority of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.

Perhaps by no small coincidence, two additional congregations were joyfully welcomed into The AALC. The biblical reference offered by The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins was quite appropriate:

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

Wrap-up

The last worship service of the convention included a graduation ceremony for two recent seminary students. The sermon by The Rev. Dr. Thomas Stover was especially fitting and again reaffirmed the full authority of God’s Word: We don’t believe just anything because we want it to be so, we believe what God’s Word declares.

That common thread I saw running throughout the convention was indeed a scarlet thread tied to Christ – the Word incarnate, the inerrant, infallible One – the antidote for our fallen broken world.

I am deeply thankful for the privilege of meeting so many God-fearing brothers and sisters during my visit to “Come and See!” I pray that everyone within the Church continues to strive within the authority of the Word, nurtured through both doctrine and practice by His grace. For the Word with the Spirit indeed provides a deep haven of rest for the people of God.

Ruuska is a recovering Finnish Apostolic Lutheran, grateful for the discovery of the precious truth in authentic Confessional Lutheranism. He resides in Oakdale, MN, with his beautiful wife, Barbara.

Pastors' Wives Meet During Pastors' Conference

by Gretchen Baker

This year, pastors' wives were invited to attend the 2020 Pastors' Conference, held during the second half of the week following the 2020 TAALC General Convention.

About 10 wives (plus one very special TAALC administrative assistant!) attended sessions and then met together during the breakout sessions. The wives got to know each other by sharing about themselves, their families, what brought them to The AALC, and prayer requests.

At a second breakout session, the wives shared struggles and questions about this unique role as pastors' wife and offered advice from the varied years of experience: some of us are new to

the role, while others have walked this road for many years.

One afternoon brought a handful of the ladies enjoying a quick trip to an ice cream shop in downtown Excelsior, MN.

The last meeting ended with brainstorming ways to stay connected,

including meeting with other TAALC pastor couples, starting a Facebook group, organizing retreats or camps for the women or the whole family. Be in prayer for these ideas to become reality.

The vocation of pastor's wife can be a lonely road, especially during a pandemic. These conversations brought much encouragement to those gathered.



Vicki Neumann was one of the pastors' wives who met during the Pastors' Conference. *Photo by Katherine Hofinga*



Pam Virkus and Karen Holst visit during the breakout sessions. *Photo by Katherine Hofinga*



Lynn Hueter shared her experiences as a pastor's wife and missionary. *Photo by Katherine Hofinga*

Gretchen Baker is married to The Rev. Benjamin Baker and lives in north central IA.

2020 TAALC Pastors' Conference

by The Rev. Dave Spotts

Psalm 133 (NKJV)

1. Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
2. *It is* like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
3. *It is* like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

The annual Pastors' Conference of The American Association of Lutheran Churches was held October 28-30, 2020, a day shorter than our usual conference, and, no doubt, a day more precious than the conferences of some years. This time of pandemic has placed parish pastors, chaplains, and those in extended ministry under significant stresses which they have never faced before. For many of us, it has underlined the fact that it is good and pleasant when we can dwell together in unity.

The meeting, perhaps a bit smaller than many in recent years, was held at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Deephaven in Wayzata, MN. Gathering together for worship and prayer, receiving the Lord's Sacrament, and encouraging one another were the chief business. During this time, teaching surrounded the idea of the pastor as the shepherd of souls.

Care of souls in a time of pandemic has proven very difficult for our pastors. In many areas of the country, churches have been prohibited from gathering according to their normal patterns to receive from God's Word and Sacraments. In some communities, those restrictions have been unevenly applied, with churches facing more restrictions than those placed upon other public gatherings. Many hospitals have restricted pastoral care and visitation of the sick, occasionally even not allowing for end-of-life care. Pastors have been told their work is nonessential. Christians, whose practices have always been centered around gathering together, have been told that their decision to participate in their faith is of no more importance than deciding to attend a chess club or reading circle.



The Pastors' Conference worship team (L-R): Rev. Len Brokenshire, Rev. John Holst, Rev. Dean Stoner, Rev. Neil Cadle, Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, and Rev. Dr. Cary Larson. *Photo by Karen Holst*

This has obviously caused a great deal of concern for pastors, who have been charged with the task of bringing Jesus' words of Law and Gospel to every nation. How do we bring God's Word and, equally important, the Sacrament of Communion, to those who are not supposed to have personal contact with anyone? We can preach and teach, encourage, and even counsel using technology like the phone or internet. But we don't have the ability to bring the true body and blood of Christ to each member of our congregation.

Pastors also face a great concern when they realize the troubles faced by those they care for. In a time of pandemic, not only do some face a very real threat of illness, disability, and death, but others have a much greater threat of the loss of their careers, their businesses, their relationships, and everything else that makes for security in this world. How will the local church respond when several families in the congregation lose their means of self-support? How will they respond when business owners find they have no business anymore?

It becomes very good to belong to a fellowship of pastors who can encourage one another, who can pray with one another, and even can simply sit together and weep for the sorrows faced by their congregations. The gathering of the saints in the Pastors' Conference drew our minds and hearts back to the promises of God in Christ - life forevermore. Thanks be to God for this tremendous blessing.

The Rev. Dave Spotts serves college students, faculty, staff, and administration members in Columbia, MO, through Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry, a mission work of The AALC.

DESIGN THIS YEAR'S
AALC YOUTH CONFERENCE SHIRT



INCORPORATING THE THEME
LIVING ON THE EDGE
BASED ON EPHESIANS 6:10

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

SUBMISSIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY MAY 1
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VECTOR FILES THAT ARE AT LEAST 200 DPI AT FULL SIZE
(300 DPI IS PREFERRED)
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UP TO 6 COLORS TOTAL BETWEEN FRONT AND BACK

Submit your designs, and any questions, to
AALCYouthConference@gmail.com

You CAN Take It With You

by *The Rev. Rich Eddy*

On September 1, Karen and I made a second trip to Indiana to handle my late sister's matters, this time to pack up the contents of her 10' x 10' storage unit into a 16-foot rental truck. After a couple nights in Indiana, we hit the road for a 2,290 mile drive back to our home in California. Here, we would unload everything into our living room (and family room, and back porch, and...) for a safer and more leisurely opening and sorting.

As we hit the road, Karen and I talked about all the stuff my sister had left behind when she passed in mid-July. For the most part, we had no idea what all was in the many boxes, plastic bins, and garbage bags, except that much of it had probably been saved by my father, who had passed away in Indiana seven years earlier.

Karen summed up the situation with the comment, "Well, you can't take it with you." But as soon as she said it, we looked at each other, and both blurted out at the same time, "We ARE taking it with us!"

Somewhere in the middle of the six-day journey (we rested on the seventh day), as we barely outran a sudden SNOW storm in Wyoming and dodged hurricane-force winds of 100+ miles per hour in Salt Lake City, I began to wonder whether we should have just abandoned the storage unit and waited for it to appear on the show "Storage Wars" instead.

Now, as we go through the unbelievable quantity of papers, clothes, and various objects, we're glad we didn't just abandon it all, since we are finding some incredible family history items, including old pictures, antique jewelry, watches, and even newspapers from the early 1900s. It's really a journey back in time, made possible because, well, "You can't take it with you."

Now we have to figure out what can be saved and how, because we, like our deceased family members, can't take it with us, either, when our time comes. I'm thinking...maybe an Eddy Family Museum or Eddy Presidential Library (don't laugh; we're not too old for one of us to be President; we're still just in our 60s!).

The truth that "we can't take it with us" when we die has prompted me to ask the question: "Is there anything we can take with us when our time comes?" And after some study and consideration, I believe the answer is: "Yes! There are some things we can and will take with us." But what are they?



Submitted by *The Rev. Rich Eddy*

First of all, we know that our material possessions are NOT on that list. That's why there are many jokes about people who tried to take their wealth with them: from the dying guy who begged his wife to bury his money with him when he died, so she wrote a check and stuck it in his coffin; to the guy who cashed in all his money and bought a block of solid gold, only to be asked by St. Peter why he brought a paving brick with him; to the 1938

romantic comedy (and Academy Award winner), "You Can't Take it With You."

As King Solomon lamented in Ecclesiastes 2:18-23, "You can work hard your whole life to gather wealth, only to have to leave it to those who come after you when you die" (paraphrased). Many tombs, from ancient times to the present, are filled with what archaeologists call "grave goods," which were placed there to assist the deceased in the "next life." Of course, since those goods are still in the tombs, it just proves the old saying, "You can't take it with you."

So what can we take with us?

1. Our souls/spirits. Theologians debate over the meaning of those terms, and whether they refer to the same thing or not. I'll use "spirit" to refer to that essential non-material part of our being that defines us as a living being made in the image of God. At the moment of death, our spirits depart our bodies and pass into what we call, "the intermediate state." Some believe that this temporary period is one of unconscious sleep ("soul-sleep"), but I believe the Scriptures teach a period of consciousness when we are either with Christ and joyously awaiting his return, or held awaiting our judgment apart from him. Evidence for this comes from Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man, in which the two are found after death to be in two separate places, "Abraham's side"* and Hades. Both are conscious and in very different conditions (Luke 16:19-31). Further evidence comes from John's revelation in which he sees the souls of the martyred under the altar in heaven (Revelation 6:9). Also, when 1 Thessalonians 4 describes Christ's return, it says, "God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (that is, died)" who will then be raised (resurrected). Since the bodies of the dead will not rise until the resurrection, how can they be with Christ already, unless it is by their spirits?

2. Our bodies. "Wait, pastor, didn't you just say our spirits leave but our bodies remain? After all, those same tombs holding burial goods are also holding remains of people's bodies. So how can you say we will take our bodies with us?" Okay, you're right, but so am I, because I'm not speaking of the intermediate state following our bodily deaths, but to the eternal state after the great resurrection of the dead when Christ returns. On that day, the cemeteries will empty and the sea will give up its dead (Revelation 20:13) and our spirits will be reunited with our resurrected bodies so that we will be whole again. But what about our bodies; will they be the condition they were in at our death? Will we be missing parts, suffering from diseases, needing glasses or wheelchairs or oxygen tanks? No, the word of Scripture is clear that we will be made perfect. 1 Corinthians 15 is a wonderful chapter that describes our resurrection to come, stating, "For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (v.53). Paul describes our death to be like the planting of a seed that is sown in weakness and dishonor but then sprouts in strength and honor. Our Creeds attest to this faith when we confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." There's more we would like to know, such as what we will look like, what "age" we will appear to be (I'm guessing 30), and what abilities we will have (will I be able to fly?), but Scripture tells us all we need to know: that we will be raised to eternal life, and that we will enter into the joy of the Lord. In the words of the old gospel hymn, "it's good enough for me!"**

3. Our memories. This is a little more touchy to assert, since all of us have memories we treasure and want to hold onto, while at the same time having horrible memories we would just as soon forget. Will we remember all our hurts, all our sins, all our mistakes and embarrassments, along with all our joys and blessings? The Bible isn't clear about this, but I think there are some conclusions we can draw. Since Christ promises to wipe every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4) and replace our mourning with joy and laughter (James 4:9, Lamentations 5:15), we can assume that at a minimum, whatever pain or regret our memories cause will be removed. If we do remember, we will see things from a now sinless perspective, and understand God's purposes in what we went through. We will be so grateful and joyful to be with the Lord that any memories of our sins will just cause us greater joy at God's mercy and forgiveness. Likewise, I believe we will recount the many blessings which God gave us in our earthly lives, which will result in our greater adoration and worship of the One who blessed us. Will we remember our faith, those special times Christ touched our lives, and our loved ones? Yes, I believe we will. Will you remember my sermons or my blogs? Probably not...

4. Our crowns. What we do here and now in this life will impact eternity. Our lives impact the lives of others, whether we give them life through having children, or saving lives

from danger, or taking them by accident or on purpose. The immediate effect can be seen, but there can be eternal consequences as well. When we raise a child in the faith, teach someone about Christ and they believe, or do a good work that brings glory to God, we affect lives not only here, but potentially forever. The Bible promises eternal life as a gift to those who believe, and says "there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), but at the same time says we will stand before the Judgment Seat to give account for all we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10). This accounting by those who are saved by faith will be to reveal and reward the good works which we have done (which of course are also by God's grace and power). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3 that we will receive a reward for any works that are built on the one sure foundation of Jesus Christ. The degrees of reward will vary, as they should: for I expect Christian martyrs to receive greater reward than I will; but there is no competition or boasting, only joy at what such works accomplish. Christ told of rewarding those who have been faithful with what they were given (Luke 19), and Paul speaks of his converts in the churches of Philippi and Thessaloniki as his crowns: "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?" (1 Thess. 2:19).

Therefore, I think of our rewards as crowns bestowed by Christ as signs of the eternal blessings he has done through us. And what will we do with those crowns? Will we parade around those streets of gold, strutting and showing them off ("My crown's bigger than your crown!")? No, we'll do what the elders do and throw them at the feet of the One who gave us those crowns, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, to whom be all praise and honor and glory and thanks (Revelation 4:9-11). For whatever we accomplish here that will be of eternal merit will be done by God's will and by his power, so the rewards truly belong to him.

So go ahead and live your life, thanking God for that life and doing the good works he created you to do (Ephesians 2:10), knowing that you CAN take everything that is truly good and matters to God with you!

Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Read: Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Revelation 4

The Rev. Rich Eddy is a pastor emeritus with The AALC.

* *ESV version; older translations call it the "bosom of Abraham."*

** *"Gimme That Old Time Religion", an African-American folk gospel song dating from 1873. Published by Charles Davis Tillman in 1889.*

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The
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