

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



BEAUTY



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Whatever is lovely.

You might have noticed that art is very important to the *Lutheran Ambassador*. We typically have six articles in our issues that are organized around a theme. Each article is often introduced by a full-color, artistic spread. The *Lutheran Ambassador* isn't a large magazine; why do we devote six of our 24 pages to art?

There are many reasons, and none of them are because we don't have enough content to share with you. One reason is to catch your attention. In our fast-paced world, I suspect not many of us would have the attention span to read two dozen pages of black-and-white, wall-to-wall text. Another reason is to guide you as you flip through each article. Our managing editor carefully and thoughtfully puts together the graphic designs and works of art that fill our pages, all to help frame and serve the content our authors have written.



But mostly, we value art because Scripture tells us to. We include beautiful art in our pages because believers are to value whatever is lovely. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Theologians in the Middle Ages often summarized that list as truth, goodness, and beauty. These three things are called *transcendentals* because they are objective realities that exist beyond what we can see and touch. These three things are hinted at in our world but are truly present in God: God is perfect truth, God is perfect goodness, and God is perfect beauty.

It is easy for us to understand why truth is important. It's also easy for us to get behind things that are good. But beauty often takes a back seat to the other two. Art isn't valuable just because it's artistic. Art isn't valuable only if it comes with an evangelistic tract. Beauty is to be valued, nurtured, and sought after because God is beautiful. Christians should pursue things that are beautiful because beauty points to the One who is ultimately beautiful. The perfect Christ taking your place on the cross and conquering death and sin on your behalf is truly true, good, and beautiful. "Think about these things."

Sophia Lucht, a student at the Free Lutheran Bible College, introduces the theme of this issue with an article about how Christians should interact with art and beauty. We also have three articles exploring specific forms of art. Pastor Christian Einertson, a friend and former classmate of mine, writes an article about physical art and how it has been—and can be—used to teach the faith. From the icons of the early church to the woodcuts of the Reformation, art has a long history in our Christian faith. Dr. Phill Hooper helps us see the beauty of Hebrew literature. The poetical books of the Old Testament are sacred and special. And Robert Vogel, the music director at Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pa., writes about congregational worship as musical art that reflects God's beauty and directs praise to the Lord.

We think believers should care about and pursue beauty that points to Christ, so we've also taken several pages this month to show you some of the best Christian art. This art directs our focus to Christ, teaches us important biblical truths, and shows us what is beautiful.

Two regular columns were introduced last month, and the other two begin in this issue. Our "In the Word" column this year will explore the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. Pastor Clayton Wilfer begins the series with "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Renah Thompson will offer us "Something to Share" on the back cover in these even months.

And as always, please read the Ministry Updates for the latest updates and prayer requests from our AFLC departments and ministries.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland

As long as we live, there is never enough singing.
[Martin Luther (Lecture on Isaiah 6)]

“

Art is valuable in and
of itself as a gift of God.

[Dr. Wes Vander Lugt]

A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God,
not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to
the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology in
itself. [Francis Schaeffer]

Rather than giving in to meaninglessness and despair,
Christian artists know that there is a way out. Thus they
create images of grace, awakening a desire for the
new heavens and the new earth by anticipating the
possibilities of redemption in Christ.
[Philip Graham Ryken]

The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home.
[Augustine]




Whatever is lovely

BY SOPHIA LUCHT

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to teach at a preschool. This was an incredible, unique experience, particularly because of the staff's approach in handling the ups and downs of preschoolers' emotions. They emphasized "recognizing greatness": recognizing the good in every situation, showing it to the kids, and teaching them how to recognize it on their own, even in the worst situations.

At first I was shocked. How was I supposed to find anything good about a screaming tantrum? However, the longer I practiced and was shown how to "recognize the greatness" of God in a situation, the easier it became to not only point out the good things in the bad situations but the best things in the good situations.

This experience changed my spiritual life quite radically. When you're constantly recognizing the goodness of God in the workplace, it's hard not to notice his goodness in everyday life. Even when life hits me with its worst, I've learned to take a step back and recognize that God is, and always has been, good. Psalm 136:1 speaks to this well: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." As the author describes parts of Israel's history throughout the psalm, both the good and the bad, he proclaims between each line



that even when the dirtiest, most horrific things of life come our way, God and his works are still objectively good.

Recognizing God as objectively good in all circumstances changes quite a few things, especially how we view the world. Specifically, it illuminates the idea of the objectiveness of beauty. Though everyone has differing ideas of what is particularly beautiful, there is a distinctly evident idea of objective beauty placed unavoidably into the hearts and lives of mankind alongside other natural laws such as logic, math, and morals. God himself declares how beautiful and good his creation is: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31a). Clearly, we have a very good Creator who has created us and the world around us as “very good.” And though creation was tarnished by sin through the fall in Genesis 3, the goodness of God and his creativity is still evident and objectively beautiful, even in the broken world we live in today.

Once we have been adopted into the Kingdom of God as heirs of the inheritance of eternal life, we have an instinctive desire from the Holy Spirit to do good and reflect the love of Christ in our daily lives. In our extraordinary joy and desire to reflect God, we cannot help but long to create what is lovely and beautiful as a reflection of the good that God has done for us.

We see the calling to creatively reflect God’s goodness when God gave mankind our ultimate vocation. “And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish

of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). When God tells us to go, be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over the earth, he doesn’t exclusively mean that all people need to have a farm and lots of children. Those things are good and certainly within God’s will for us, but this verse goes quite a bit further; it implies that we should be expanding upon and creating with the resources that God has given to us in this world. We are to explore the earth, make history, form cultures, and create art.

Now that we have been filled with the joy and goodness of the gospel, we go and create beautiful, lovely things as a reflection of the good things that God has made and done for us. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

The objective goodness and beauty of what God has done for us is wonderfully evident in our lives. As Christians, we should rejoice in these lovely things alongside the rest of creation as we ourselves create and reflect the lovely works he has done for us. As “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1), let us join together to create what is good and lovely in a reflection of the goodness of our God.

Lucht, a senior at the Free Lutheran Bible College, is a member of Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn. Artwork: “Italian Landscape with Umbrella Pines,” by Hendrik Voogt, 1807, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Art &

BY PASTOR CHRISTIAN EINERTSON

“P ictures are loathsome. It follows that we also become loathsome when we love them ... For God wants to fill our whole heart and will in no way tolerate that I should have a picture before my eyes.”¹ With these words, Andreas Karlstadt, one of Luther’s fellow reformers in Wittenberg, explained why he believed that visual art has no place in the church—and he wasn’t the only one who thought so. In fact, while Luther was hiding out at the Wartburg, the Wittenberg city council had art removed from the churches out of concern that religious artwork violated a scriptural prohibition of sacred images.

One person who didn’t agree with Karlstadt, though, was Martin Luther. Luther knew that this wasn’t the first time that Christians had argued over religious art: almost eight centuries earlier, some Christians in the Eastern Roman Empire had opposed images of Jesus and the saints in churches for similar reasons. Yet in the face of this eighth-century controversy, the church ultimately realized that when the Son of God chose to become a man to suffer and die for the sins of the world, he became visible to human beings, so there is nothing inherently wrong with using our sense of sight to learn about him.

Luther was a firm believer that visual arts were a helpful way to learn about Jesus. After all, a lot of Luther’s parishioners in Wittenberg couldn’t read, which means that they couldn’t learn more about their Savior by

reading the Bible on their own like many of us can today, but that didn’t mean that they couldn’t learn about him at all. Instead, Luther—and Lutherans ever since—realized that paintings and stained-glass windows, woodcuts, and statues were effective ways to teach people who Jesus is and what he has done for them. That’s why Luther’s catechisms and Bibles included religious artwork from his local artists that helped reinforce the lessons that people were supposed to learn from the Word of God; it’s why Luther himself famously kept a picture of the Virgin Mary in his room, and it’s why Lutheran churches throughout Germany were and still are decorated with astoundingly beautiful images of Christ and his saints. It’s all to teach people about Jesus.

If you want to know how good religious art can teach people about Jesus, look to the artwork of Lucas Cranach the Elder. Cranach was an artist who lived and worked in Wittenberg for as long as Luther lived there. He was not only a supporter of the Reformation but also a personal friend of the Reformer and served as the godfather of his first child, Hans Luther. Famous for the woodcuts that he created for Luther’s translation of the Bible, Cranach was also a renowned painter who was asked to paint such prominent figures as Emperors Maximilian and Charles V, and he put his painting ability to use teaching people the faith.

In the altarpiece that he and his son created for the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul in Weimar, for example, Cranach offers us a variety of visual lessons to teach about Jesus and strengthen our faith in him. At the center of the altarpiece—and at the center of our faith—stands

THE CHURCH



“Christ on the Cross,”
Lucas Cranach the Elder and Younger,
1552–1555

Jesus, crucified for sinners. To the right stands St. John the Baptist, who points with one hand to Jesus and with the other hand to a lamb, reminding us that the Christ who suffers on the cross is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1). Next to John stands Cranach himself, along with his friend Martin Luther! And if you look carefully, you’ll see that the blood flowing out of our Lord’s pierced side is landing right on Cranach’s head, showing that Cranach, like the rest of us, is justified only through the blood of Jesus. In the background, we can see the expulsion of our first parents from Eden for the sin that our Lord Jesus died to remit; the bronze serpent of Numbers 21, which Jesus references in connection to his own crucifixion in John 3; and the angels’ proclamation of Luke 2, when they told the shepherds of the Savior who would bring peace on earth through the shedding of his blood.

You could spend hours looking at this one painting and likely find even more edifying reminders of God’s Word, and there are many more like it from Cranach and other brilliant Lutheran artists. So as Christians, we do well to learn what the visual arts can teach us about the Word of God, and in a world where visual arts so often seek to draw us away from God, we can give thanks for all the good religious art that he’s given for our instruction and edification.

Einertson is the pastor of Trinity Lutheran, an LCMS congregation in Farmington, Minn.

¹Kim W. Woods, “Andreas Karlstadt, On the removal of images,” in *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.



Healing of a Bleeding Woman

ROME: CATACOMB OF MARCELLINUS AND PETER, C. 300–350 A.D.

This fresco, found in the Roman catacombs of two third-century martyrs, was created in a significant era for Christian art. Prior to Roman Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313, the existence of art around Christian themes was rare. Why? Scholars have several theories. Perhaps early believers were protecting themselves from identification and potential martyrdom. Perhaps their art did not survive. Possibly Christians were following the prohibition of the second commandment (Exodus 20:4). Or maybe early Christians were separating themselves from the debauchery of the Roman culture, which was rich in idolatrous imagery.

Whatever the case, the early examples of art unearthed in such places as the Roman catacombs of Priscilla and Marcellinus and Peter depict a developing vocabulary of images and symbols that would set the stage for a wealth of creative illustration based on stories from the Old and New Testaments.

In the fresco of the bleeding woman, a story recorded by each of the synoptic Gospel writers, we see a powerful portrait of a youthful Jesus and the woman in question, caught in the act of kneeling and touching the edge of his mantle. Unlike the Gospel narratives of the scene, the immense crowd is missing. Instead, we look into the intense eyes of the woman. Is she afraid? Has she just felt the power of the God who heals? Jesus, stopping mid-step, turns back to the woman and smiles, his hand outstretched. Like her, may we in wide-eyed wonder boldly approach our willing Lord.

Lindisfarne Gospels

NORTHUMBERLAND, C. 715–720

The earliest known translation of the Gospels into English comes from an illuminated insular manuscript—fancy words to describe a hand-written, decorated document created on the islands of Britain and Ireland during the post-Roman era.

The Lindisfarne Gospels are named after its eponymous monastery in Northumberland, where it was created in its scriptorium. Its text and artwork are thought to be the work of one monk, Eadfrith. But the illumination's design can be attributed to a wealth of cultural influences—intricate swirls and trumpets from Irish designs, intertwined birds and other animals from early medieval English metalwork, Roman mosaic-like patterns, and Coptic and Byzantine figural work. The result is uniquely beautiful—almost too beautiful to touch.

What would inspire one monk to commit to such backbreaking, eye-straining years of work? Consider the end result: 250 vellum pages filled with masterful artwork that has awed viewers for centuries. People traveled to see such a wonder. But its true beauty—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is the treasure. The artwork illuminates what is already there.



Return of the Prodigal Son

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, C. 1668–1669



Often named the “greatest picture ever painted” by art historians, this masterpiece was created at the end of Rembrandt’s storied career. The Dutch master had fallen out of popular favor and was in debt and alone. And his son Titus, just 26, had recently died.

Rembrandt paints Jesus’ parable as a moment in time rather than the more typical symbolic lesson of his contemporaries. It is packed with emotion. First, your eyes are drawn to the left side, where the lost son, his shoes and clothing barely held together, buries his face into his father’s chest. He is bald, dirty, and so sorry. His father grasps his son with both hands—one strong and firm, the other delicate and gentle—his red cloak enveloping them both. The father’s face, turned slightly toward his penitent son, is tender, merciful.

On the other half of the image, the older son looks down on them, frowning. Though he dons the family’s red cloak, his face is far from merciful. Instead, his clasped hands betray his torn emotions—desiring mercy and love yet despising its outward form.

It is a moment fraught with the tension of Jesus’ audience: his disciples, the crowds—and the Pharisees.

Biblical POETRY

BY DR. PHILL HOOPER



"Haftarot (Vikrah-Bamadbar)," 11th–12th century, National Library of Jerusalem.



“Circles,” Frederick Kahler,
1982, Smithsonian American
Art Museum.

The LORD is a sculptor and a poet. Creation shows his artistry as a sculptor; his Word shows his artistry as a poet—the Old Testament in particular, which is about 40 percent poetry. One might argue that the poetic touches come from human authors and reflect human styles and genres. This is true, but God himself inspired those authors, and the words on the page are entirely his. (Besides, 40 percent poetry is hard to ignore or dismiss as *not* being his style.)

Originally in Hebrew, the Old Testament’s artistry is not as apparent to we who read it in English. The English translation often loses how similar-sounding words in Hebrew are combined for effect, as alliteration or even as puns. We also generally lose the original meter and rhythm of a passage. I was personally struck by this when I heard a rabbi read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 at a funeral. The verses are well known, speaking of a time to be born, a time to die, etc. The rabbi’s well-practiced reading allowed me to hear a rhythmic passage that *sounded* like the turning of the seasons and made these verses audibly seem to come alive like they had been “written in 3D.”

For non-Hebrew speakers, encountering those audible aspects is likely a lost cause, though good footnotes can help point out particularly striking verses. At the same time, there are some parts of Hebrew poetry that do manage to bridge the gap of translation. One well-known element of Hebrew poetry is that of parallelism. At the risk of oversimplifying, a parallelism is where an idea, image, or emotion is described by two or more similar or parallel phrases, such as, “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1, NAS). The two phrases might seem repetitious; they certainly cover similar ground. There is also some contrast between the two phrases, which introduce a certain added dimension or depth. To “bless” the LORD is not always an easy concept to grasp; to see that it apparently involves praising helps, though one should then reflect: are there other ways that we might “bless” God, besides praising him?

So also, Isaiah’s words foretelling Jesus’s crucifixion, that, “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities” (53:5), underscore the brutality of Jesus’ suffering because of our sins and communicate more than the fact that Jesus suffered for us. They bring a whole layer of emotion to the text: we can imagine and sympathetically “feel” the nature of that suffering. The two following phrases, “The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed,” continue to develop the emotional reality of what

Jesus went through, but at the same time shift from the bitter note of our sin to the blessedness of our well-being and healing. The text could simply say, “Jesus died for our sins so we could be forgiven,” but this would not only fail to describe the nature of that forgiveness—our well-being and healing, among other things—it would also lose some powerful emotive communication.

Art affects those who experience it. When in a poetic part of the Old Testament, such as the Psalms, slow down and think about the similarities and differences between two similar phrases. Mull over them and, prayerfully, try and “feel” the way they are meant to affect you.

A great deal more could be said about the artistic nature and merits of Old Testament poetry; shelves of books exist on the topic. Perhaps a more useful and surprising observation can be found in not just the “what” of God’s poetry, but also the “where.” Many modern translations of the Bible use special indentations to show readers what is poetry as opposed to what is simply prose. The indentations of Psalms and most of Isaiah are chapter after chapter of pure poetry. The history of Israel—including the books of Samuel and Kings—contains chapter after chapter of unbroken prose. Occasionally, one finds a verse or two of poetry seemingly “stuck” into a narrative passage. For example, when Adam saw Eve (Genesis 2:23), he (rightly) broke into poetry:

*This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.*

More surprisingly, in Genesis 3, God himself breaks into poetry and does so *in pronouncing judgment* because of the humans’ fall into sinfulness. His judgments on the serpent (vv. 14–15), the woman (v. 16), and the man (vv. 17–19) are all poetry, even while the description of the creation of the world is almost entirely prose. Why is this? The creation of the world ought to call for glorious poetic reflection. The bad news of God’s judgment for sin ought to simply be as terse and concise as a news report—unless the fall itself is, in fact, so profound a fall as to bring out a deep, mournful, dread artistry in the heart of God.

As in the other poetic parts of the Word, reflect, pray, spend some time there, and let God affect your heart and soul, along with your rational, prose-reading mind.

Hooper serves St. John’s Free Lutheran, Duluth, Minn.

Law & Gospel

LUCAS CRANACH, THE ELDER, C. 1535



This 16th-century work by Lucas Cranach the Elder can teach us entire doctrines of truth. In the upper left we see Christ seated in judgment over the world, reminding us of our sin and need for a Savior. Moses and the Prophets are dressed in contemporary clothing because the law always accuses us. Adam and Eve committed the first sin in the Garden of Eden, but sin and death prod us all towards hell and eternal condemnation.

Thankfully, the right side of the painting shows us the gospel. John the Baptist points us to Christ, who is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. A stream of blood flows from Christ to the man who believes the promise. Death and the devil are defeated, and Christ lives and reigns forever. What other details about the law and the gospel can you find depicted in this painting?

Christ Pantocrator

SINAI, C. SIXTH CENTURY

This 6th-century piece of art is one of the oldest known depictions of Christ. *Pantocrator* means “ruler of all,” and this painting can teach us many things about Jesus that we learn in Scripture. One of the first things you’ll notice about the painting is Christ’s eyes. The church spent a lot of time discussing Christ’s two natures in the fifth and sixth centuries, and this painting reminds us that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. The halo around his head also illustrates his divinity.

Christ’s right hand is also significant. His fingers are arranged to spell the Greek letters used to abbreviate “Jesus Christ.” In addition, the two fingers that are up represent the two natures in Christ, and the three fingers that are down remind us of the three persons of the Trinity. This meaningful hand gesture has been used for centuries in many classic Christian icons like this one as a way to teach people basic Christian truths.





Ecce Homo

ANTONIO CICERI, C. 1860

This 19th-century painting vividly illustrates the encounter between Jesus and Pilate in the passion narrative in John 19. After having Jesus flogged, mocked, and abused, Pilate brought his prisoner before the Jewish people. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” It is good for us to be reminded of the humanity and humiliation of Christ.

This true God was also true man; the divine Son of God submitted himself to the cruelest of fates. He took on flesh, endured ridicule, was beaten and bruised, and crucified and buried because of his great love for you. This painting reminds us of the consequences of sin and shows us how far our God was willing to go to recover his beloved people. This man to whom Pilate pointed became the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world. His head bleeds from painful thorns, his wrists are cut with rough bindings, and his face looks down as he accepts this fate that you and I deserved.

But even in this scene we know what Jesus said in verse 11: “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.” Christ was bound and would be crucified, but he was always in control. This man we behold in the pages of Scripture holds power over death itself, and God raised him from the dead on the third day. Christ became sin for you, that you could become a child of God.

Perfecta, imperfecta, imperfectissima,

Melodia dimin

perz ascendendo. a

Music's

BY ROBERT VOGEL

Scripture teaches us that God created mankind for his own glory. His precious gifts we experience through the arts act amongst man's chief blessings for fulfilling this purpose. Inspired sculptures, paintings, other visual arts, architecture, and vocal and instrumental music elevate our ability to praise our Redeemer. The art of dance, as "David danced before the LORD" when the ark of the LORD was returned to Jerusalem, and Christian-themed dramatic works can also transport audiences forward in their faith.

Worship music encompasses the depths of Christ's passion, the joys of resurrection, and the wonders of the nativity. Furthermore, singing Scripture burns biblical passages and events into our memories and hearts. Our understanding of scriptural passages may become enhanced when connected to inspirational melodies. One may, for example, associate Isaiah's prophecy, "Surely he hath borne our griefs" (53:4), with the whipping rhythms in G. F. Handel's *Messiah* chorus. Or consider Peter's words, "proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," as utilized in Craig Courtney's dramatic opening for his setting of "The Church's One Foundation" (I Peter 2:9).

Other examples abound. Johannes Brahms composed powerful music for the Apostle Paul's text from I Corinthians 15:55 when he wrote, "O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" in his *German Requiem*. Once heard, it can be difficult to read that Scripture without recalling Brahms' masterpiece. In John Stainer's *Crucifixion*, the text from John 3:16–17 makes for an extraordinary chorus, "God So Loved the World." Seek out Marian Anderson's moving rendition of the spiritual, "They Crucified My Lord," on YouTube,



"Initial C: David Playing Bells,"
Master of the Ingeborg Psalter,
1195–1210, *The Getty*.



majesty



and you will witness listeners sitting in stunned silence following her performance.

Opportunities to connect music with the preaching of, “Christ crucified, risen, and coming again,” likewise abound through a rich storehouse of hymns, spiritual songs, and psalms. Christians are told to imitate Jesus, who sang psalms with his disciples during the Passover. Hymns associated with specific church festivals often carry strong ties that make it difficult, for example, to exclude “Holy, Holy, Holy” from Trinity Sunday, Ralph Vaughan Williams’ “For All the Saints” from All Saints Sunday, “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” from Easter Sunday, “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart” from Pentecost Sunday, and “Silent Night” from Christmas Eve candlelight services. Listeners may weep through “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” praise a beneficent Father while singing “Now Thank We All Our God,” joyfully celebrate with “Rejoice Ye Pure In Heart,” discover comfort in “What A Friend We Have In Jesus,” and find motivation to fulfill the great commission through “O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling.” Beautiful hymn traditions should be encouraged because they inspire faithful hearts.

Some soloists are gifted with magnificent voices that can easily fill a large sanctuary. Others have voices that blend beautifully in a choir, praise group, or small ensemble, and they find joy in congregational singing. All are commanded in Psalm 66, however, to “make a joyful noise to the Lord.” Oh, for the day when our voices unite in glory in “a new heaven and a new earth, where

righteousness dwells.” We will join saints through the ages before the Lamb’s throne. Praise God!

Text is not necessary for praising the Lord. Biblical examples of instrumental music include drums, cymbals, stringed instruments, trumpets, flutes, and organs being employed to honor God, and David played his harp to cure Saul’s madness. Siegfried Karg-Elert’s magnificent work, “Praise the Lord with Drums and Cymbals,” reminds one of Psalm 150. Ultimately, believers await fulfillment of prophecy with the trumpet sounding at Christ’s return.

A text by Fred Pratt Green paired with Charles Stanford’s tune, ENGELBERG, expresses the Christian’s love and view of music.

*When in our music God is glorified,
And adoration leaves no room for pride,
It is as though the whole creation cried: Alleluia!*

*How often, making music, we have found
A new dimension in the world of sound,
As worship moved us to a more profound Alleluia!*

*Let every instrument be tuned for praise!
Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!
And may God give us faith to sing always: Alleluia!*

Not only do hymns serve to elevate mankind’s praise to the Heavenly Father, but they also function as indispensable prayers. Familiar hymn texts of prayer include: “Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,” “Take my life and let it be,” “Open my eyes, that I might see,” “Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul,” and “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.”

Music, a powerful and sacred gift, comes from our Creator. May believers everywhere embrace music as a blessing for praise in their walk with the Lord.

Vogel has served as music director at Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., for nearly 40 years.



A library of tools.

BY PASTOR RANDY NELSON

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship (AED) remains committed to its mission of equipping and supporting congregations in fulfilling the Great Commission. Below is an update on our recent initiatives and future plans as we continue the work of making and equipping disciples who make and equip disciples.

Season two of the Living as a Disciple podcast

Following the successful launch of the Living as a Disciple podcast, season two has recently launched, focusing on practical discipleship. Season one explored Matthew 28:19–20, emphasizing Jesus’ call to make disciples. This year, we are featuring interviews with pastors, ministry leaders, and laypeople who share how they live as disciples and equip others. The podcast is available on Apple, Spotify, YouTube, and our website at aflc.org/evangelism.

Discipleship Manual revision

The Discipleship Manual, a helpful resource for both new and mature believers, is currently undergoing updates and will include two new chapters. These additions will provide insight into the history of the AFLC and its emphasis on free and living congregations, as well as explain the operational framework of our association. Copies of the updated manual will be available in early June.

Re-launching RightNow Media

AED is reintroducing RightNow Media, an online library of biblically based video resources, as a powerful tool for congregational training in evangelism and discipleship. This resource provides access to thousands of videos on topics such as Bible studies, parenting, marriage, and leadership. Free subscriptions are available to AFLC pastors and ministry staff, with discounted rates offered to congregations. We encourage congregations to explore RightNow Media as they seek to train and equip their members for discipleship and evangelism.

Rekindle the Fire 2025

We are excited to announce the 2025 Rekindle the Fire event, scheduled for Tuesday, June 10, at Amery Free Lutheran Church in Amery, Wis. This year’s theme, “You Shall Be My Witnesses” (Acts 1:8), will focus on equipping attendees to live as bold witnesses for Christ. We encourage you to save the date and join us for a day of inspiration and fellowship.

Developing new Evangelism and Discipleship resources

AED continues to expand its library of tools to support congregations in their evangelism and discipleship efforts. Last year, we released “Preparing to Share Your Faith,” a practical resource available for free download on our website. Building on this, we are developing additional resources. See the infographic at left for a list of those resources.



Resource development.

- **The 21-Day Challenge:** A reading plan designed to guide believers through the Gospel of John.
- **Getting Others to Ask About Jesus:** Active listening and steering conversations toward Christ.
- **Baptism is Not Magic:** A new printing of a familiar Lutheran tract affirming the efficacy of infant baptism and the importance of a growing relationship with God.

Supporting AED by prayer.

- The continued growth and impact of the Living as a Disciple podcast.
- The timely completion and usefulness of the updated Discipleship Manual.
- Congregations as they explore and implement RightNow Media for training and equipping purposes.
- The preparation and success of the Rekindle the Fire 2025 event.
- Wisdom and creativity in developing new evangelism and discipleship resources.

Nelson is the director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship.



People who serve youth.

BY ADAM MCCARLSON

If you could take a peek behind the curtain of AFLC Youth Ministries, you would see people. A lot of them. I'm not talking about the individuals who attend some of our events, like FLY Beyond, Youth Workers Weekends, or the FLY Convention. Rather, I'm thinking of those folks who sit on planning teams, volunteer at our events, or who contribute in other ways. I want to highlight two groups of people.

First are the teams or committees that help us plan our events. The FLY Convention, Youth Workers Weekends, and FLY Beyond each have their own group of individuals who meet every four to six weeks to plan their respective event. For FLY Beyond and Youth Workers Weekends, the Youth Ministries staff invites others from across the AFLC to sit on the respective planning team. They help us plan and organize our events in a way that represents the unity of the AFLC's teaching and the variety of our congregations' practices.

On the other hand, the FLY Committee—with its own bylaws and constitution—is elected by the FLY Federation every two years during the FLY Convention. The individuals on the ballot are nominated by the FLY Nominating Committee. The FLY Nominating Committee is selected at the business meeting held at the FLY Convention every other summer.

At the time of publication, the FLY Beyond planning team is busy finalizing themes, dates, and location for FLY Beyond 2026; the Youth Workers Weekend planning team just finished up YWW 2025, and a new planning team is beginning the planning process for the 2026 event; and FLY is entering its final stretch before the 2025 FLY Convention this summer. Please pray for wisdom and discernment for each of these groups that are serving our AFLC congregations by planning events.

Second, I want to highlight a group of writers who are contributing to a teen devotional. AFLC Parish Education invited Youth Ministries to help with the layout and focus of the devotional and to identify and work with writers. The purpose of this devotional is to provide a resource for teens to be in the Word of God. It will be given to the teens in attendance at FLY 2025, and will be available for purchase by other teens, leaders, and caring adults. We have invited more than 30 pastors, youth workers, parents, and young adults from across the AFLC to submit a devotional entry for this resource. It has been a joy to see folks from around the AFLC with a heart to disciple and train teens in God's Word. Please pray for the teens in the AFLC who will use this devotional resource, that the Holy Spirit would work through his Word to awaken and strengthen faith in their hearts.

AFLC Youth Ministries couldn't do what we do without the many hands that help. There are many individual Free Lutherans who see the value of cooperating together as the body of Christ to accomplish more than they could on their own. This makes our efforts to encourage AFLC congregations to win, build, equip, and multiply teens in Christ Jesus possible. Consider how you can play a part to pass on the faith to teens, whether that be through prayer or financial gifts on behalf of AFLC Youth Ministries, through serving alongside the many volunteers currently supporting our efforts, or by directly caring for the spiritual lives of teens in your own congregation and community.

Youth committees

- **FLY Beyond:** Planning the youth equipping camp held every other year. The next event will be held in 2026.
- **Youth Worker Weekends:** Planning the yearly equipping event for youth workers. The next event will be in January 2026.
- **FLY Committee:** Planning the national youth convention held every other year in Estes Park, Colo. The next event will be June 30–July 4, 2025.

For more information about these events, visit our website:

- aflc.org/youth

McCarlson is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.



Commissioning new music.

You've heard of the Great Commission. You're likely familiar with a commissioning service, where missionaries are sent out for kingdom work. But what does it mean to *commission* new music? This is what FLBC music students are experiencing this school year as they learn and share a new five-movement work titled "TRINITY: Our God of Hope and Help" (Beckenhorst Press, Inc).

Andrew Hanson, FLBCS music director, knew the benefits of the commissioning process after leading Bible College choirs through similar efforts in 2017 ("Five Solas" by Josh Bauder) and 2019 ("The Hallel" by Lloyd Larson). So, he jumped at the chance to participate when he learned of this cooperative effort with four other choirs around the country. Hanson notes, "Being a part of commissioning this music has given us the sense of connection to the greater body of Christ and the honor of helping this beautiful, meaningful music exist."

Though not in print yet, the college received access to the composition last fall and began preparing to share three of the movements at the annual Christmas concert. The composer, Marianne Forman of San Diego, Calif., visited campus in late October. Forman gave feedback and encouragement to the FLBC musicians during their class rehearsal. Afterward, she stayed for lunch to answer student questions and share more about her creative process.

"Working with Marianne Forman was one of my highlights from my time in the FLBC music program," said Esther Rabenberg (FLBC sophomore), who sings and plays both violin and piano. "Hearing her thoughts behind the music and texts helped me connect to what I am playing and singing."

Forman hopes that her music will drive listeners to Scripture. She described her inspiration from Matthew 6. "Anxiety can be such a buzzword these days, which makes us look at ourselves," said Forman. "The Bible says, 'Don't be anxious ... look at the birds of the air ... look at the flowers ... don't you think he is going to take care of you, too?'"

Students are seeing that commissioning music is not about any one musician or choir but about the power of God's Word to impact hearts. Students are excited to continue to learn and share the commissioning work as they sing about the hope and help God offers through the Trinity.

Guests are invited to the FLBCS campus or to watch the livestream as students share the full work on Sunday, Feb. 2. The choirs will also share selections from the composition throughout their spring tours.

Visit the FLBCS website (flbc.edu/trinity) for concert information, an interview with the composer, and archived recordings of the choir performing the new composition.



Sixtieth anniversary media.

Thank you to all who helped the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary celebrate 60 years of establishing students in God's Word. If you missed the 60th anniversary gala event, you can find a recording of the evening, including student testimonies and an interview with our keynote speaker, Dr. Philip Dearborn on our website:

- flbc.edu/gala

Introducing a new academic journal.

The administration at FLBC announced the publication of a new educational resource at the recent Seminary Symposium in January. Volume 1 of *Sola Scriptura* is now available for purchase. This annual journal of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary is intended for pastors, members, and friends of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. Each volume will include writing from faculty members and guest contributors, as well as highlighting exceptional student papers. Volume 1 includes articles from Dr. Brent Olson (“Ezekiel and Sola Scriptura”), Dr.

Nathan Olson (“The Word of God That Elicits Faith”), Dr. James Molstre (“The Ministry of the Word in the Congregation”), seminarian Alex Monseth (“A Lutheran View of Romans 9”), and a sermon transcript from Larry Walker (“The Ruthless Love of Christ: John 11:20–21”).

The name *Sola Scriptura* was chosen to reflect the journal’s purpose, to “bring God’s Word to bear on different aspects of our faith and life,” while affirming its infallibility, inerrancy, and authority. In his introduction to the inaugural volume, editor Andrew Kneeland states, “Sola Scriptura does not mean, however, that we should shun all other books, resources, and teachings. We don’t read our Bibles as if no one has ever read them before. ... As we seek to faithfully wrestle through the topics and issues of the day, living and serving in our vocations

and spheres of influence, may God grant that we continue to confess the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.”

To purchase the first volume of the new academic journal, visit our website at flbc.edu/SolaScriptura.



• SOLA SCRIPTURA



Course Spotlight: English Composition

• Instructor: Madi Greven



This course introduces students to the writing process and principles of composition. Throughout the course students learn to draft and refine essays of differing styles including Critique, Descriptive, Persuasive, Creative, and Journalistic. Assignments include prompts to describe a figure from church history, present an argument for the historical resurrection, or apply worldview analysis to news articles and academic papers. As they learn to diagram sentences and improve their grasp of English grammar, students will be prepared to write with excellence and communicate God’s Word to their families, neighbors, and congregations.

For a full course list and course spotlight videos, visit flbc.edu/academics.

Establishing students for the AFLC and beyond.

“As dean, I have been asked many questions about our program. But of all these questions, the vast majority can be boiled down to one: Is training in God’s Word worth the investment? The impact in students’ lives, vocations, and congregations tell the story, and we are excited to be part of it.”

• Pastor Adam Osier, FLBC dean

Seminary Symposium focuses on justification

The Free Lutheran Seminary hosted a symposium focused on “Justification: The Righteous Shall Walk By Faith” Jan. 15–16 on its Plymouth, Minn., campus. Dr. Reed Lessing, chair of Old Testament studies at Concordia University–St. Paul, Minn., led the opening session Wednesday evening on “The Righteous Shall Live By Faith,” focusing on how the Old Testament prophets taught the doctrine of justification. He also led two Thursday morning sessions. First, on the Book of Amos, he showed how God used the prophet to call the people of Israel to repentance and faith. In the second, on the Book of Jonah, he shined a light on the theme of justification.

The symposium concluded with three afternoon sessions on Thursday. Dr. Phill Hooper, who serves St. John’s Free Lutheran, Duluth, Minn., discussed how the doctrines of justification and grace were concepts the church professed long before Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. He worked through many examples from 1,500 years of history.

Pastor Dennis Norby, who serves Grace Free Lutheran in Valley City, N.D., presented a paper on “Justification in the Catechisms,” in which he showed how Martin Luther articulated the doctrine in the catechisms he wrote for the church.

Dr. Jason Gudim, faculty at FLBCS, presented the final session on “Realized Eschatology: Justification in the Congregation.” His presentation explored how images in the Book of Revelation demonstrate how God uses the sacraments to connect his church to eternal reality.



TOP: Dr. Reed Lessing leads a session on the Book of Jonah. LEFT: Seminarian Aaron Arneson asks a question about Amos. ABOVE LEFT: A participant takes notes. ABOVE RIGHT: Dr. Phill Hooper.



LEFT: Stafford Thompson, Cloquet, Minn., interacts during a Q&A time.
 MIDDLE LEFT: Pastor Dennis Norby leads a session on "Justification in the Catechisms."
 MIDDLE RIGHT: Ellen Dalager takes notes.
 BELOW LEFT: Seminarians Adam McCarlson and Jeremy Larson chat during a break.
 BELOW RIGHT: Pastor Micah Klemme listens to a session on "Justification by Grace: Long Before Luther," led by Dr. Phill Hooper.



PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Patrick VandenBos, Salinas, Calif., has accepted a call to serve Abiding Faith Free Lutheran, Ortonville, Minn., beginning in February.

Pastor Tom Tuura, Stover, Mo., has accepted a call to serve United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb. He began in January.

Pastor Mark Molstre has resigned from Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D., and has accepted a call to serve Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., beginning in May.

Members of the World Missions Board of Directors announced that **Zach and Carey Ritland** of Radcliffe, Iowa, have been called as lay missionaries to serve in Paraguay helping Pastor Matthew and Ednay Abel in the work of church planting. They will start March 1 raising a support team with the goal of being in Paraguay by the end of the year.

Members of **Christ Free Lutheran**, Devil's Lake, N.D., voted to close the congregation.

Jordan Langness, Ishpeming, Mich., was approved for the AFLC Licensed Pastor Roster and is available for call.

Troy McNear was approved for the AFLC Licensed Pastor Roster. He is currently serving Trinity Free Lutheran, Minnewauken, N.D.

The Women's Missionary Federation (WMF) has hired **Jennifer Thorson**, Sioux Falls, S.D., to fill the role of executive secretary. The position was held by Dawn Johnson, Wilson, Wis., who recently stepped down.

Pastor Patricio Bravo, Santiago, Chile, was approved for the AFLC Brazil pastor's roster by members of the AFLC Brazil Colloquy Committee. Bravo is planting a church in Santiago.

Volunteers sought for Alaska VBS team

Building relationships through the ministry of vacation Bible school (VBS) is a powerful way to share the gospel of Jesus with kids in remote Alaska villages. In many cases, these children only hear about Jesus during VBS. By showing these children how much they are loved by Jesus, members of VBS teams have had an impact on their lives, the full effect of which will only be known in eternity.

Serving on an Alaska VBS team can be hard work and challenging, but the blessings of serving in this way are abundant. The Alaska Mission staff desires to keep this ministry going. We are looking for volunteers to serve on a VBS team this Summer. We prefer to have a married couple and two others on the team. Maybe you are a young couple in college, recently retired, or a teacher who would like to serve the Lord in Alaska for a few weeks of the summer.

The commitment includes six or seven weeks (potentially even a partial term), serving the remote villages near the Alaska Mission in Naknek, Alaska. Each week, the VBS team loads up supplies and is flown to a village for five days, where they lead a program for area children. At the end of the week they are picked up and flown back to Naknek to resupply.

Please pray with us about who God would call to serve in this way. And keep in mind as you pray that it just might be you who the Lord is calling. Contact Loren Tungseth, Alaska coordinator, by phone or text at 218-205-6987.

Seminarians receive internship assignments

Six students at the Free Lutheran Seminary recently received their internship assignments. These one-year internships will be served from June 2025 through April 2026.

Adam Erickson will serve Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., under Pastor Brian Westerbur.

Alexander Grimes will serve the Roseau Free Lutheran Parish, Roseau, Minn. under Pastor Todd Erickson.

Alex Monseth will serve Good

Shepherd Free Lutheran, Brainerd, Minn., under Pastor David Franz.

Caleb Korhonen will serve Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D., under Pastor Dennis Norby.

Micah Moan will serve Our Savior's Lutheran and Reiner Lutheran Free, Thief River Falls, Minn., under Pastor Alex Amiot.

Adam McCarlson will serve Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, under Pastor Jason Gudim.

DECEMBER MEMORIALS

- Bible College** Ronnie Olson
- Jerome Rice Pastor Alvin & Frances
- Ruth Claus Grothe
- Linda Nelson ... in honor of
- Marilyn Jacobson
- Home Missions** **ARC**
- Linda Nelson Yvonne Blake
- Seminary** **Bible College**
- Ione Priebe Stephen & Paige
- Moan
- WMF** David Blake
- Ardis Twedt
- World Missions** **World Missions**
- Valborg Huglen Steve & Janene
- Pastor Wayne Hanson Hawkins

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-December 31, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$51,865	\$438,599	96	\$424,138
Evangelism	17,125	122,486	90	118,802
Youth Ministries	12,537	147,081	95	135,252
Parish Education	21,467	193,803	104	155,571
Seminary	45,538	296,503	104	325,732
Bible College	64,246	649,013	138	468,173
Home Missions	54,734	368,241	87	329,029
World Missions	66,051	440,446	91	425,379
Personal Support	101,815	830,016	107	851,672
TOTALS	\$435,376	\$3,486,189	103	\$3,233,747

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving



The poor in spirit.

BY PASTOR CLAYTON WILFER

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

Do I need to be poor to enter the kingdom of heaven? The short answer is, yes. In fact, you must be bankrupt. But this might be a different kind of bankrupt than what you think.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It’s puzzling, especially if you look to Luke’s Gospel, in which he gives a shortened version: “Blessed are the poor.” This has been taken to mean that as a follower of Jesus, you must live a life of poverty. It’s true that wealth can be a stumbling block. Remember, Jesus told the rich young man to sell all that he had and give the money to the poor. However, it was not the man’s wealth that was the issue, but his covetousness of that wealth. So, if it’s not about money or material things, what does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Thankfully, Jesus gave a wonderful parable in Luke 18:9–13 to help us understand the difference between being “rich” and being “poor in spirit”:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men

went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’”

The Pharisee thought that he was so wonderfully perfect and righteous that God would bless him. Yet, his heart was not full of the love of God. Rather, it was full of pride, self-love, and contempt for others.

In contrast, the tax collector, who worked in a profession despised by many, knew that he had nothing to bring before the Lord. He knew that he was but a beggar before the Lord, bankrupt of all self-righteousness. Instead of saying a long or eloquent prayer like the Pharisee, his prayer is short and heartfelt: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” This was the same prayerful cry of another beggar, Bartimaeus, who said, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Luke 18:38). Though he was a materially poor beggar, Bartimaeus also knew that he

was a spiritually poor beggar.

Both the tax collector and Bartimaeus knew they were spiritually bankrupt of any self-righteousness. They had nothing whatsoever to bring to God. The only thing they could do was to ask for God’s mercy. It’s the same for us. We come to Jesus as beggars with nothing to offer. The song “Rock of Ages” puts it well: “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling; naked, come to Thee for dress, helpless, look to Thee for grace.”

To be poor in spirit is a posture of humility. Rather than proudly proclaiming how wonderful we are, the spiritually poor beat their chests in humbleness, knowing how much they need a Savior. R. Kent Hughes writes, “Poverty of spirit is the posture of faith. God pours out his grace to the spiritually bankrupt ... He does this with no one else. No one can enter the kingdom without poverty of spirit” (*The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*).

By humble faith in Christ Jesus, you enter into the kingdom of God and receive the “immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6–7).

To be poor in spirit is to be blessed by God’s riches! It is to have the favor of God. That’s why this section from Matthew is called the Beatitudes, which is Latin for blessedness. Each statement by Jesus is a pronouncement of the favor of God’s grace, mercy, and loving kindness.

So, must you be a spiritually poor and bankrupt beggar to enter heaven? Yes. But what awaits you is the immeasurable riches of God’s grace in kindness toward you in Christ Jesus. What a blessing!

Wilfer serves Joy Christian Community, Fountain Hills, Ariz.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

SOMETHING TO SHARE

Shelter (vignettes).

BY RENAH THOMPSON

I watched a YouTube video the other day; a hippie couple was building an earthen house. It was backbreaking labor, but worth it. They made the safest, calmest, quietest house you can imagine. Once it was finished, nothing could shake it; no storm or 110-degree desert heat or earthquake would disturb them.

I'm neighbors with a good friend who has the most stable and caring presence of anyone I know. I can come home dysregulated, frantic, exhausted, anxious—but a few minutes later, after a hug and a little conversation with my neighbor, I can breathe again. That presence and “with-ness” brings peace, a life-giving exhale.

I remember coming back to my tiny little house last winter during the worst of the cold. It was 35 below zero and snowing and blowing—the kind of weather where you double-check to make sure you have your keys before you step outside for something, or look out, you might actually die. I hustled inside, pulled the door shut, and turned up the heat. Phew. Safe. The wind could blow all it wanted.

I work at a school district in rural Montana. One sixth grader told me that he's moved four times this year and has been trying to protect his little sisters the whole time—first they were with Mom, then Child Protective Services came and took them to Grandma's. Then Dad's place, then Auntie's, then back to Dad. Unfortunately, there's drinking at Dad's and somebody pulled a gun this summer, so they might be moving again. Another kid told me a similar story. He's been abused for years, one

“father” after another, and now, at 15 years old, things are finally changing. I asked him who in his life would support him, who he could talk to. “Um ... I guess ... you.” My broken heart can barely hold all this.

They just need one safe place.

• • •

We're all in need of shelter, one safe place to hide from the spiraling evil and fatigue and the big or small disasters in our lives. One safe place to hide from sin, really—ours and others' and the brokenness of the whole world. It is a burden too heavy to carry and too deadly to manage or survive. So consider—what in your practical, daily-lived, ordinary life are you doing to take shelter? How does Jesus, in more than theoretical terms, become your safe place?

Martin Luther said, “For a man who belongs to an everlasting kingdom all is well, and it is fitting that he should dance through life ...” That is one of the best answers I can find. Fix your eyes on what is (for now) unseen. Put your hope and your focus on the things that last so that you have the stability, the perspective, the strength, to shelter others and to share that hope.

Remember: “My life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). In all the layers of theological richness there, remember the simple truth: he is your hiding place. Hope in him.

Thompson is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.