

The

EVANGEL

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Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our lord and savior! Along with articles about special ministries happening in the AALC, you will notice that there is a heavy focus on the Reformation in this edition. This will continue through the end of this year. Because it is the 500th anniversary coming up in October, it is so exciting that we can reflect on the importance of the Reformation, and celebrate the Biblical truths recovered by the reformers. I hope that this focus proves encouraging to you all, and helpful in your own spiritual life.

On the topic of our Lutheran reformational identity, I thought I would share a quick story about one of the first Lutheran churches I attended. When I had first become a Lutheran, I looked all over Connecticut for a Lutheran church to attend while I was home from college for the summer. After visiting a number of churches, I stumbled upon a tiny LC-MS congregation whose sign read "We preach Christ and Him crucified." This was so exciting! This is what I was looking for! I decided to join this 20 person congregation for the summer, and truly, they did faithfully preach Christ and Him crucified. Here's the funny part: the whole time I attended this church, the sign never changed. Eventually I asked the pastor why this was the case, and it turns out they had lost the key. The sign would never change.

Of all of the messages to have stuck, plastered on the church sign indefinitely as the focus of a church, Christ and Him crucified is certainly a good one. Of course, this comes from 1 Corinthians 2 where Paul writes:

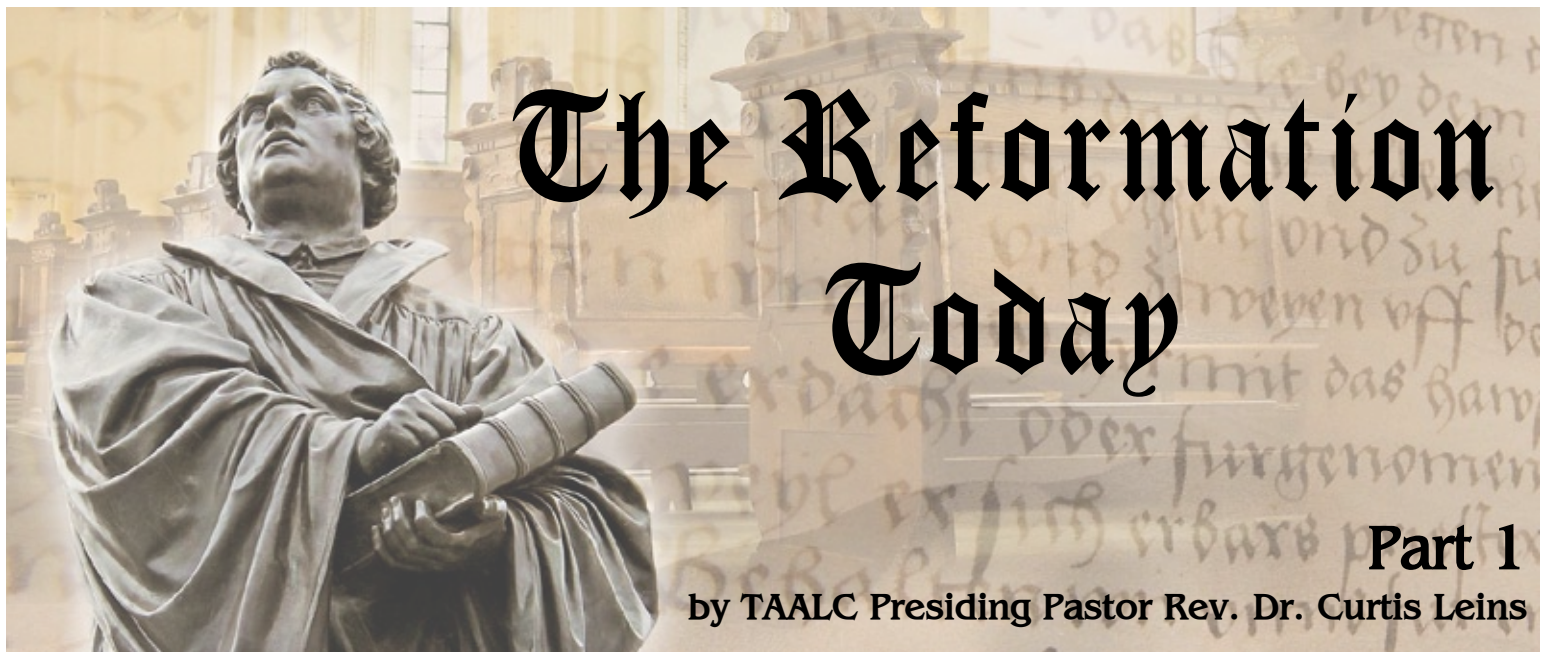
For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul was not necessarily a man of great eloquence of speech. He appeals to the Corinthians, not as a man of impressive charisma, but as a man who resolved to humbly preach the Word of God. This is what we are called to do in our own congregations—and not just the pastors of our association. All of us are called to live in a way that reveals the grace of God that has been shown to us through Jesus Christ.

The Reformation was centered on recovering the truth that we receive faith solely as a gift from God by grace through faith. By removing works from our salvation, the focus of our Christian lives shifted from meritorious action to faithful reception. This is the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified: that through His work on the cross, all of our sins have been atoned for, and we have been freely given all of his righteousness.

In Christ,
Lisa Cooper

To submit articles for upcoming editions of The Evangel, please email them to me at theevangel@taalc.org, or mail them to 425 E Lincoln Ave. Watseka, IL, 60970. Please include the author's name and photo credit, along with a way to contact you (either a phone number or email address).



Ripe for Reformation

How would you describe the world? It could be described as besieged by an expanding Caliphate, beleaguered by social unrest, influenced by pervasive secular humanism, and plagued by a general mistrust of all in authority, even those of the Christian religion. How would you describe society's reaction to the Christian faith? One could make the case that while this is a time of genuine spiritual hunger across all age groups and economic strata, it is also a time of societal disconnection from biblical authority, and widespread ignorance of biblical truth.

You may think that I am writing about the United States in the 21st century. I am, in fact, describing Luther's Germany at the beginning of the 16th century. You may not have realized it, but many of the same influences that affected life and faith at the time of the Reformation are affecting life and faith in our time today.

Is it possible that the same kind of spiritual renewal and church-wide Reformation that characterized Luther's day may come to characterize ours as well? Is it possible that the rethinking and reshaping of religious faith and life that God engineered in Luther's day may be in God's plan for our own? Regardless of whether we are destined to be involved in a significant religious movement or just attempting to live a Christian life in our current situation, there are a number of things that we can and should learn from the Lutheran Reformation that will give us helpful guidance in our Christian witness today.

What follows is the first of four articles on the importance of the Reformation for Christian living today.

Justification and Holy Scripture

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted 95 Theses on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg. Luther was responding to a papal fund-raising campaign by Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar who was named the Grand Commissioner of Indulgences and was selling them throughout Germany.

What were indulgences? In exchange for meritorious work or money, the church offered persons relief from God's punishment by drawing from the Treasury of the Merits of Christ and the Saints. The Roman Church taught that even though one had received forgiveness of sins by contrition and confession, because of God's holy righteousness, God still required punishment. If punishment were not completed upon the earth, punishment would continue in purgatory. An indulgence could reduce or even eliminate that punishment!

The Grand Commissioner's terrifying preaching about purgatory and his false promises about indulgences angered Luther. Tetzel claimed that anyone who bought an indulgence would be "cleaner than when coming out of baptism," and that "the cross of the seller of indulgences has as much power as the cross of Christ." He went so far as to declare that an indulgence could apply not only to the living but to the dead. The dead did not need contrition and confession, they simply needed your money. The Grand Commissioner proclaimed, "When your coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!"

Luther's 95 Theses were a call for theological debate about this practice. More than that, the 95 Theses became the spark that lighted the fire of the Reformation. Soon, Luther was required to defend his positions in theological disputa-

tions. Luther would not accept Church tradition or council or pope as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. His sole authority was the Word of God. The sale of indulgences was not found in Holy Scripture. On the contrary, the Bible taught that sin and punishment were imputed to Christ Jesus by grace through faith. Likewise, by faith, Christ's righteousness and forgiveness were imputed to all believers. A theology of the Treasury of the Merits was not found in Holy Scripture either. Christ's mercy and grace were given freely to all those who believe. They certainly were not sold for money! Mary and the saints had no surplus merits, but were sinners just like the rest of us. They did not earn their way into heaven, but relied upon the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, as do all believers.

Debates about indulgences, purgatory, and the Treasury of Merits, plus Luther's continuous study of God's Word, led the Reformer to many profound theological insights. For the sake of this article, we mention only two. The first was the article by which the Church stands or falls: "Justification by grace through faith." Luther realized that human beings continue to try to merit God's favor and earn their way into heaven. The Reformer objected to any claim to being righteous before God based on human merit or achievement. Justification and righteousness were given solely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul writes in Romans 3: 21-24:

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

A second and related truth for Luther was the absolute authority and reliability of Holy Scripture. Luther rejected any unbiblical theology or practice of the Church of Rome, and relied solely upon the Word of God. As he declared to Emperor Charles V and the Electors of Germany at the Diet of Worms in 1521:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God....God help me. Amen

Christian Living Today

Today, the Roman Church continues to claim that humans must perform certain works of faith in order to gain salvation. Even the Sacrament of the Altar is viewed by Roman Catholics as a work of man that is offered to God

for forgiveness and salvation. Of course, this is exactly the opposite of the truth. The Sacrament of the Altar is Christ's gift of forgiveness and salvation that is offered to us and received by faith.

Many Protestants have lost hold of what Luther called the "chief article," justification by grace through faith. Some erroneously claim that humans are basically good, or that they can cooperate in their conversion, or that they can do good works that merit eternal life. Have they forgotten that we all have inherited the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:12-21); that, as such, we are enemies of God (Rom. 5: 10); and that the wages of our sin is death (Rom. 6:23)? Ultimately, if any part of salvation is dependent upon human actions, works, or merit, we are doomed to failure. More importantly, such teaching directly contradicts Holy Scripture, which declares that before conversion we are dead in our sins (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13), and our justification is by grace alone through faith alone, apart from any works of the Law (Rom. 3:21-28; Eph. 2:4-10). How is it possible for people to lose sight of things taught so clearly in God's Word?

Unfortunately, even some Lutherans have lost sight of the truth of justification by grace through faith. A 1970 survey of nine million Lutherans revealed that 40% believed that they were going to be saved and justified by their works, not by faith alone in Jesus Christ. A study done in 1997 indicated that the number of Lutherans who believe God is satisfied by their good works grew to over 56%. Many important biblical truths like this one have been lost because the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture have been diminished or destroyed in our time.

The articles of faith that we Lutherans hold dear are as important in our day as they were in the time of Luther and the Reformation. It is still crucial that we help all people to recognize their sin before God. It is still essential that we speak the Gospel message that they are justified by grace through faith in Christ Jesus apart from works of the Law. It is still fundamental that we declare to them that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God which is His true proclamation of salvation for them and for people of every time and place.

The Reformation message is still needed today! Declare what we believe, teach, and confess to all who will hear! Be as bold as Luther!

Sources helpful in writing this article are:

Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity (Vol II): The Reformation to the Present Day*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Revised and Updated, 2010), pp. 21-35.

Alvin J. Schmidt, *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity*. (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), pp. 25-49, 291-293.

Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Word Publishing, 1995), pp. 240-246.



See How They Love One Another

by Rev. Richard P. Shields, President of American Lutheran Theological Seminary

In light of the great needs in the world, one suggestive and even tempting quip is heard: “Let the Christian churches show their love for the hurting, the refugees, the persecuted.” John’s first letter proposes a different agenda for the Christians gathered around the Word and sacraments: “love for one another.” Given the atmosphere, attitudes, and languages among Christians (at least in the U.S.), now is a good time to reflect on what John faced and wrote in the first century. John minces no words about love in the life of a Christian—specifically love for other Christians:

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. (1 John 3:14-15 CSB)

What is the culture of love like in our congregations? A real problem for Christians is when our love for others is feigned, and ultimately love is replaced by indifference. What does cooling love sound like? In the tone of dialog. In the descriptions of others. Of course, we don’t always outright reject them or attack them. We don’t have to. We are too subtle for that. So how do we move beyond superficial love? John writes: “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (1 John 3:16 CSB)

Jesus showed us exactly what perfect love is. He sacrificed his own life, not for good people, but for sinners like you and me. He loved in words and in deeds, all in truth. So John asks the first century Christians (and us!) to consider that in our love of other Christians. He explains: “If anyone

has this world’s goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.” (1 John 3:17-18 CSB)

Therefore, the pattern for loving our brothers and sisters in faith—the very people we meet at worship, on the street, in our homes—is Jesus himself. As you read through the Gospels, notice how Jesus loved openly, freely, deeply. None of Jesus’ love was based on what the person could do for Him, but was given unconditionally because the people needed to be loved. And Jesus, being perfect, could do just that.

John concludes this chapter with a summary of the thoughts above, with one specific addition.

Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us. (1 John 3:23-24 CSB)

John adds that we know that Christ and his love remains in us through the Spirit who is given to us. Notice, then, that we not only have the example of Christ loving, we have the Spirit leading us to live in Christ, and to love in Christ.

Such description and hope mean that love is the central aspect of our life together in Christ. Our actions reflect that love. We see those in need in our midst and respond. We speak with one another not “as if we loved them,” but “because we do love them.” May the observation from a second century pagan become a tribute to God’s love in our midst: “See how they love one another.”

People of the Reformation

by Rev. Jordan Cooper

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. In honor of our history, and of God's work in the sixteenth century, throughout the rest of this year, each edition of our magazine will include a segment titled, "People of the Reformation." In each of these articles, unique and important figures in the Reformation are outlined. This is a chance for you to learn more about our history as a church, and of the providential work of God in bringing forth the Lutheran Reformation. In our first installment of this series, we examine three figures: Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, and Johannes Bugenhagen.

Martin Luther, "The Reformer"

Born in November of 1483 in Eisleben, Germany, Martin Luther was raised in a middle-class family with the expectation that he would enter into a profession in law. One night, Luther was traveling in the middle of a storm, and while fearing for his life, he prayed that God would spare him. In exchange, Luther offered his own life to God and promised to take monastic vows. In July of 1505, Martin Luther entered into the Augustinian order in Erfurt. While living in the monastery, Luther devoted himself to rigorous exercises of fasting, confession, and other devotional practices. Martin feared the wrath of God, and struggled deeply



in his faith. For him, God appeared to be a wrathful judge, waiting to punish those who strayed from his will.

Through years of intense spiritual struggle, Martin Luther sought to find help for his profound feelings of guilt and despair. He was often counseled by his superior, Johann Staupitz, who pointed his pupil to the love of Christ. At Staupitz' request, Luther pursued a doctorate in theology, and he took up an intense interest in the writings of the Apostle Paul. At some point between 1512 and 1517, Luther's approach to the Christian faith began to change. He discovered that St. Paul speaks about God's righteousness, not as his anger toward sinners, but as a gift that is freely bestowed on all who believe. This teaching, labeled *justification by faith*, became the touchstone of the Reformation. God is a God of mercy and grace, not merely of wrath and anger.

Luther's newfound discovery of the gospel led to several criticisms of the medieval church. In 1517, Luther posted ninety-five theses on a church door in Wittenberg in opposition to the practice of selling indulgences (a practice wherein one could receive benefits of salvation through donating money to the church). This led to a heated controversy with the Papacy, and eventually resulted in Luther's excommunication from the Roman church in 1520. The following year, Luther was asked to stand before both the emperor and the leadership of the church for a trial. He was asked to recant his views on the Papacy, justification, and other teachings. Luther declared his allegiance to the Word of God over any rulers, whether religious or political, and refused to recant his teachings.

These events led to an official break between Martin Luther and the Roman church, and thus the formation of the Lutheran church. Luther spent the rest of his life lecturing on theology, preaching, and writing. Among all of his writings, the most influential are his Small Catechism and Large Catechism, which have been used for the past 500 years to teach the Christian faith. He is remembered today for his relentless commitment to the truth of God's Word, and of his passion for the good news of Jesus Christ who saves sinners.

Philip Melanchthon, “The Scholar”

Though perhaps not as well-known as his older colleague, Philip Melanchthon was just as important to the success of the Reformation as was Martin Luther. Melanchthon was born in 1497, and received training in both Greek and Latin at a young age. His aptitude for languages and other academic subjects led Melanchthon to the University of Heidelberg where he studied philosophy, along with other subjects. He later gained an intense interest in the study of theology. At the young age of twenty-one, Melanchthon was called to teach Greek at the University of Wittenberg, where a close bond between Luther and Melanchthon was formed.

While Luther spoke boldly and often in haste, Melanchthon was a careful scholar, who spent a long time giving nuance to his ideas. It was Melanchthon, then, who systematized many of Luther's ideas, and defended them in scholarly publications and debates in opposition to various critics. These two very different personalities complimented one another throughout their respective careers. Luther was a prophetic type of figure, who spoke with boldness, but who sometimes did so in a harsh manner. His younger colleague was able to tone down some of this harshness. Melanchthon was scholarly, respectful, and calm, but he was also prone to compromise in areas where such was not possible. Luther pushed him to stand up for truth against error when Melanchthon was reticent to do so. In this way, God used both the strengths and weaknesses of each figure to serve alongside of one another.

Among all of his writings, the most important contribution that Melanchthon made both to the Reformation and to Christianity itself, was the writing of the Augsburg Confession. Though there were a number of men who contributed to the document, Philip Melanchthon was the primary author of the first and most central confession of faith of the Lutheran Reformation. The Augsburg Confession, first published in 1530, outlined the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Reformation, and it continues to define the Lutheran church today. Along with this document, Melanchthon also authored the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* and *The Power and Primacy of the Pope*, which are both included in the 1580 Book of Concord. These documents, along with Melanchthon's commentaries and theological treatises continue to be used by pastors and students of theology today.

Johannes Bugenhagen, “The Preacher”

Though Luther and Melanchthon are—without debate—the most important theologians in the first era of the Reformation, they were not the only figures to significantly impact the church in the sixteenth century. One of

these people is Johannes Bugenhagen. This German reformer was born in 1485 on the small island of Wollin. He had an interest in religious things from his youth, and was ordained as a priest in 1509. Bugenhagen was interested in the study of Biblical languages, as well as philosophy. Unlike Luther, he did not initially have any profound problems with the state of the church, though he was an advocate of certain moderate reforms. In 1520, Bugenhagen encountered Luther's treatise *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Though he initially viewed Luther with suspicion, he was eventually convinced of the truths of the Reformation, and desired to take part in it. Bugenhagen moved to Wittenberg, and was called as the parish pastor at St. Mary's.



Though he left for Wittenberg as a student of the Reformation, Bugenhagen's gifts were quickly recognized by the faculty of the University of Wittenberg. He began lecturing on various theological topics, with an emphasis on Biblical interpretation. After getting called to St. Mary's, Bugenhagen had the additional role of serving as Luther's pastor. Bugenhagen was Luther's spiritual counselor throughout his life, and a deep friendship developed between them. Alongside of Luther and Melanchthon, Bugenhagen published a number of theological treatises in defense of the Lutheran Reformation. Alongside of criticisms of the Roman church, Bugenhagen also wrote against various errors of other Protestant groups. Though not as well-known as writings of some other reformers, these treatises are still published today.

Each figure of the Lutheran Reformation had a distinctive role in their contributions to the reform of the church. Luther was a prophetic figure, who denounced the unbiblical errors of the sixteenth century church. Melanchthon was a scholar who began to formulate Luther's ideas in a clear, systematic, and succinct way. Bugenhagen was, first and foremost, a pastor. In his life we see the implementation of the theology of the Reformation to a congregation, as he serves as an example for all pastors today who seek to be faithful to God's Word.



CELEBRATING FAITHFULNESS. ALWAYS.

by Rev. Joe Christina

As of the date of this writing, there are 231 days until the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. That is, of course, October 31st, 2017.

Also as of the day of this writing, there are 72 days until another anniversary. I am speaking of the anniversary of the Edict of Worms, issued on May 25th, 1521 by then Emperor Charles V. This edict stated (in short) that Luther, his writings and anyone who offered the “heretic” safe haven were to be outlawed. It quite literally put Luther’s life at risk simply for standing up for the eternal truths of the Gospel and God’s—NOT Luther’s—Word.

There is without question a sense of celebration and joy as we continue during this year to that anniversary of the Reformation. Here at Christus Victor in North Carolina, we have dedicated many special monthly events to that anniversary. The AALC has its own celebration fast approaching that should be nothing short of a blessed experience. We Lutherans—even those of us coming from the more German camps—are “happier” than usual. And as well we should be. The Reformation marks the momentous occasion in history when God, through a once conscience-stricken monk, reformed the church to what it was supposed to be all along. A church of faith in the only God of grace who supplied all that we need for our eternal salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The anniversary of the Edict of Worms perhaps doesn’t carry the same sense of joy as that of the Reformation. In fact, it implies just the opposite. It was a frightening time. A dangerous time. It did not mean a return to the glorious and comforting truths of God’s Word as much as it meant a fleeing from danger and bodily death, which is what Martin would have to do. But it calls to mind a very real and often times necessary trait of Christians living and worshipping in a world that hates us: faithfulness. It calls to mind the time

Peter responded to the Sanhedrin when they ordered him to stop preaching the Gospel of Jesus: “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29). Luther stood firm. He did not recant his writings or his teachings. In fact, he could not at the peril of going against God’s inerrant, infallible, and ruling Word.

This is the 500th year of the Reformation. But it is also the Year of our Lord 2017 and with each passing day, a time closer to the reappearance of our Savior. As such, it is often a perilous time for the flock of Christ on earth. And it will only get more perilous as days and years march on until the days are “cut short” for the sake of the elect as Christ promises (Matthew 24:22). Faithfulness is still a much-needed quality among Christ’s people. Adhering to the truths of God’s Word is as crucial today as it was in the time of Peter and Luther. We have been blessed to be members of a church association that takes these truths very seriously and gives thanks to God for them. And “from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). This includes faithfulness.

But let us never resolve to be faithful out of fear, like a young monk shivering on a cold floor agonizing over his sins. Let us resolve to be faithful out of thankfulness to the One who did not spare his only Son but gave him up for us all. Let us strive for the faithfulness that can only spring from hope in the full and free forgiveness of our sins and a heaven purchased by the blood of the Lamb of God. And let us pray for continued faithfulness to the truths of God’s Word in such a way that gives both October 31st and May 25th reason to celebrate. God’s promises as given in his infallible Word are faithful and true. With the help of Christ, may we celebrate every circumstance as our opportunity to be faithful to the same.

Prayer Bookmark

May

1. Ascension Lutheran *Waterloo, IA*
2. Nigel Brown, seminary student
3. Redeemer Lutheran *West Union, IA*
4. Christ Evangelical Lutheran *Ellis, KS*
5. St. John's Lutheran *Pocahontas, MO*
6. Kevin Bullock, seminary student
7. Mighty Fortress Evangelical Lutheran
Seward, NE
8. AALC leadership
9. Lake Madison Lutheran *Nunda, SD*
10. Michael Callahan, seminary student
11. Association council
12. Ryan Dexter, seminary student
13. Grace Lutheran *Nunda, SD*
14. Tom Elder, seminary student
15. Poplar Lake Lutheran *Fosston, MN*
16. Clergy commission
17. Emmanuel Lutheran *Kelliher, MN*
18. New Hope Lutheran *Newfolden, NM*
19. Kris Johnson, seminary student
20. Kongsvinger Lutheran *Oslo, MN*
21. Trinity Lutheran *Galata, MT*
22. John Linch Seminary student
23. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Presiding Pastor
24. For the lost
25. Abraham McNally, seminary student
26. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran *Sidney MT*
27. Seminary professors
28. Alexander McNally, seminary student
29. Faith Lutheran *Columbus, ND*
30. John Morley, seminary student
31. American Lutheran *Mandan, ND*



Rev. Morley Installed

Parshall, ND

On March 5th, 2017, the Rev. John Morley was installed at the dual point parish in Parshall, North Dakota.



Present at the service were: Pastor Morris Kirchoff, Pastor Steve Lundblom, Pastor John Morley, Pastor David Huskamp, Pastor Scott Neumann, and seminary student Michael Callahan.

Prayer Bookmark

June

1. First Evangelical Lutheran *Parshall, ND*
2. Scott Neumann, seminary student
3. Lucky Mound Lutheran *Parshall, ND*
4. Light of Christ Lutheran *Williston, ND*
5. Oly Olson, seminary student
6. Our Redeemer's Lutheran *Williston, ND*
7. Abiding Grace Lutheran *Gillette, WY*
8. Nathan Rinne, seminary student
9. Sonland Lutheran *Casa Grande, AZ*
10. Janet Price, Seminary student
11. Michael Rokenbrodt, seminary student
12. Rev. Dean Stoner, National Mission Developer
13. Chris Rosebrough, seminary student
14. St. Peter's Lutheran *Elk Grove, CA*
15. Shepherd of the Mountain Lutheran
Frazier Park, CA
16. Mike Stuhr, seminary student
17. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran *Galt, CA*
18. Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran
San Diego, CA
19. Karl Tervo, seminary student
20. Trinity Lutheran *San Pedro, CA*
21. Regional chairmen
22. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran *Yuba City, CA*
23. Charles Upole, seminary student
24. Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran
Albuquerque, NM
25. Brian Vanderlinden, seminary student
26. The Barn Again Lutheran *Tijeras, NM*
27. Regional Mission Developers
28. Emmanuel Lutheran *Bremerton, WA*
29. Andrew Virkus, seminary student
30. Elim Lutheran Brush *Prairie, WA*

Wittenberg Door

Campus Ministry Newsletter

by Rev. Dave Spotts

We seem to live in a world of “fake news.” The world is full of claims. Many are truth claims. But those truth claims are difficult to evaluate. The world of academia runs aground on this problem regularly. So does the Church. Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry regularly attempts to break through the flood of misinformation with careful analysis. Let's give it a try here and now, using a problem that I hear from members of the University community quite frequently.

The problem, stated in brief, is simple. How am I going to tell if I love Jesus? I mean, if I really, really love Jesus? John 14:22-24 is often used to twist our affections around based on this question. Jesus tells his disciple that someone who loves him will “keep” his word. Sometimes this word is clumsily translated “obey.” The word used, *τήρέω*, normally has more to do with valuing and guarding something. In short, the person who loves Jesus is going to care about what Jesus said.

So how do I know if I really love Jesus enough? Often I don't seem to care what he says. That troubles me. Maybe I don't really love Jesus. That would be really sad.

Did you catch what I just did? In fact, that's the kind of internal monologue many of us have on a regular basis. There's an important key to the statement. “That would be really sad.” Yes, it would. What does that attitude tell us about our concern for Jesus' word? If we don't care about it, why would it be sad? It wouldn't be sad at all.

I know many people who have gone through serious times of fear. Fear about whether God will accept them. Fear about whether Jesus really forgave them. “I hope I have been faithful enough.” Let's put an end to that. No, you are not faithful enough. No, I'm not faithful enough. But it isn't about me. It's about Jesus. If we are the least bit concerned about his attitude, we are exactly the people who are valuing Jesus' word. We love him and he loves us.

What do we do in light of this? Maybe, like this disciple, “Judas, not Iscariot,” when the going gets rough we are going to make ourselves scarce. Maybe, like this disciple, we will later emerge from the shadows. After all, Jesus said he'd be there with us. After all, Jesus said he would care for us. There isn't really anything to fear. This is the word of the one who sent Jesus. Thanks be to God.

Celebrating New Life

at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

by Rev. Fred W. Balke

The newly organized Women of Life group at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Franklin, North Carolina launched a Thrivent Action Activity called "Newborn Starter Kits." Thirty to forty kits will be provided for new mothers and newborn babies at the Angel Medican Center in Franklin, NC each month during 2017.

Pictured here are women from Good Shepherd assembling the kits and delivering them to the hospital. A note with each kit reminds the new mothers that each new life is a special gift from God and encourages them to seek God's blessing for their new child through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Photos of the event were sent to the local newspaper in town and published in a recent edition.



The American Association of Lutheran Churches invites you to attend
The 500th Anniversary of The Reformation Celebration
October 31-November 1, 2017

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Deephaven in Wayzata, MN
18360 Minnetonka Blvd, Wayzata, MN 55391-3232



Registration Fee: \$75 per person

Registration Deadline: September 1, 2017

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