

THE LUTHERAN 

MARCH 2013

AMBASSADOR



"In the Cross is ..."

Moments before the cross

BY PASTOR KEN MOLAND

In our time meditating on the passion of Christ, we are led to the closely related term, “compassion.” Our experience at the cross of Christ leads us to wrestle with how God changes us in this “loving contemplation,” as it is put by the hymn writer Walter Shirley. Is our focus on passion or compassion? Does it make a difference?

The phrase, “The Passion of Christ,” has come to refer to His sufferings, especially those of Holy Week when Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world. We are brought face to face with horrific brutality and unimaginable human suffering.

How is that intended to change your life and mine?

One approach has been to seek to generate sympathy in the hearts of the witnesses of His suffering. The goal of this approach is to elicit deep and agonizing empathy with the suffering of Christ, resulting in a deeper love for the Savior. I was struck by this portrayal in “St. John’s Passion” by J.S. Bach as it was interpreted by a very emotive soloist singing the role of Evangelist. It appeared that the emotion of sorrow and pity for Christ was the desired effect. That may, or may not, be a good thing, depending upon where it leads us. If it is merely a human response of sympathy for a suffering Savior, the focus may be misplaced. The devious heart of man may lead us to a human solution for our sin rather than embracing God’s perfect plan for our redemption. Could we be misled to think that the strength of our emotional response to Christ’s sufferings is the way we deal with our sins?



Let me move the focus to compassion, specifically the compassion of Christ. This biblical term puts the initiative where it belongs, in the heart of Christ. The perfect Son of God is moved with compassion to act on behalf of the cold-hearted, self-centered sinner. This strikes home when the reality of law and gospel is rightly exposed at the cross of Christ.

The law of God is graphically displayed and personally applied at the cross. The magnitude of the judgment of the sins of the world and of our own sins brings a godly sorrow that we have offended a holy

God. All things are open and laid bare before Him. A righteous God demonstrates His wrath toward sin as His only Son is forsaken on the cross. Our sorrow, however, does not save us. No amount of contrition or sympathy, however it is elicited or contrived, can lead to peace with God.

It is because of the compassion of Christ that we are not consumed. In the blessed hope of the gospel we are assured of the forgiveness of our sins. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—that is the hope of our salvation! This saves us from the impossible task of measuring our sorrow or sympathy for Christ and evaluating how earnest we are in our empathy. It places the focus on Christ, the compassionate One, through whom the mercy of God is demonstrated unto the salvation of our souls. Let’s take our stand there, beneath the cross!

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*"In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is Life;
in the Cross is protection against our enemies;
in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness;
in the Cross is strength of mind;
in the Cross is joy of spirit;
in the Cross is excellence of virtue;
in the Cross is perfection of holiness.*

*There is no salvation of soul,
nor hope of eternal life,
save in the Cross."*

—Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ



THOMAS À KEMPIS (d 1471), whose writings are the source of this issue's theme, was the author of a devotional classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, which, outside of the Bible, may be the world's most read Christian book. "We may readily admit that if we were limited to the *Imitation* alone, it would not be a fully adequate guide for life. Undoubtedly it does not set forth clearly enough how we come to Christ, though it gives profound guidance as to how we are to follow him" (B.M. Christensen, *The Inward Pilgrimage*, p. 45).



Salvation & Life

By Pastor Scott Guhl

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Many of us can send a simple message as a text or e-mail with no personal interaction. The problem is that without personal interaction, the message can get lost in translation. Consider this: The Byrds, the Doobie Brothers, and DC Talk recorded the song, “Jesus is Still Alright with Me,” which sends the message that Jesus Christ is acceptable to many in our culture. The thought in this song is right in line with Mahatma Gandhi and others who have conveyed the message: “We are okay with Jesus and some of the ideas he stood for.”

Often times what is said is not as important as the tone used to convey the message. Then again, isn't hypocrisy a powerful message? One man said that while he simply chooses not to believe in God, he still finds the blatant hypocrisy of many Christians around him to be a powerful message demonstrating that their belief system must not rest in the power of the God they claim to serve. Many a pastor's kid, including my own, can say that the man who stands up front on Sunday is not always the same man seen and heard around the house.

The central message of American culture revealed through mainstream media is approval and reward for envy and selfish ambition. The results are evident: disorder and evil practices. The power behind the advertisements that perpetuate our media-driven world is the invitation to enjoy more pleasure. Likewise, Satan guaranteed divinity to our original ancestors, Adam and Eve. This message only serves to help mankind rationalize disobedience by overlooking future consequences and eventual judgment. The ongoing message is that through the purchase of the latest model, anyone can tangibly enjoy salvation from the older model's deficiencies.

Universally, there is one message—agreed upon by a minority of people, celebrated, told and re-told, heralded, taught, sung about, and preached—that is foolishness and power at the same time: the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. It is this message that has led to the martyrdom of the saints for centuries, to the passionate and faithful activities of the body of Christ, and to world-wide evangelization efforts through Bible translation, church planting, Bible

schools, and many forms of humanitarian care. The simple message of the cross is the engine resulting in the great and small activities of the Church fueled by the Holy Spirit.

The crux of the matter is the personal nature of this message. For example, the self-absorbed church-goer does not really help convey the message of the cross to the heart of the widow sitting in the back row. The Bible Study on Wednesday night may alienate a percentage of our society that is shy and exceedingly in-going. And the business of the church calendar may actually keep a few zealous people running while it prevents true conversations around the doughnuts at fellowship time. The personal nature of the message of the cross is conveyed through the one who realizes he or she is born with the sin-switch turned to the “on” position, but has been made new by Christ's work on the cross.

This message sounds ridiculous and almost unnecessary compared to a new iPhone and Siri answering all down-to-earth questions. The barrage of text messages and e-mails may drown out the simple Word being read. Work and sport schedules circumvent regular Sunday morning worship. Fatigue following too many late nights easily creates the inability to personally unravel how the message of the cross can become personal once again. Are we inside the church still being saved by the same message that caught our attention the first time?

Remember when you first heard and understood the message of the cross, and it wasn't foolish anymore? Can you remember your response? Maybe you got on your knees and confessed your sins out loud before Holy God for the first time with joy. Maybe you sat quietly aware of the mystery God had revealed to you, as you wondered who else around you was truly aware of the significance of the message you had previously ignored. Or, maybe you stood and sung out a hymn of praise along with the rest of the congregation, feeling for the first time you were really a member of your church. The personal nature of the message of the cross is that it is the same message today as it was when you first heard it.

The message of the cross is life to those who are being saved and it is salvation to those who know they would otherwise be damned. When this message becomes personal, then it becomes our objective reality and the only pertinent message worth sharing.

Guhl serves St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill.

Protection against enemies

By Pastor Scott Stroud

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before the presence of his glory with great joy ...” (Jude 24).

When Jesus rescued me from my life of sinfulness, I was in the middle of a four-year prison sentence for armed robbery. Having been in prison I can relate to the need for protection in a very tangible way. My desire for safety came in two different forms.

First there was the desire to be protected from the other men who were serving time alongside me. I never knew when a convict might be having a bad day and just snap. Maybe some new charges had surfaced against him and he was facing an additional sentence. I remember one guy who almost went ballistic on me for dropping one of his socks while I was setting his load of laundry on the top of the dryer to make room for my wet load.

There were a couple of ways I increased my chances of protection against the other inmates. The first was to surround myself with a group of friends (a gang) because loners were singled out more regularly. The second was to lift weights and train to fight. Guys who didn't have a gang or were too weak checked themselves into the isolation cell block. They spent most of their sentence in a cell by themselves fearing the general population.

But the inmates were not the only ones I needed protection from. I also feared what the guards could do to me. My life was literally in their hands. Convicts who got on the bad side of the guards had a very difficult time. Guards had the power to tell you when and where you could go. They had power over the type of job you had from day to day. They could even use physical force to subdue you if they felt that you were a threat in any way to the peace of the prison.

There were certain things we did to try and protect ourselves from the wrath of the guards. The first was to steer clear of them. If that didn't work you could try to make friends with them.

The bondage of this present life reminds me of a prison. The Devil and his minions are like those prison bullies who want to harm us. Satan and his demons are sentenced to death and want to do anything they can to steal our freedom, kill us, and destroy any blessing we may have.

For those who are not Christians, there is One who also seems like our enemy. Like the ultimate prison guard, the warden, God is watching over His world with an iron fist and will punish disobedience with severity and finality. Our strategy for protection does not work with God. We cannot avoid Him because He is omnipresent. And we cannot befriend Him because He will not tolerate convicts in His presence. Protection is impossible on both counts.

There is irony, then, when mankind realizes the most unlikely source of protection from God's wrath—His own Son.

God's plan of salvation is much like a warden sending his own son to prison in order to offer protection from bullies like the Devil and his minions as well as the guards' wrath. But Jesus didn't offer the kind of protection most prisoners would expect. He didn't form a super gang to defend His people. And He didn't stage a prison break and lead His followers to freedom.

Instead, like a prisoner sentenced to death, one day Jesus was led down a particular hall. It was a place dreaded by everyone in prison: Death Row. Prisoners prayed and cried in their cells as the lights dimmed and then surged. The One who had the power to offer them protection was gone.

The full purpose of God's protection was revealed when, a few days later, Christ overcame our ultimate enemy—death. Can you imagine as a prisoner receiving a letter of pardon between the bars of your cell? The top of the letter would read, “Now [from] him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (Jude 24). The rest of the letter would explain that the warden had allowed his son to die in order to pay the debt owed by each prisoner. He was offering a full pardon for anyone who chose to accept it.

Can you imagine, then, that some would just laugh, tear up the letter of pardon, and return to their normal way of trying to protect themselves from their enemies?

But for those who believe, not only is there a full pardon, but God also offers special protection from the thugs of this world. His Son's sacrifice means release from the bondage of this present life.

Stroud serves at St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif.





*Infusion of
Heavenly
sweetness*

By Clara Gunderson

This morning I read once again the account of the crucifixion of Christ as recorded in each of the four gospels, seeking understanding of what at first appeared to me to be a paradoxical phrase by Thomas à Kempis: "... in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness ..."

Death—cruel, undeserved death. How could the human mind put such a label on it? The point, I realize, is the word "infusion." Infused with what? By whom? Each question is answered by that very familiar Bible verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." God, our heavenly Father, infused the cross with the sweetness of His unconditional love, His undefeatable power, His unlimited grace and unending mercy, His unfathomable peace in forgiveness, and His unequalled victory over sin.

Rereading these accounts the Spirit touched my heart and showed me this sweetness anew in the circumstances unfolding and the words Jesus spoke as He suffered. As I meditated on these few verses that say so much, I saw the truth in Jesus' example as evidenced in lives around me.

Most recently this was shown to me through the testimony of a young lady at the funeral of her father. He had not known Jesus as his Lord and Savior throughout his life, though she knew him as a very loving father. She shared with us the beautiful story of his being diagnosed with cancer and his struggle throughout the illness. Through prayer and Scripture reading, in the throes of this terminal sickness, he came face to face with his own spiritual needs, and like the dying thief next to Jesus, he called out for mercy. As the thief received the assurance of eternal life, so did this father. Today he is in the presence of his Lord.

Touched by this story, I thought of the heavenly sweetness of God's grace infused into the lives of the parents who lost first one son and then a second to illness, both in the prime years of their lives. The compassion of Jesus for His mother as she witnessed the cruel death of this, her beloved child, shows how deeply He loved her. Mary, as these parents, was infused with heavenly love and could go on living. The acceptance of God's grace in my friends' lives, grace to heal, has always been a great witness to me.

The word *infused* has a very clear meaning in the dictionary: to pour in, inspire, steep or soak. I love the depth of it! It seems to indicate that the amount necessary to appropriate the good from that which is being given will never fall short.

When you think of forgiveness, that sweet gift from the Lord,

doesn't your heart rejoice and sing with the joy of it? Think of the peace it brings to you each day. I've always been so impressed with King David's total assurance of God's forgiveness, as he prays in Psalm 32:5, "... and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." Nothing remained that could be held against him.

The cross was steeped in heavenly forgiveness for you and me, for those whose hands nailed Jesus to the cross, as well as for those who shouted, "Crucify Him!" "Father," Jesus prayed, "forgive them for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Stephen, in Acts 7:60, mirrored this same forgiving spirit as he, too, prayed that God would "... not hold this sin against them," even as the stones hurled at him crushed him to death.

Corrie ten Boom knew something of this miraculous gift of forgiveness. She, too, was a receptacle of God's gracious infusion of love for her enemies. I love the response she gave when asked about her feelings regarding her jailers after her release. She said something like, "I distinctly remember forgetting that." Heavenly sweetness! I want to live with that attitude in my life: Forgiveness freely received, freely given.

It was because Jesus was obedient to the end, both living and dying to save the world, that we can live victoriously, infused by His Spirit. It was because of His humility and obedience that the final glory will be His as well. Paul writes in Philippians 2:9-11:

Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We see a glimpse of that in the words of the Roman centurion upon witnessing Jesus breathing His last: "... he began praising God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent'" (Luke 23:47).

I read somewhere that the early Christians would greet one another with the words, "Jesus is Lord," thus identifying themselves as true believers. As we worship Him each Lord's day, celebrating the victory of the resurrection, we, too, are identifying ourselves as His followers. As we sing our praises to Him, receive His Word and the elements of His supper, we are, indeed, being infused with His heavenly sweetness.

Gunderson, Cambridge, Minn., is a member of Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

Strength of mind

By Renee Oscarson

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

During the past few years, I have pondered what it means to have the mind of Christ when one’s mind is weak. In our society, dementia and mental illness might be viewed as examples of weak minds. I know of two people from my workplace who have recently left due to diagnoses of Alzheimer’s disease. My grandfather and mother both had dementia. I am at risk. My mind is weak.

In the cognitively obsessed culture in which I work, “strength of mind” is assessed by initials after one’s name, grant dollars, publications, and scores on student opinion surveys. In other settings, organizational results, IQ tests, productivity, financial independence, or other numbers might measure “strength of mind.”

Instead of bowing to western culture, Christ-followers are to “let this mind be in [us] which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:9, NKJV). What does it mean to have strength of mind characterized by Christ-likeness? What does Jesus’ mind look like, and how do we have minds that are like His mind?

Jesus is the ultimate example of humility. He gave up the glory of heaven in order to become human, and He suffered death on the cross—for us. Philippians 2 tells us that humility in our relationships with other believers will be evidenced by unity, lack of conceit, and service to others. Humility regarding our own weaknesses will be evident by openness to receiving help.

I am thankful that Jesus humbled Himself to come to earth, and that while on earth, He interacted with society’s outcasts. Many people seem reluctant to associate with those who have weak minds, or are unwilling to spend time with those who have been rejected by mainstream society. Even Jesus was accused of being “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). To what extent do we welcome “the least of these?” (Matthew 25:40)

Jesus’ mind is also described in the Gospels. For example, Jesus knew Scripture and was committed to doing His Father’s will. To what extent do we seek to know and obey Scripture? Do we have a singular focus on submission to the Father’s will?

Doesn’t knowing and obeying Scripture require that I can read, think straight, and act on it? What happens when I am unable

to read Scripture or to serve others? Does the command to have Christ’s mind in me no longer pertain?

By caring for Mom when she had dementia, and through my own experiences of depression, I’ve learned that a Christ-like strength of mind is unrelated to the world’s measures of success and productivity. My sinful tendency toward stubborn self-sufficiency is the antithesis of a Christ-like mind. In reality, I cannot in my own strength take care of myself, let alone anyone else. I am dependent on His grace.

Have you been in a position for a period of time where you felt unable to contribute, unable to be productive, completely depleted of strength, and dependent on others? How did (or do) you respond? I need frequent reminders of my own weakness to recognize my complete dependence on Him.

In reference to his request that his “thorn in the flesh” be removed, Paul wrote, “And [the Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’” (II Corinthians 12:9). True strength of mind occurs only in weakness, for it there that His strength and grace are evident. When I turn to Him in my weakness, He redeems that weakness and demonstrates His strength. Paradoxically, complete weakness is total strength. “Fellowship in [Christ’s] sufferings” (Philippians 3:1) is part of developing the mind of Christ, transforming us into His likeness.

In Philippians 3, Paul wrote about his own journey toward Christ-likeness. Paul was a well-educated, accomplished success. Yet, he recognized that success as it was and often is measured is “rubbish,” but knowing Christ was and is everything.

Our minds, as individuals and as a group, are to “press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14). Christ *is* everything.

Because of the mind of Christ in us, we have humility and hope. We have assurance that His grace is sufficient in our weaknesses—including dementia. And we know that we will have complete understanding, knowing true strength of mind, on that day when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

Oscarson, an associate professor of human development and gerontology at South Dakota State University, Brookings, is a member of Bethany Free Lutheran, Abercrombie, N.D.



May the mind of Christ, my Savior live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling all I do and say.
May the Word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph only through His power.
May the peace of God my Father rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

—Kate B. Wilkinson



By Pastor J. Christian Andrews

“... and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9, NASB).

One of the character traits with which my eighth grade language arts students are quite concerned is fairness. They are not so concerned that they are fair or unfair. They are very concerned that I am fair. I often hear the complaint, “That’s not fair,” when I give them an assignment they think excessive or when they perceive that another student is being treated better than they are.

My response is usually, “Don’t tell me about life not being fair.” I have a great litany of examples of the unfairness of life. Some of them I have shared with my students, most I have not. They are, most of them, aware that in 2006, after nearly 27 years of marriage, I became a widower. None of them are aware that just about every one of those 27 years included a bitter battle with mental illness. Shortly after my late wife’s death, a good friend consoled me with his insight that he had been impressed by my faithfulness in a very challenging situation. We came to the conclusion that I had indeed been chosen to care for one of God’s precious daughters through her struggles in this life and that I had now been released from that charge. My life might now find some semblance of “normal,” but that prospect didn’t necessarily take away the sting of death.

Days after my dad had a brain aneurysm the following winter, I flew back to Minnesota to sit with Mom in the hospital while he received treatment. Dad was in an induced coma, the hope being that reduced body and brain activity would help him heal. The first night I was there, the doctor suggested we should gather the family. Pressure was mounting in Dad’s skull, and the doctor believed his death was near. Those of us close enough to be there gathered around Dad’s bed in prayer. He survived the night and those that followed. I had to get back to my responsibilities long before he was taken out of his coma. I got all choked up and tears came to my eyes as I thanked Dad’s care team in the intensive care unit of the hospital. I’m not sure why, but I wonder if I was just not ready to

face death again. It has been six years. The brain damage is significant, but we continue to enjoy his presence in this life.

Life is like that, I guess, full of things that aren’t fair, things that bring despair, things that hurt, things that cause sorrow and mourning. That’s not to say that there aren’t things in life that are also good: happy times, peaceful times, new love times, times to laugh and have fun. But for some reason it seems the hard times stick with us harder and the hard times bring back the strongest emotions. Unless ...

One of the greatest joys of knowing Jesus has been the perspective a personal relationship with Him has given to the unfairness of life. The cross and Christ’s suffering for the brokenness in our lives



Joy of Spirit

give a whole new meaning to our suffering. The cross and Christ's suffering mean that God in Christ has won the victory over sin, death, and hell. Because Christ has won the victory, we can know that our suffering is only temporary. Because Christ has won the victory, there is victory in our death.

Dienne died on a Saturday night. I didn't preach that next day, but I did take the pulpit the following Sunday. I don't remember that I really had a text. I do remember, however, the content of what I shared. The only thing that made any sense was how the cross brought meaning and even joy in the midst of grief. She had been released from her earthly suffering; she was singing with the angels; she was sitting with her Father, the one Who had adopted her

through baptism and her participation in the cross of Christ, and had now called her home.

Because of the cross, her joy was complete. And because of the cross we, too, while still in this life can know a joy that surpasses not only all that is not fair in this life, but also all that is good. We can really only have and know this joy when we are in that most wonderful of all relationships with God made possible through the cross of Christ.

Andrews teaches eighth grade language arts at Hillview Middle School in Palmdale, Calif., and serves Evergreen Lutheran Church (Independent), Phelan, Calif., on a part-time basis.



Virtue & Holiness

By Pastor Jason Gudim

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Romans 7:15).

Romans 7 is a remarkable chapter. In it, the Apostle Paul—as a Christian—wrestles with the presence of sin in his life. This struggle is most evident in verses 7-25. Paul goes round and round with himself, saying things like, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing,” (vs. 19). He breaks down and confesses in verse 24, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

I shudder to think what some Christians would say to Paul if they encountered him in a struggle like this today. Would he be labeled as a backslider? Would he be accused of failing to be “in the world, but not of it”? Would he receive a lecture on compromising his faith?

Situations like these are easy to envision today, mostly and unfortunately because they are so common. They are so common (mostly and unfortunately) because we as Christians, some 2,000 years after the cross, have almost completely missed the mark when

it comes to sanctification.

We live in a world where “deeds not creeds” reigns. We want to see results and progress in our lives and in the lives of the believers around us. This has led to an over-emphasis, or at least a misunderstanding, of the doctrine of sanctification.

The most common definition of sanctification that I have heard is, “the process of being made more holy.” A key passage in the understanding of sanctification is 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”

It’s easy to see a need for action when we compare our lives to God’s standard of holiness. But soon, this need for action becomes the means to the end, the means to our sanctification. What happens next is that sanctification, holy living, becomes our contribution to salvation, which leads us to think: “Jesus got me to this



point. He died on the cross for my sins by taking my place and the punishment I deserved. But now it's my job to make that worth something in my life. Holiness is what I produce in response to what God in Jesus Christ has done for me."

That's a dangerous line of thinking, friends. If we continue down that path, sooner or later we find ourselves in a religion of works righteousness, where my holiness before God is dependent on what I do.

In contrast to this, the Bible says, "Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption," (I Corinthians 1:30). Jesus is our sanctification!

In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther wrote, "God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves."

Sanctification is a daily return to the cross, where we remember that Jesus is our everything. It is on the cross where Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). If it is indeed finished, then Jesus

doesn't need our help to complete what He started.

Any credit we get before God as we stand before Him comes from Jesus. He is our righteousness. The very best of what we could bring before God is nothing more than "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

Yes, we are identified as Christians by our fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). But it is fruit that Jesus produces in us and fruit that is for our neighbors, not for God. The things we do, because we are sinners, are done with ulterior motives and a need for recognition that satisfies personal pride.

The excellence of our virtue and the perfection of our holiness are not areas of our spirituality that God has left up to us. Rather, they are two more opportunities God has given us to look back to the cross, where His one and only Son took our place and washed us clean with His very own blood. And that is something we can always rely on and never doubt.

Gudim serves Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

AFLC youth workers meet for winter retreat



TOP LEFT: Matt Rieniets, Williston, N.D., shares about an experience he had with a youth.
TOP RIGHT: Greg Anderson, Fergus Falls, Minn., leads a session on nurturing community.
MIDDLE LEFT: Nearly 70 youth workers attended the retreat at the ARC.
MIDDLE RIGHT: Christina Osthus and Todd Waldie talk about challenges in youth work.
LEFT: Brandon Marschner, an AFLTS student, takes part in a table discussion group.
ABOVE: Pastor Eric Christianson interacts with a table discussion group.

BROKEN

Isaiah 53

BY NATE OLSON

Broken. What comes to your mind when you see that word?

Do you think of broken families that have crumbled through divorce? Or of a young woman, broken hearted after being rejected by her boyfriend? Maybe you've seen parents who have come to a place of brokenness with their child. Or a news report that has left you speechless.

The reality is our world is full of brokenness and desperate circumstances. You probably don't have to think hard to remember the hurt and pain seen on a daily basis.

The truth is that brokenness only comes as a result of sin. God did not design the world to be broken and shattered, rather, to be perfect and complete.

However, mankind went against that design. Ever since that day in the Garden of Eden, the brokenness that results from sin has continued to show itself in our lives. Each and every day, what God made good, we take and pervert into evil. Left to ourselves, we would be utterly destroyed and hopeless.

"But, God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5, ESV).

You see, God loves us too much to let us stay in our place of brokenness. Perhaps this Lenten season you've heard of another example of brokenness as a result of sin. It is in this season we remember that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, was broken for the sins that you and I have committed.

As Isaiah the prophet writes, "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

You see, the great and glorious news this season is that Christ came to be broken for us, so that we may be restored back to God as forgiven sinners. This should not be glanced over lightly, as the seriousness of this means that Christ, the God of the universe, was crushed for our sin. He didn't have to die; He had done no wrong. Nevertheless, Christ took upon Himself the sin of us all in order that you and I might be brought into a right relationship with God.

God proclaims this truth through the Apostle Paul, that "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (II Corinthians 5:17).

This summer at the 2013 FLY convention, the theme "Broken" will allow us to look at both of these components. First, our inherent brokenness due to sin, and second, Christ's brokenness to pay the price for that sin. In a culture that is hurting and is without hope as it looks to the things of this world, we stand to proclaim the truth of the gospel, that Christ has brought healing for our hurting.

Olson, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, is the second vice president of the Free Lutheran Youth.



TOP RIGHT: Dr. Francis Monseth (right) and Loeffel Dyrud take part in a panel discussion on "Georg Sverdrup and Controversy." ABOVE: Pastor Terry Olson, who led devotions, presents a paper by Pastor Stephen Mundfrom on "The Free Congregation and the Pure Congregation."

Sverdrup Society hosts campus forum



Members of the Georg Sverdrup Society hosted a discussion forum Feb. 1 in the AFLC chapel building under the theme, "Georg Sverdrup and Controversy." The schedule included three sessions: "Sverdrup and the Missourians" by Dr. Francis Monseth, "The Free Congregation and the Pure Congregation" by Pastor Stephen Mundfrom, and a panel discussion.

Paccha speaks at Mission Conference

Pastor Darwin Paccha, a 2006 graduate of AFLTS, was the evening speaker during the annual AFLC Schools Mission Conference held in late January. Paccha came to AFLC seminary from Cuenca, Ecuador, where he now works with a school ministry.

The theme of the conference, held Jan. 27-31, was "From Darkness to Light: Jesus is the Only Hope of This World."

Mission programs were highlighted throughout the conference, including presentations made by AFLC World Missions and Home Missions, Voice of the Martyrs, and World Mission Prayer League.



Partnership opportunities available in oil field ministry

The AFLC Commission on Evangelism is spearheading the formation of a new AFLC outreach ministry to the oil fields of North Dakota. After several assessment trips to the affected area, members of the Commission have formulated a plan of outreach and are asking for missionaries to volunteer for this ministry.

Two opportunities are available. The first is for men to go and live in the man camps and work in the oil fields in western

North Dakota. "These men would have the opportunity to live out their faith while making a living," states the Commission of the tent making ministry. Financial help and a short training session will be available to begin the ministry.

The second opportunity to join in this ministry is to become a driver of a ministry truck, which will be used to meet truckers while they are on the road in western North Dakota. The convertible truck will

be used as a respite site for those who need refreshing, as well as spiritual encouragement. The Commission will consider couples for this ministry.

Please pray for this new outreach and the many men it could reach for the gospel. For more information, contact AFLC Evangelism at evangelism@afcl.org or call (763) 545-5631.

God's work in Iran

BY PASTOR CRAIG WENTZEL

When my Aunt Ruth passed away, a trip into her attic revealed that her house was really an addition to the original pioneer log cabin first built by my uncle's family when they homesteaded the land. We discovered several old trunks that they had brought with them when they emigrated from Norway. When we put them up for sale at auction, several only sold for \$1 each.

If we had found an old locked trunk or box that we didn't have a key for and which we thought looked valueless, what would we have done with it? We probably would have ignored it, put it aside until we found a key, or discarded it as useless.

To many Americans, the nation of Iran has been like an old box that has been locked away since the 1979 revolution against the Shah of Iran. As Muslims, Iran's people have been spiritually locked away from the good news of Jesus and His salvation. That lock has become even stronger recently as political legislation has sought severe punishment for those who leave the Islamic faith—even death. Without a key to get in, American Christians may be tempted to ignore this possible mission field, postpone going there until the situation changes, or completely discard it as a useless cause.

Through the encouragement of a recent contact, members of the AFLC World Missions Committee have recently been considering the work God is doing in Iran. In an article in *Mission Frontiers* ("Today's Iranian Revolution: How the Mullahs Are Leading the Nation to Jesus," September-October 2008), author Krikor Markarian recounts the great things God is doing within the locked box of Iran in order to help its people break out of the spiritual prison of Islam. "The story of how this has come about is perhaps one of the most intriguing examples of God's sovereignty at work to accomplish his unchanging purposes among the nations," writes Markarian.

According to Markarian's article, American missionaries began working among the Persian Armenians (the original Christians in Iran) in the 1960s, establishing a "bridge people" between Muslims and Christians. Markarian writes that several factors contributed to an exponential growth among Iranian believers, including persecution of the Church in Iran and the assassination of its leaders. Also, "a silent rebellion among Persian young people (70 percent of Iran is under the age of 30) was



beginning to build momentum." The rebellion was spurred on by the harsh restrictions of Islamic law, and a love of anything the government is opposed to, such as Americans, the Christian Church and the Bible. The Armenian churches began to grow and "open their doors to Persians and to use the Farsi language in their services," writes Markarian. Also facilitating the growth of the gospel in Iran was Christian satellite broadcasting, which began to reach every home in Iran starting in 2000. The result of these forces, writes Markarian, has meant that "at least one million have already become believers, and many millions more are on the verge."

One of the trunks we found in my aunt's attic was red and white with rosemaling decorations and the year "1876" painted on it. It turned out to have an unexpected value of \$750 at auction. What kind of value will Iran finally have in Jesus' Kingdom?

God has also given us a key with which to unlock Iran from the outside—the Word of God in Farsi. Markarian writes, "There is tremendous hunger and widespread demand for the Bible," and, "Interestingly, the only churches in Asia and North Africa that survived the Islamic occupation were those that had the Scriptures in their own language." Pray with us that God would provide the key of His Word to unlock the locked box of Iran.

Wentzel, who serves Living Word Lutheran, Edmore, N.D., is the chairman of the World Missions Committee.

Conference housing info now available

Housing information is now available for the Annual Conference, which is scheduled for June 11-14 at the Association Retreat Center located near Osceola, Wis. The ARC has many housing options available on site, including both motel-style and dormitory options. Camping sites are also available on site. Housing registration for the ARC is available on its Web site at www.arc-aflc.com. More information is also available by contacting the ARC by phone at 715-294-2877 or e-mailing info@arc-aflc.org.

Rooms have also been blocked off for the conference at nearby hotels. They include:

- Holiday Inn Express, St. Croix Falls, Wis. (16-mile drive)
Phone: (800) 315-2621
Web site: hiexpress.com
- River Valley Inn and Suites, Osceola, Wis. (8-mile drive)
Phone: (888) 791-0022
Web: osceolarivervalleyinn.com
- Super 8, New Richmond, Wis. (16-mile drive)
Phone: 715-246-7829
Web site: super8.com
- AmericInn, New Richmond, Wis. (16-mile drive)
Phone: (800) 634-3444
Web site: americinn.com

AFLTS professors, students attend ETS convention

“Caring for Creation” was the theme of the annual convention of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), meeting in Milwaukee, Wis., on Nov. 14-16, 2012. More than 2,200 members were registered, with approximately 900 workshops scheduled, representing the various areas of theological education. AFLC seminary professors Jerry Moan and Robert Lee, together with students Rob Edwards, Jerrell Hein, Kurt Hein, and Ryan Tonneson attended. Next year’s convention will be held in Baltimore, with “Inerrancy of God’s Word” as the theme.



Pastors and lay leaders gather for prayer during the Home Missions leadership retreat.

Home Missions leadership retreat

Meeting under the theme, “The Shepherd and His Flock,” pastors and lay leaders from AFLC Home Missions congregations gathered at the Association Retreat Center Jan. 21-22 for a winter conference.

The retreat included an evening vespers service and several workshops led by AFLC pastors, including “Feeding the

Shepherd” and “Leading the Flock” by Ollie Olson, Spring Valley, Calif.; “Organizing the Sheep” by Wade Mobley, Sioux Falls, S.D.; “Protecting the Flock” by Home Missions Director Paul Nash; “Protecting the Shepherd” by AFLC President Elden Nelson, and a time of testimonies and prayer.



Pastors gather at the Association Retreat Center for the annual Pastor’s Retreat held Jan. 22-24.

AFLC Pastors Retreat held at the ARC

The AFLC Pastors Retreat was held Jan. 22-24 at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. The schedule included evening services and a morning Bible hour led by Pastor Craig Wentzel. Several AFLC pastors led workshops, including “The Country Parson” by Terry Culler, “The Congregation in Scripture” by Martin Horn, “The Pastor’s Physical Health” by Tom Olson and “Equipping Marriage Mentors” by Lee Hoops.



Casting a vision

BY LORI WILLARD

Vision prepares us for what lies ahead. Have you ever wondered, “Are we pursuing God’s plan or our plan for our group?” Our ultimate desire is to do God’s will, and that begins with prayer—asking Him to reveal His desires. Prayer prepares our hearts to accept God’s vision. Who knows better what lies ahead than God?

According to the *American Dictionary of the English Language* (Webster, 1828), in Scripture vision is “a revelation from God; an appearance or exhibition of something supernaturally presented to the minds of the prophets, by which they were informed of future events.”

One Scripture reference comes to mind when I think of vision: “Where there is no vision, the people perish, but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18). A search in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* connects “vision” with “divine communication.”

Members of the national WMF board met to decide how we could best serve you in 2013 and beyond. Our task was to present a proposal to a grant committee. As we prayerfully discussed possibilities, the Lord impressed on us the need to personally offer our services to our 16 districts and local WMFs. The grant money was awarded to provide you support for hosting an event to develop or strengthen your district or local WMF.

Vision Seminars

We know our WMF groups throughout the country are already are serving the Lord by seeking His guidance. We desire to serve you by providing your groups with tools or information which could assist your organization through implementing Vision Seminars. We are committed to come alongside and pray with you as you seek the Lord’s plan for your group and cast a vision for your future.

We plan to hold seminars with various AFLC women’s groups

to help them develop a vision for outreach into their communities; to renew God’s vision for women; to help ladies determine God’s call for them as a group; and to provide money to reduce or eliminate the costs of their event through the awarded grant monies.

Your national WMF board officers are committed to come and present WMF ministries with local groups. These ministries include missionary information, mission events, Bible studies, projects, and local and district organizations. Board officers will also work with your local WMF to inspire growth and outreach and facilitate brainstorming sessions. They will also be available for your events, to answer questions, to offer planning assistance, conduct a Bible study and speak for your event. In addition, bulletin inserts and posters are available to you for your Vision Seminar.

Members of the national WMF board will contact local groups to discover your needs and provide whatever assistance you may desire. In the meantime, consider our commitments to you. Let us know what areas you would like addressed at your Vision Seminar. If you wish to contact us first, call Dawn Johnson (WMF executive secretary) at 715-772-4454 or e-mail wmf.es@aflc.org.

Travel expenses for a representative from the national WMF board to visit each district or local WMF are covered through Women’s Outreach Coordinator (WOC) funds. Event expenses will be taken from Vision Seminar grant upon request.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” We are looking forward to being with you!

Willard, second vice president of the national WMF, is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Everett, Wash.

AFLC memorials: January

AFLBS

Ruth Claus

AFLTS

Pastor Orville Olson

Ambassador Institute

Rosella Kasperon

General Fund

Julian and Ardyce Harstad

Melvin Finstrom

Home Missions

Astrid Heyen

Pastor John Ottesen

World Missions

Lynn May

Melvin Finstrom

Hansen remembered for work on AFLC campus

A funeral service for H. Donald Hansen, 90, was held Feb. 2 at Dovre Free Lutheran, Winger, Minn. He died Jan. 28 and is survived by his wife, Margaret, and four children.

It has been said that Hansen “came with the property” on Medicine Lake in Plymouth, Minn., with it was purchased in 1964, having previously worked for the Hauge Federation. He served in the headquarters and on campus in several capacities for many years until his retirement.

According to Pastor Raynard Huglen, founding editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, “Don was always a keen Bible student and occasionally brought the message at chapel services.”

Editor’s note: Don was able to attend the 50th anniversary conference of the AFLC in Thief River Falls, Minn., last June, and it was a pleasure to visit with him again. He was an encouragement to me and to others, and a gift from God to our AFLC family. Blessed be his memory.

Iverson remembered

Eileen (Tande) Iverson, 64, of Ferndale, Wash., died Jan. 27 at Bellingham, Wash., after an extended battle with cancer. Eileen was the wife of Pastor Dean Iverson, who serves Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale.

Born April 28, 1948, in Powers Lake, N.D., she was the daughter of Marvin and Margaret Tande. She grew up on the family farm near Tioga, N.D., where she graduated from high school. She married Dean Nov. 9, 1985, and they moved to Grand Forks, N.D., and then to Houston, Texas, before returning to North Dakota. They moved to Plymouth, Minn., in 2003 so that Dean could attend AFLTS. Upon his graduation, they accepted a call to Ferndale.

Surviving are her husband; one brother, Lyle Tande; two sisters, Beverly Trowbridge and Lenore Tande.

The service was held Feb. 4 at Triumph Lutheran, with Pastor Ken Moland officiating. A service will also be held Feb. 16 at Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Williston, N.D. Memorials may be given to the AFLC Commission on Evangelism.

People and Places

Pastor Al Pinno, president of the AFLC-Canada, was installed as pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Hawarden, Sask., on Feb. 17 by former national president Pastor Gene Sundby.

Pastor Doug Lutz, Sandpoint, Idaho, accepted a call to serve Bethel Lutheran Church, Elbow, Sask.

A funeral service for **Pastor Roger Carlson** was held on Jan. 17 at Hope Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, where he had served for many years. Blessed be his memory.

Carr installed at Tioga congregation



Pastor Richard Carr (front center right) was installed Feb. 10 at Zion Free Lutheran, Tioga, N.D., with Pastor Elden Nelson (front center left), president of the AFLC, officiating. Also pictured are church council members Jim Smithberg, Matthew Rieniets, Bruce Lovdahl, Kris Nielsen, Brian Mickelsen, Ronnie Lund, Henry Rieniets, and Lee Olson.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Jan. 31, 2013

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$34,813	\$34,813	\$25,264
Evangelism	12,303	12,303	14,231
Youth Ministries	15,783	15,783	8,092
Parish Education	9,585	9,585	10,897
Seminary	25,406	25,406	23,179
Bible School	46,137	46,137	26,483
Home Missions	48,831	48,831	83,773
World Missions	44,036	44,036	33,954
Personal Support	42,382	42,382	60,935
TOTALS	\$279,276	\$279,276	\$286,808

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

Grace greater than sin

*Upon the cross the robber prayed;
The Son of God swift answer made:
Yes, Thou shalt rest, I truly say,
With Me in paradise today.*

There's a story behind this Lenten hymn that may have been sung by your congregation this year. It's number 92 in the *Ambassador Hymnal*, with the name and dates of the author noted beneath the text: Hallgrimur Petursson (1614-1674).



Pastor Robert Lee

Petursson, renowned as the sacred singer of Iceland, was reared in a religious home, but turned away from the faith as a young man and traveled to Denmark, the ruler of Iceland,

where he worked as a laborer. A pastor happened to hear him one day, cursing in the Icelandic language, and he would become Petursson's spiritual father, eventually supporting his studies for the Lutheran ministry.

*Hear, in Thy love, my contrite cry:
That malefactor, Lord, am I;
If Thou should'st mark deeds done amiss,
My sin would prove as vile as his.*

In the year 1627 four slave ships from North Africa raided the coast of Iceland, carrying away several hundred captives who were sold in the slave markets of Algiers. After ten years a fund was finally raised to ransom 34 of the survivors, and they were brought to Copenhagen in the midst of much rejoicing. But it was soon discovered that the Christian faith of most

of the ex-slaves had slipped away, as they had been indoctrinated in the teachings of Islam.

This is where Petursson enters the story again, as the young theological student was commissioned to be the religious instructor of the group. History tells nothing of his failure or success, but rather of his infatuation with Gudrid, a beautiful woman who had even caught the eye of an Arab prince during her captivity. Though she had a husband, Petursson began an illicit relationship with her, dropped out of seminary, and together they returned to Iceland where he worked as a laborer. They were finally married after her husband died.

*One truth alone can cheer my soul;
Thou, Lord, didst die to make me whole:
The sacred stream from Calv'ry's hill
Can cleanse e'en this foul heart from ill.*

The pastor who had been Petursson's mentor was now an Icelandic bishop, and, in spite of the fact that his theological studies had never been completed, ordained him as a pastor. The story does not have a happy ending, however, as Islam never lost its hold on Gudrid, which was a great source of grief to the pastor. Then Petursson contracted the dread disease of leprosy, which finally led to his death.

It was during his first years of parish ministry that he composed his famous "Passion Hymns," first published in 1659. This collection, which took three years to complete, consists of 50 hymn poems,

one for each working day of Lent, and for nearly two centuries these devotional classics nourished the spiritual life of the nation as they were sung in home and church. Sadly, they are little known to our English-speaking world, and one will seldom find them in any modern hymnal.

*... for nearly two centuries
these devotional classics
nourished the spiritual life
of the nation as they were
sung in home and church.*

(The one exception is the 1930 *American Lutheran Hymnal*, which includes eight of them.) Petursson's memory is honored in Iceland today by an impressive church building bearing his name, dedicated in 1986, in Reykjavik, the capital city.

*When comes at length mine hour of death,
Thy voice shall soothe my latest breath,
As from the cross Thy mercy cries:
Today, with Me, in Paradise.*

It is hard to sing the words of this hymn without recalling the life and testimony of its author, a man who had sinned greatly but who experienced the grace of a Savior greater than his sins. May each of our readers rejoice in this same confidence.

something to share

A God-designated purpose

BY MOLLY WIESEN

I wasn't standing by a burning bush, but several years ago I had something in common with Moses—excuses and resistance. God said, "I am sending you to Pharaoh ..." (Exodus 3:10). Moses came back with, "Who am I ...?" (vs. 11), "... what shall I tell them?" (vs. 13), "I am slow of speech and tongue" (4:10), and, "Please send someone else" (vs. 13).

One morning in 2003, I opened an e-mail that listed my name as one of the team members on a medical mission trip to Ecuador, thanks to an orthopedic surgeon with whom I previously worked. It didn't take long for me to come up with strong Moses-like resistance. The fear of the unknown attacked my comfort zone with lightning speed. Not wanting to admit I could be afraid of this experience, I readily whipped up some other reasons. Of course, it would be too much money to spend. I doubted I could spare the time from my job. These were "different" people, with a language I had not even studied in high school. What skills as a physical therapist did I have that could be used in that remote location? Worst of all, how could I fix my hair in such a place?

God didn't really accept my lame reasons, anymore than He accepted Moses'. As I write this, I am preparing for my ninth trip with this team to serve the children He appoints in Ecuador, as God gives me strength and provision. I am humbled and tearful as I think of how the Lord took me, in my weakness, insecurity, and limitations, and gave me this work to do. It is not Nobel prize-winning. It does not compete with the great service given by thousands of people who devote their lives to missions and ministry-related

work. Yet Ephesians 2:10 reminds me that I am a unique creation with a God-designated purpose. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Year after year, He shows me so much. I have seen how He cares for me and protects me. He answers prayer, even before I know what to ask for (Isaiah 65:24). Skilled laymen "show up" to adjust wheelchairs. New therapists volunteer to address the ever-increasing work load. He provides people, finances, supplies, and timing for each situation. He shows me there are millions of people in our world with a need for the gospel, for love, and for help. Lives are waiting to be changed. And my life gets changed as I willingly accept the opportunities to serve Him.

When God shows Himself through an obscure farm girl like me, He is honored. Have you discovered all that work "prepared in advance" for you to do? He is ready to do amazing things if you are willing to stretch your comfort zone. So many of us *do* have the financial, physical, and skill set to go beyond the "adequate" and launch into places we never considered—mission trips, adoption, teaching Sunday school, leading a Bible study, helping the homeless, or aiding the orphans and elderly. Are we too busy? Distracted? Unmotivated? Our Savior put service as high priority when He said, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40). What an honor to serve Him.

Wiesen is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran Church, Grafton, N.D.