



Threads of Hope

Deut. 29:5
You gave them
nations and nations,
but they did not wear
out and did not swell.

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but they did not wear
out and did not swell.

possession of the
king of
the land of Og king of
the east of Sihon.

Num. 21:21-25

multiplied their
children as the stars of
heaven,
and brought them into the
land you had told their
fathers
to go in and possess.
So the people went in
and possessed the land,
and subdued before them
the inhabitants,
the Canaanites,
and gave them into their
hands, kings of the land,
with them

Gen. 15

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EDITOR

Pastor Andrew Kneeland
laeditor@afcl.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@afcl.org

CIRCULATION

Liz McCarlson
lasubscriptions@afcl.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Coyle
Pastor Jerry Moan

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One divine author.

The Bible is a big book. There are 66 different books in our Bibles. These writings include historical accounts, magnificent works of poetry and wisdom, and letters to the early Christian churches. More than 30,000 verses were written by at least 40 different authors over at least a millennium and a half. Scripture is a beautiful and remarkable book.

One thing we do well as a church body is take seriously the historical nature of each individual book. It is important for us to learn when, where, and why each book was written so we can better understand Scripture's meaning. If we lose this emphasis, Bible study can quickly devolve into merely, "What does this verse mean to me?" History, grammar, and context matter.

But we also need to take seriously that, ultimately, Scripture has one Author. God used many different writers in many different contexts, but the Word of God is one united story of God's love for us. II Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God." Similarly, II Peter 1:21 tells us, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."



Don't keep the books of the Bible too separate! They should always be read together. We should not read the words of Moses without thinking about the words of Paul. When we read the prophet Ezekiel, we should also keep in mind John's Revelation. God perfectly arranged each word in Scripture to tell us the story of our salvation.

Your leather covers and bindings aren't what hold the books of the Bible together; they are held together by their divine authorship. God weaves threads of hope across these pages of his Word. He plants seeds in one book that bear fruit in another. He includes a story in one book that comes to have more significance when we read about it in another book.

God is the author of all Scripture, and he uses these sacred pages to tell us about Jesus and our salvation. This issue explores the threads of continuity that span across Scripture. Pastor Tim Herset takes a look at the biblical theme of the "River of Life." We see a river in both the Garden of Eden and in Revelation 22. What can that connection tell us about our faith?

Pastor Patrick VandenBos looks at the theme of "Sabbath" seen throughout Scripture. Jeff Heikes explores the significance of rebirth and resurrection in the Bible. Many different parts of Scripture contain either blessings or curses, and Pastor Dan Hurner gives us some helpful words to better understand these sometimes confusing passages. And finally, Trisha Pillman writes an article in this issue about the theme of family and adoption.

Also in this issue are ministry updates from the AFLC President's Office, Development, Parish Education, and the Association Retreat Center. We're grateful to be able to share the latest updates and prayer requests from these ministries. Pastor Nick Schultz writes about the second and third petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and Clara Gunderson offers us another "Encouraging Word."

Send me an email if you have any questions or concerns for the *Lutheran Ambassador*. We are accepting submissions of book reviews for our Book issue coming out in May. Let us know if you've come across a book relating to our faith or Christian life. Email LAeditor@afcl.org or ruthg@afcl.org.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland

How unspeakably wonderful to know that all our
concerns are held in hands that bled for us.
[John Newton]

“

Heaven will perfectly restore the paradise
we lost through the sin of Adam and Eve.

[Wayne D. Mueller]

A true soldier fights not because he hates what is in
front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.
[G.K. Chesterton]

“The people of God,” the spiritual Israel of all true
believers, have the eternal Sabbath-rest of peace and
pardon, union and communion with God, with its
fullness to be reached in heaven. God’s resting on that
first Sabbath after creation typified this wondrous rest
as did all the Sabbaths observed in the Old Testament.
[Richard E. Lauersdorf]

If afflictions drive us nearer to Christ, the Bible, and
prayer, then they are positive blessings. We may not
think so now. But we shall think so when we wake up
in the eternal world. [J. C. Ryle]



The Ruby Range
Kada Aug 8th 79



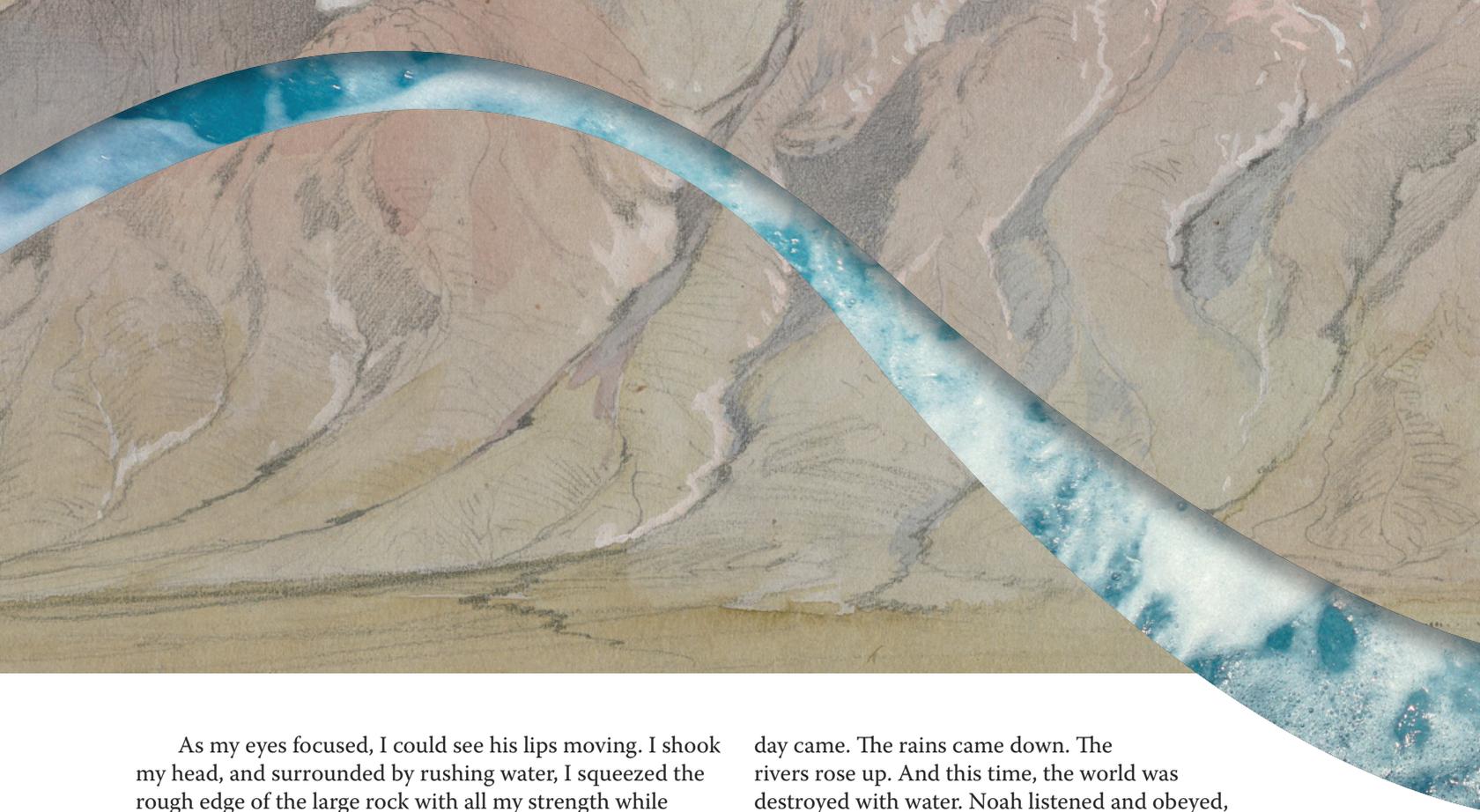
River Of Life

By Pastor Tim Herset

My wet fingers were clinging to the slippery surface of a large rock in the middle of the raging Flathead River. My arms and legs were shaking while water dripped into my eyes. My ears could only hear what sounded like a Boeing 747 at takeoff. It was a hot August afternoon, temperatures in the 90s Fahrenheit, but I was shivering. Some of the shivers were from the cold water I just emerged from, but mostly they came from fear.

Moments before, I was laughing, having a joyful time anticipating a fun adrenaline rush. I had been in the back of an inflatable, tandem kayak. The person in front of me (who shall remain anonymous) was supposed to be paddling as the river shifted from a smooth, peaceful flow to splashing, crashing whitewater. This set of rapids led into a massive hole and a standing wave that has been known to fold a 12-foot raft in half. This stretch of whitewater on the Flathead River is controlled by Kerr Dam at the south end of Flathead Lake. Class 3 rapids can quickly become class 4 rapids depending on the amount of water being released. I don't remember the flow levels on that day, but there was enough water tumbling over rocks and through the canyon that both of us in that kayak should have been paddling.

While perched in the middle of that raging river, I shook my head. In between gasps of breath, I did a thorough check of myself and my surroundings. Both of my legs hurt. My vision was blurry. I was cold. The sun was warm. The water roared. I couldn't see the blue rubber vessel or my paddle, but I saw a figure just downriver looking up at me.



As my eyes focused, I could see his lips moving. I shook my head, and surrounded by rushing water, I squeezed the rough edge of the large rock with all my strength while looking around at my options. It became clear to me that my friend sitting in his kayak below the rapid was yelling, “Jump!”

Adrenaline coursing through my veins made my thoughts a jumbled mess. I remembered two previous trips down this stretch of whitewater that had gone poorly. But this time was worse.

Surrounded by raging waters on that rock in the middle of the Flathead River, I was trembling in fear. I felt pain. And I knew I needed to let go, to jump into the flow. Pushing off the rock, I was swept into the hole, up over the standing wave, and spit out the end of the rapid, floating on my back, arms stretched wide, looking up at the blue sky.

When I reached my friend in his kayak, he scooped me up and looked me in the eye, saying, “You are safe with me.”

• • •

The language throughout Scripture regarding water describes it as I would have that day on the Flathead River: both life and death. After God created the heavens and the earth, he formed man out of dust. God breathed life into the man, making him a living being. And next, God planted a garden and put the man in it. He finished his work by resting on the seventh day.

Out of that garden flowed a river, the Pishon, which split into four rivers: Havilah, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates (Genesis 2:1–14). If you read the Old Testament and parallel historical documents from that time, you will see the significance of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the development and preservation of human civilization.

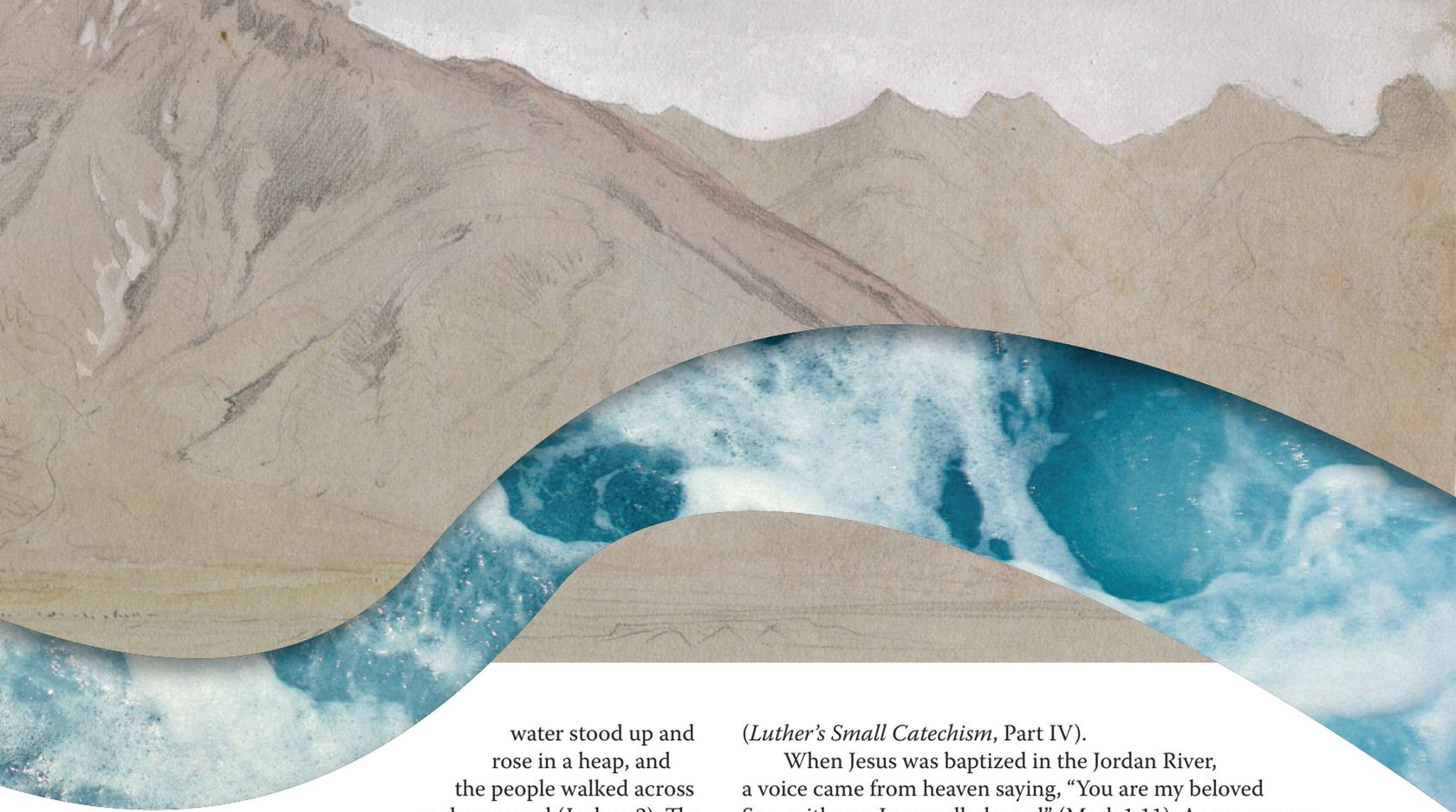
When mankind wandered farther and farther from God’s intended way of life, a reset was needed. Noah was chosen by God to be part of the plan and began building a boat in the middle of the arid wilderness. With no water nearby, his neighbors mocked him. And then that fateful

day came. The rains came down. The rivers rose up. And this time, the world was destroyed with water. Noah listened and obeyed, and his family and two of every animal were saved. With the storm subsiding, the sun came out. Light shining through airborne particles of water gave a multicolored promise in the sky. The rainbow is the way God made clear to Noah (and still to us today) that he would not destroy the earth with a flood ever again (Genesis 6–9).

Continuing through history, God’s people again needed to be saved from slavery in Egypt. A baby was born and placed in a basket, floating in the slow current through the reeds on the edge of the Nile River. This baby was found and cared for by Pharaoh’s daughter, eventually being adopted. He was named “Moses” because he was drawn up out of the water (Exodus 2:1–10). When it came time for God to use Moses and his brother Aaron to work with Pharaoh to set God’s people free, a sign of God’s power involved that same river. Striking the water with his staff, Moses was used by God to turn the river’s water to blood. This didn’t soften Pharaoh’s heart, and nine more plagues ensued. Eventually, after much suffering and death, the Israelite people got out of Egypt.

At the Red Sea, the people seemed to be staring death in the face at the edge of the water. Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and the people were being pursued. Moses stretched his hand out over the sea, and God moved with a mighty east wind. The waters parted. God’s people walked across on dry land. When the Egyptians followed, Moses stretched out his hand again, and God brought the waters down until none of them remained. God saved his people and destroyed their enemies, again using water.

As the Israelites approached the Promised Land, they spent three days camped at the edge of the Jordan River. Joshua told the people to prepare themselves because God would do wonders among them. When the soles of the feet of twelve men carrying the Ark of the Covenant touched the water from the river that was overflowing its bank, the



water stood up and rose in a heap, and the people walked across on dry ground (Joshua 3). The movement of water at the hand of God provided a pathway to life for the people of God walking in faith and obedience.

• • •

The familiar lines of Psalm 46 begin with, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ...,” and the next image is of mountains trembling before the waters of the sea. Directly following that is the beautiful picture of what it is like to be in God’s presence: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High” (v. 4). The psalmist uses figurative language to help communicate the truth of God’s steadfast love. Compare this with Psalm 36:7–8: “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.”

How is it that we can drink from the river of God’s delights? Does God really find great pleasure in us? So much so that ancient poets describe God’s pleasure in his creation using the picture of a river? Is the delight God has for repentant sinners continually flowing like clear, fresh water in the Flathead River? Can this truly be God’s attitude toward humanity?

Yes. And amen.

To discuss how God uses water to intervene on humanity’s behalf and show his love without mentioning the sacrament of baptism would be a mistake. “Baptism is not simply water,” Luther writes, “but it is the water used according to God’s command and connected with God’s word. ... Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe, as the word and promise of God declare”

(*Luther’s Small Catechism*, Part IV).

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, a voice came from heaven saying, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). As we emerge from the burial waters of baptism, or remember our baptism in daily repentance, God revives us and looks upon us as his beloved sons and daughters. As Jesus declared in John 7:38, “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” Jesus was pointing out that the Holy Spirit would be given to the believers—and the contrast of a flowing river for thirsty people in the dry, hot land of Israel would not have been missed. Our spiritual thirst is quenched by the rivers of living water that come to us as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

In the normal, everyday life we get to live, the Holy Spirit is our guide. While rivers will never cease to amaze me with their power and continuous flow, there is a deeper longing within me and within us all. This longing is for the new creation, where all things are made new, and where we will see as John saw in his visions of Jesus recorded in Revelation: “... the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God ...” When that day comes, the night will be no more. We will need no light; we will not even need the sun. Jesus will be our light and will reign forever and ever (Revelation 22:1–5).

In our normal, everyday lives, when our sin flips us out of the kayak and tumbles us over the rocks, and we are alone and afraid in the middle of the river, Jesus invites us to let go and trust him. We look around, take an honest assessment of our situation, and know we can’t save ourselves. So we release our grip on whatever we’re clinging to. We jump into the river of life. We are washed clean. And by the mercy and grace of God, we can confidently hear Jesus say, “You are safe with me.”

Herset serves Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont. Artwork: “The Ruby Range,” by Thomas Moran, 1879, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

*By Pastor
Patrick VandenBos*



Sabbath Rest

God's goodness is revealed in creation. He took what was formless and void and turned it into the beauty of this world. God is good, and when God worked within creation, creation manifested his goodness: "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10, 12, 17, 21, 25). As each day came to a close, a new day began with more work to do. The seventh day, however, brought collective creation to "total" completion. So, on the seventh day, God rested.

What does it mean that God rested? Some would say *rest* is a synonym of *peace*. Others would consider rest to be enjoyment, and others a dedicated time to relish the satisfaction that comes from previous work. Any of these ideas are helpful, but the main idea is simple: God stopped; he ceased. His work creating the world and all its systems was finished.

Scripture reveals how the seventh day of creation is a purposeful template for God's beloved creation. Mark 2:27 says, "The Sabbath was made for man," while Exodus 20:8–11 tells mankind to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

God's people are called to set apart the Sabbath in their weekly schedule—a day to cease. The action of ceasing is one way to honor God as the Lord of all creation. While mankind runs a rat race to get ahead, the weekly Sabbath is ingrained into our weekly schedule as a reminder that we live for more than this world, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36). Every week on the Sabbath, God gives us the opportunity to live out our faith. Will we push forward living for this world, or will we trust God?

The existence of the Sabbath causes us to wrestle with the questions, Who is my Lord? Who do I trust? What do I

live for? It is a weekly gift to examine our greater purpose.

Scripture also reveals that God's design for Sabbath rest goes beyond weekly physical rest; the law of the Sabbath is called a shadow (Colossians 2:16–17, Hebrews 10:1). Hebrews 4:9–10 gives us this word of hope: "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."

The Gospel of John shows us that God entered the spiritual darkness and chaos of this world and created life and rest through Jesus Christ. Jesus' daily work of bringing hope and healing parallels God's work of creation. His redemptive work before the cross continued each day until he came to the cross, and on the cross, Christ declared a new Sabbath: "It is finished" (John 19:30). All the work that was to be completed for the salvation of the world was completed at the cross. After the cross, Jesus rested.

The physical Sabbath in creation stands as a God-given gift until this world is renewed. The Sabbath rest offered in Christ's work stands for all eternity. This is why the Sabbath rest found through Jesus is "better." It is a rest not for this kingdom but for God's eternal kingdom.

One final thought: God's work *of* creation ceased after the sixth day, but his work *in* creation continued after: God has walked with his creation to bring salvation to them. God was and is still working.

We who have experienced the Sabbath rest of salvation recognize that our work *of* salvation has been completed, but we now are called to work *in* our salvation. This is the heart of all Christian work. Jesus said, "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12). Doing good is applying and living out our Sabbath rest. We, as Christ's body, have been entrusted by God to be the means by which he continues his redemptive work in the world. This is done by our good work that God has entrusted to us. Revelation 19:7b–8 sums this up: "[Christ's] Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people. Live in it!

VandenBos is an AFLC pastor living in Salinas, Calif.

Artwork: "Landscape Around Varin," by Jülius Schubert, 1946, Slovak National Gallery.

THE HOPE OF Resurrection

Are we hopeful for the future? We may invest in retirement accounts and the kids' college funds, exercise five days a week, and limit the number of treats after Sunday's service to stay healthy. With each action we take, we are more hopeful for our future and what it can bring.

But is the approach to hope described above ultimately vanity? Admiration of our own ability to plan and earn? Is our hope based on what we do and what we know? There must be a better risk management strategy—something more enduring, risk-free, or perhaps eternal to give hope?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope.

In the Gospel of John chapter 11, we read about the resurrection of Lazarus, a literal dead man walking. Mary and Martha make Jesus aware their brother is sick, and he lets his disciples know Lazarus' illness will not end in death. Then, several days later, he travels to Judea to "wake him up." In John 11:15, Jesus plainly tells the disciples that Lazarus is dead, but that for their sake he is glad he is not there so that they will believe.

Once they arrive, well after Lazarus' death and burial, Martha finds Jesus and says, "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replies, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." In her grief, Martha has hope, not in herself, but in Jesus Christ. Moved by Mary and Martha's faith and mourning, Jesus calls for Lazarus to come out of his tomb. And Lazarus, the dead man, does come out. The witnessed resurrection causes many Jews to believe and have hope in Jesus Christ.

The miraculous story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a powerful demonstration of his authority. Many witnesses placed their hope in Jesus being "the resurrection and the life." Everyone who believes in him will never die. Is that where we place our hope today?

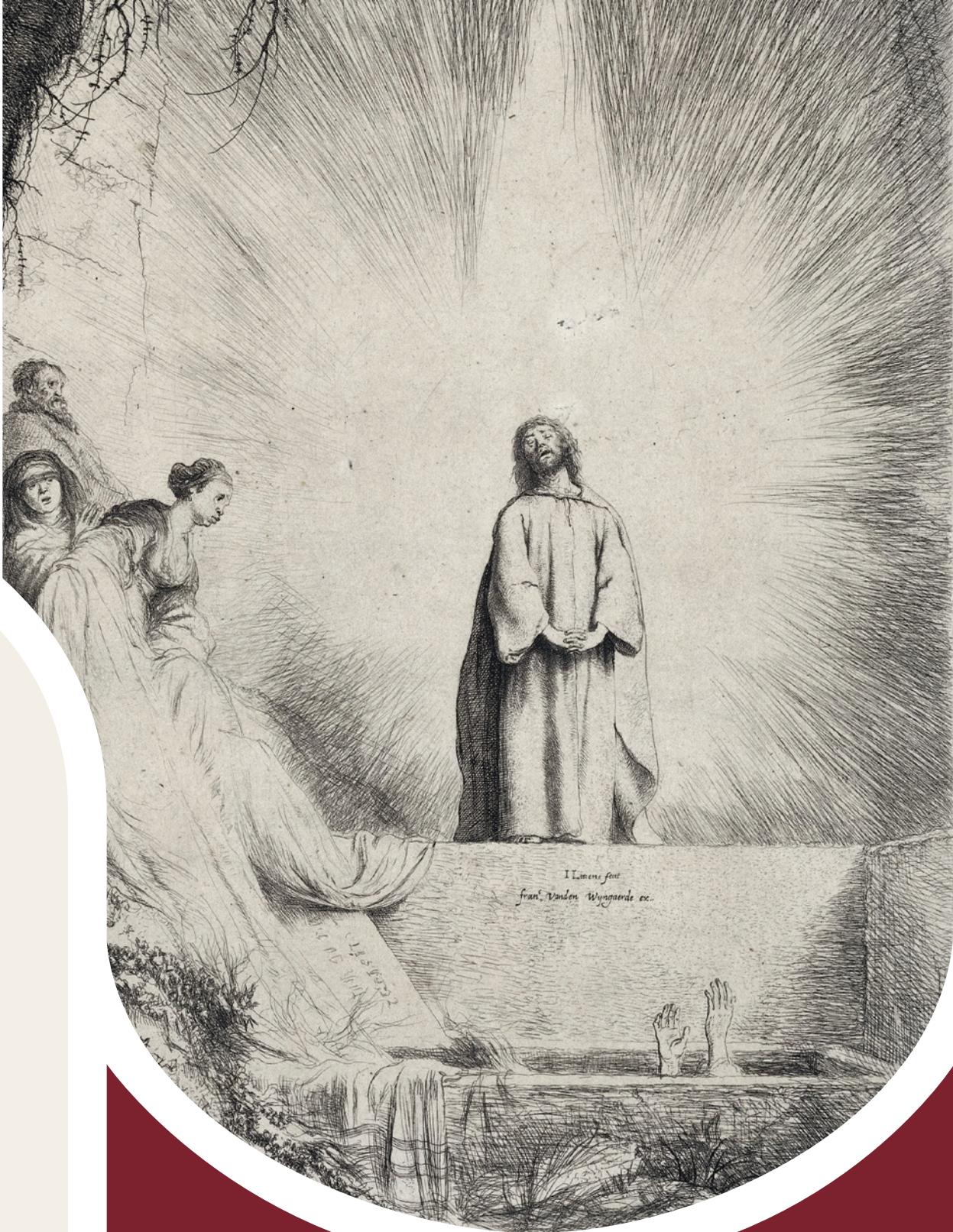
Paul articulates very clearly in I Corinthians 15:14, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and

so is your faith." These verses tell us there is nothing else we can rely on but Jesus. Not ourselves, our bank accounts, or our planning skills. If we cannot be confident in the resurrection of Christ, then everything else we hope in is nonsense, too. Our hope is that we are saved by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We rest then, by faith, in his death and resurrection. This is hope we can be certain of and rejoice in!

If we want to trust and believe, how do we start? In Ephesians 1:17–19a, Paul writes, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

Our hope starts by knowing the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and that, by faith, we shall not die but shall rise again on the last day. As Paul says in I Corinthians 15:42–44, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." With these promises and enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, we rejoice in the hope of the resurrection. We have confidence in him, like the witnesses at Lazarus' tomb, and can join the Apostle Peter in saying, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Peter 1:3–5). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope.

Heikes is a member of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. Artwork: "The Raising of Lazarus," Jan Lievens, 1630, Rijksmuseum.



By
Jeff
Heikes

FAMILY AND Adoption

By Patricia Pillman

The desire to belong to a family is such an important part of the human design that many people will spend their whole lives searching for those who make them feel as if they belong. All of us need to feel part of a family that accepts and loves us unconditionally—a need that an earthly family can only in part fulfill. Thankfully, throughout Scripture, God gives full assurance to believers regarding the status, proofs, and benefits of being adopted into the family of God.

Let's first consider our status of adoption into God's family. Revelation 5:9–10 tells us, "... You are worthy ... for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." Our high status of "kings and priests" is not because of any merit on our own—it is purely through God's mercy and adoption. John 1:12–13 states, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." God's children believe in him, and this faith and trust come from God choosing us first and drawing us to himself. Deuteronomy 7:6 says, "For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." Truly, there was nothing good in us, but Christ loved us enough to rescue us through shedding his life's blood and bringing us into a covenant relationship with him and the Father.

How can we know for sure that God has accepted us as his adopted children? God spells it out irrefutably for us in Romans 8:14, 16–17: "For as many as are led by the

Spirit of God, these are sons of God ...

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." There are so many things that we are offered in this passage, both as proofs and as benefits of our adopted status. God's grace, which he offers freely to all of us, is all the proof we need to assure us of our status. If we are followers of Christ, being led by the Spirit, then we are adopted as children of God and may enjoy all the privileges that come from that relationship. If we need more evidence of this truth, consider the presence of God's sanctifying and convicting work in our lives, as outlined in Hebrews 12:5–8: "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening ... then you are illegitimate and not sons." God graciously proves time and again that we are his children by his continued work of sanctification in us.

Having then full assurance of our acceptance in the "Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6), we also have full assurance of its benefits. Consider Galatians 4:4–7, which says, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son ... to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a



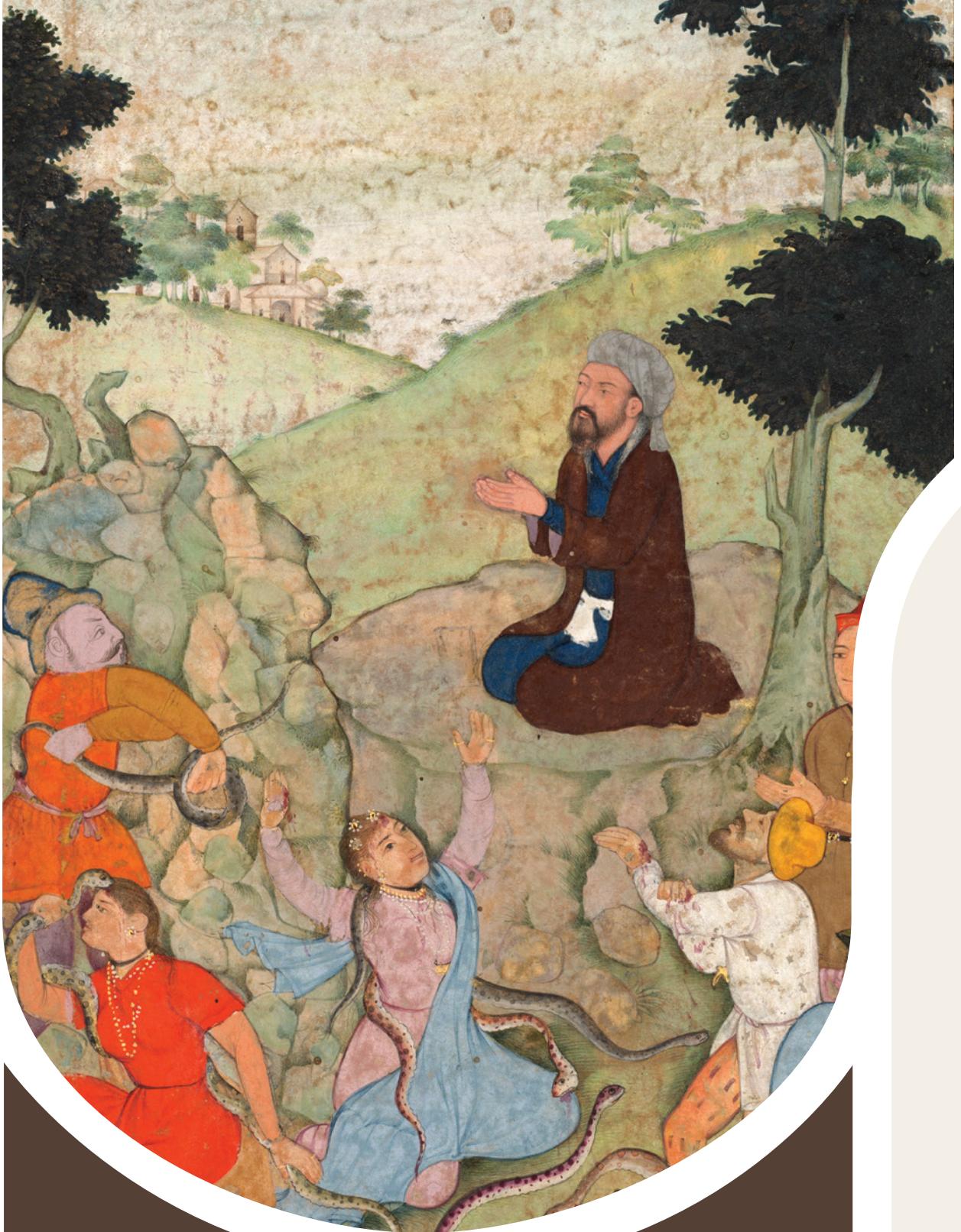


slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” The holy, just, creator God of the universe is the one we can intimately call “Daddy.” We can run to him with our every trouble and have full access to his throne room and his ear. He is never too busy for us, and in fact, he delights in spending those moments with his precious children. In fact, Zechariah 2:8 declares that he views us as “the apple of His eye.” This ever-present help for us gives us hope no matter how dire our circumstances are. We are also joint heirs with Christ, receiving an incorruptible inheritance that we in no way deserve. His inheritance will never fade away, nor shall anyone be able to take it away from us. I Peter 1:3–4 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” This inheritance is our eternal home in heaven with God.

What mercy, grace, and hope God has given us through

our adoption into his family! He is a good Father who takes care of his children. We can rest assured that we belong, really and truly, to the family that loves and cares for us like no other. Let I Peter 2:9–10 be your joyous declaration: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

Pillman lives in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Artwork: “Jesus Blesses the Little Children,” Cottage Pictures from the New Testament, 1856.



By Pastor Dan Hurner

Blessings

In March 2023, National Geographic shared about the rise of new age spirituality, stating that 1.5 million Americans identified as pagans. You probably won't see someone building an altar on a hilltop anytime soon, but that doesn't mean you don't see it at all. Online social platforms have plenty of people proclaiming the alleged benefits from crystals, bizarre herbology, and tarot cards.

Apart from how it's being communicated, there's nothing new about people seeking benefits from an external power. Pick a pantheon—Egyptian, Norse, or Roman. People were convinced that if you prayed the right way, made the right offering, and caught the deity on a good day, they would bring some kind of divine intervention. Finances, peace with enemies, healthy offspring, fair weather ... you get the idea. As a bonus, extra help for you consequently meant less help for any who might oppose you.

But what does it mean to be blessed by our God? Blessings abound in Scripture; the more you look, the more you'll find. Shortly after creation is finished, God extends the blessing to man to multiply, fill the earth, and govern it (Genesis 1:28). God promises Abram that all the nations will be blessed through him. The priests are given a very familiar blessing to extend to the people in Numbers 6:24–26. In Matthew, Jesus proclaims several blessings in the Beatitudes as he begins the Sermon on the Mount (5:3–12).

Blessings are forms of God's mercy (not receiving what we deserve) and grace (receiving what we don't deserve). Sometimes we see God's blessing in Scripture through his intervention and action: deliverance from enemies, rain during a drought, protection from plagues, promising "a future and a hope" to exiles (Jeremiah 29:11). Additionally (and often to the irritation of God's people), God's blessings are seen in his everyday providence to all people—including those who are evil, wicked, and unrighteous. How many psalmists write about their frustration that God hasn't dealt with their enemies? Jonah gripes about God forgiving the Ninevites for days. You can imagine the annoyance in the audience when Jesus proclaims that God causes the sun to rise on both the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45).

But what about curses? Here is where we would do well to note the distinction between our heavenly Father and the fickle pagan gods. Certain pagan deities were known for their temperamental nature and harsh curses. Mercifully, this is not so with the Lord. Some notable passages include Ezekiel 33:11, as God declares no delight in destroying the

wicked and implores people to turn from their sins. The same sentiment is echoed in II Peter 3:9, which says that God waits for people to turn to him in repentance.

This doesn't mean God ignores sin. On the contrary, we regularly see the consequences of sin being poured out on individuals, families, tribes, cities, and nations. Cain is sent to wander the earth after killing his brother. With the exception of eight, God wipes out mankind in a global flood. Egypt is ravaged, and Pharaoh's army is destroyed as Israel leaves slavery. The Canaanites are judged as Israel claims the land God promised them. Israel endures raiding parties, famine, drought, and oppression throughout the Book of Judges for their spiritual apathy. David's prayer for forgiveness in Psalm 51 shows the consequences for his sin with Bathsheba. Ananias and Sapphira are judged for trying to deceive God.

How do we handle a passage like Exodus 34:6–7? We see God's character and blessings in verse 6, but we're met with a grim reality check in verse 7: "[He] will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children ..." Does the punishment for sin get passed down generationally? At face value, we would argue that it's not fair to receive consequences for someone else's decisions and actions. Why should the innocent suffer? This question must lead us to another important question: who is truly innocent? Exodus 34:7 is a warning of judgment for those who repeat the sins of their forefathers. The driving point is that we are still under the pronouncement of judgment for our sin because we share in Adam's curse. This is Paul's compelling argument in the early chapters of Romans: all who come from Adam's line bear the curse of sin and will share in its consequences.

But the new and better Adam has come, one who took on flesh and was born of a woman under the law to redeem those under the law (Galatians 4:4–5). God's most profound blessing to us is seen in his Son's work on the cross. Jesus bears our curse from sin on the cross, pays our spiritual debt, and, in faith, brings us into a new and better kingdom. Praise God for his blessings to us through Jesus Christ!

Hurner serves the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, Dalton, Minn. Artwork: "Moses Prays to End the Serpents' Attack," Mir'at al-quds of Father Jerome Xavier, Mughal India, 1602, Cleveland Museum of Art.



Lenten devotionals.

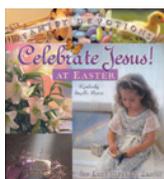
- Lenten devotionals help us focus our attention on Jesus as we remember his suffering and death.

These resources and more are available in our campus bookstores and online at ambassadorpublications.org

Project updates.

- We are partnering with AFLC Youth Ministries on a new devotional booklet for teens. Youth Ministries Director Adam McC Carlson and his team have been gathering the devotional material, and Parish Education is overseeing the production and publishing. The devotional booklet will be given to teens at the 2025 FLY Convention as an encouragement to keep meditating on God's Word and growing in faith.
- We are preparing visual mission story flashcards for classroom use based on our *Missionary Chronicles* book. Thanks to the national WMF for making this their promotional project for Parish Education in 2025. Monetary gifts to support this project can be given through your local WMF group.

Thank you for your prayers and gifts!



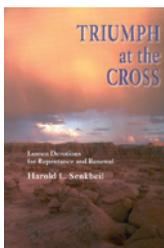
Celebrate Jesus! At Easter

Bring the family together to contemplate and celebrate the true reason for Lent and Easter—salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Includes daily Scripture readings, meditations, songs, prayers, crafts, family projects, and service ideas. \$8



Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross

Drawn from both historic writings and contemporary Bible teachers, this collection of 25 meditations will help you ponder more deeply the price Jesus paid for your sins and his gift of salvation. \$12.95



Triumph at the Cross

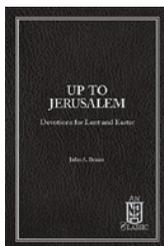
Daily devotional readings for the 40 days of Lent remind believers that Christ cleanses, restores, and renews broken hearts through faith in him. \$17.95

Up to Jerusalem

In ten minutes a day through 55 inspiring devotionals, embrace God's love for you as you travel with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem from Ash Wednesday to Easter. \$17

More Titles

- **With Him to Golgotha**
Trace the steps of our suffering Savior from Gethsemane to Golgotha through 42 devotionals by Fredrik Wisløff and see the purpose for his suffering and death. \$9
- **Martin Luther's Easter Book**
Sermons exploring events from Holy Week through the Resurrection portray Luther's thoughts on faith, human imperfection, salvation through grace, and the wonder of God. Illustrated with 18 woodcuts by Virgil Solis, a contemporary of Luther's. \$9.75





Hosting Annual Conference.

BY KIRK RAUTIO

The Association Retreat Center (ARC) welcomes the 63rd Annual Conference of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) June 11–14. We are honored and blessed to be a part of this annual event where we can come together to celebrate the ways the Lord has blessed the AFLC over the past year and look forward to the many more blessings in the years to come.

The ARC staff and the Annual Conference committee have been meeting regularly to plan what some have called a spiritual powerhouse of prayer. We are excited, enriched, and blessed to be hosting this event. As our 2025 ARC theme states, we are “Abiding In Him” (John 15:4) through the planning process and are always honored to partner with the AFLC Annual Conference. During this week of learning, teaching, and working together, there will be activities for all ages, including morning and afternoon schedules for nursery, vacation Bible school, and youth during conference business sessions.

The ARC has been making plans and improvements to our facilities since we last hosted the conference in 2022. If you haven’t been to the ARC in a while, please come back and visit our campus, as several changes have been made. More buildings have air conditioning, and we have made strides to make more of our buildings Wi-Fi accessible. We want to say thank you to all those who have sent us funds and spent hours with us making these upgrades possible. We look forward to having you all on our property this June!

We thank all those who have supported and are supporting this event. Without the help of volunteers, donations, and prayer, this event would not be possible. If you wish to help in any way before, during, or after the conference, please reach out to the ARC at 715-294-2877 or email info@arc-aflc.org.

We encourage everyone to attend the conference. Seeing how God has been moving through the missions of the AFLC that we support is always encouraging. Taking that encouragement back to your congregations further strengthens the AFLC and its missions as well as the kingdom work in your area. Come, be blessed, and then be a blessing. See you soon!

Conference registrations.

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 11–14 on at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. Registration is required to participate in the business meeting. WMF Day will be held June 11 at the ARC.

- **AFLC Annual Conference:** Register for business sessions at aflc.org/about-us/conferences
- **Meals and Housing:** Register for meals and housing at the ARC at arc-aflc.org.
- **WMF:** Register for the Women’s Missionary Federation day at aflc.org/women/wmf-day

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center.

Generosity & stewardship.

BY PASTOR MICAH HJERMSTAD

I remember an intense and arduous discussion on the floor of the 2012 AFLC Annual Conference regarding the Stewardship Committee; with no clear responsibility or duties to fulfill, its members suggested that the conference dissolve the committee. Some of the concern with dissolving—or suspending—the committee centered around the thought that we might lose an important voice in our fellowship to encourage one another to good stewardship.

In the end, I voted to dissolve the committee, and that was the majority opinion. But I wonder if we have lost something in the absence of such a committee.

In my first Coordinating Committee meeting as president in 2022, the decision was made to return direct oversight of the Development department to the AFLC president, as it was originally set up when the department was restarted 14 years ago. That began quite a journey of learning for me; I didn't take any development or fundraising classes in seminary. I've since learned that a healthy Christian development department focuses less on dollars raised and financial goals and instead encourages its ministry's partners to biblical, generous stewardship of whatever time, talents, and resources that God entrusts to them.

We've entered a time of transition in our Development department, and that includes a renewed focus on how we can best serve our congregations and individual partners by encouraging them to see their position as stewards of God's gifts. It's quite a responsibility to be a steward of what God owns. I feel that most keenly as I consider my role as a dad. It humbles me that God would entrust these children into my care. It also brings me joy and a spirit of extravagant generosity because God takes joy in what he has created and owns, and he has been so lavish in his gifts to us.

One of the questions that has helped shape my view of biblical stewardship is this: "Where do you find your greatest joy in giving as a steward?" I find such great joy in the family that God has given me, so I'm going to be generous in giving my time to them. Regarding financial resources, that means finding a ministry that brings great joy to your life and then giving generously to that.

Pastor Tonnes Pollestad has served the AFLC faithfully in the Development department for 14 years, but the AFLC is too big for one man to serve in this way. Part of the restructuring of the department included putting the Foundation Board in a position to provide advice and consent for the department. This board uniquely includes members from every major corporation that the Development department serves, so it made sense to empower them in this way. I worked with them to hire two new staff members.

Mark Sivertson joins our team as our new vice president of Development. He has been tasked with overseeing the department. He is from Sioux Falls, S.D., and he brings a wealth of experience in the banking industry, having built two trust companies from scratch. He's been in the AFLC for many years; two of his sons attended FLBC. He's very excited to get to know many others in our association. He'll manage our team, which will include Tonnes and his extensive experience working in the AFLC. It will also include a new administrative assistant, Angel Luttmann. She is also an AFLC member from Sioux Falls. She loves people, and she has excellent organizational skills, which will greatly enhance our work.

Please pray for this venture of faith. Pray for Mark, Tonnes, and Angel as they begin this new work together. It is our desire to serve well, and I pray that this renewed focus on healthy, biblical stewardship will bless our congregations and members for years to come.



Connect with Development.

If you are interested in hearing more about how the AFLC Development department can serve you, or if you would like to schedule a seminar in your congregation about ways you can steward God's resources, please reach out to Mark Sivertson:

- mark.sivertson@afcl.org

Hjermstad is the AFLC president.



Theology of giving.

The AFLC unreservedly and joyfully embraces Scripture as God's inerrant and authoritative Word and the source of our understanding in all matters of faith and life. This includes the stewardship of the resources that God entrusts to us. So it is necessary for the Development department's mission to be wholly grounded in Scripture.

God owns all things and needs nothing.

We believe that everything in all creation belongs to God, our Creator, and he is not dependent on us or our resources. There is nothing we can give to God that he doesn't already own.

We promise to humbly honor and gratefully acknowledge God's authority and leading in our lives, and specifically in matters of stewardship. We promise to give God all the glory and trust him completely for every need.

God is rich in love and extravagantly generous.

We believe that God is benevolent by nature, and he provides for our every need. Ultimately, his generosity was perfectly demonstrated on the cross, where his Son "died once for all" (Romans 6:10). God was willing to pay this price because of his great love for us, and he calls his children to love one another likewise.

We promise to love our giving partners with the extravagant love of Christ. We will never overstate a need, fabricate a story, or exaggerate an outcome out of a sinful need to manipulate a partner for selfish gain. We already have everything we need in Christ, and we believe he will provide according to his will.

Everything we have is a gift from God that he has entrusted to us as stewards, not owners.

We believe that God created us and "all that exists ... He daily provides abundantly for all the needs of my life ... and He does this purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy" (*Luther's Small Catechism*). Everything belongs to him, and we are stewards of what he has assigned to us. Further, God has equipped each of his children to steward his creation in unique and beautiful ways.

We promise to care for the gifts God entrusts to us, according to his Word. We promise not to hoard those

gifts inappropriately, but rather to use them to the best of our ability for the work of God's kingdom. We will joyfully partner with our donors to create a culture of mutual encouragement, support, and challenge as we seek together to be faithful stewards of all that God has given us.

The biblical role of a development department is to help connect people to God's calling to be faithful stewards.

We believe that part of the role of the body of Christ is to encourage one another in whole-life stewardship, focusing less on dollars raised and more on living a life marked by things like generosity, joy, thanksgiving, "storing up treasure in heaven" (Matthew 6:20), and turning away from idolatry.

We promise to always put ministry over money. God will supply all our needs. He calls many of our partners to give financially to the work of the AFLC, but what matters most to us is that we are loving and serving our partners and encouraging them in their walk with the Lord.

Accountability is a biblical principle and something to be embraced.

We believe that God has given us the body of Christ to encourage and build one another up, admonish one another, rejoice with one another, etc. Submission to others is healthy and wise. In this way, the body of Christ grows and better serves God and neighbor.

We promise to practice transparency in our policies and procedures while maintaining confidentiality that honors our partners. We will submit to regular audits and seek to conduct our practice in a way that is above reproach.

Scripture consistently directs our hearts to praise and thanksgiving.

We believe that God's extravagant goodness to us leads us to respond in joyful thanksgiving and praise. Our lives are marked by thankfulness, and when God's people practice God's love and generosity with one another, we express genuine thankfulness.

We promise to thank our partners regularly, not to cultivate future giving, but to express sincere gratefulness to God and demonstrate the results of our partners' generous gifts. To God be the glory!



Choirs present new musical work: Trinity, Our God of Hope and Help



Members of the Free Lutheran Bible College's choirs presented a concert on Feb. 2 to celebrate the commissioning of a new musical work, "Trinity: Our God of Hope and Help," written by Marianne Forman of San Diego, Calif. The concert, which also included a congregational hymn sing, featured the five-movement work centered on the Triune Godhead in three core pieces, "Look At the Birds," "What a Savior, What a Friend," and "Breath of God." The introductory piece, "One Jehovah," and the conclusion, "Gloria," round out the composition.

The choirs will share selections from the composition throughout their spring tours. A recording of the concert can be watched at flbc.edu/trinity.

TOP and ABOVE: Members of both FLBC choirs present the five-movement Trinity compositions. LEFT: Audience members participated in the hymn sing portion of the concert. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Esther Rabenberg shared about her impressions of the commissioned piece. MIDDLE: Nate Wilhelm sang a solo in "One Jehovah." BOTTOM: Choir members sing the final piece, "Gloria."

Coyle speaks on the Trinity at Spotlight: Missions conference



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pastor Andy Coyle was the featured speaker at the spring semester Spotlight: Missions conference. Rose Stenberg and Johanna Lindley participated in a discussion group. Lydia Pedersen, Meagan Pedersen, and Erika Bodin were part of an object lesson. Harley Dale listens to a session.

Pastor Andy Coyle, director of AFLC Home Missions, was the featured speaker at the spring semester Spotlight: Missions conference at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary. During three morning sessions and one evening session, Coyle spoke on the theme of the Trinity and how the fellowship of the Triune Godhead is the key to a missional worldview. “Truly understanding the tri-unity of God is the most attractive thing about the Christian faith,” said Coyle.

Video sessions can be found on the FLBC website.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Shane McLoughlin has resigned from Bethel Free Lutheran, Minot, N.D., and has accepted a call to Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Eagle Butte, S.D., and Bethel Lutheran, Faith, S.D.

Pastor Dana Coyle has resigned from Freedom Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill., and has accepted a call to serve Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D. His new call will begin on May 1.

Journey Missions is hosting a short-term mission trip from Feb. 20 to March 6 to the AFLC World Missions field ministries in Brazil. The team of 12 participants will travel with AFLC missionaries Pastor Paul and Becky Abel. They will first participate in a children's camp at the ARCA in Curitiba. Then, they will travel to the two-point church parish in Foz do Iguacu. They will end their trip in Campo Mourão where they will visit the Bible School and Miriam Children's Home before participating in a Carnival camp with AFLC Brazil missionaries Pastor Jonathan and Tamba Abel, Pastor John and Hannah Lee, Jonni Sliver, and AFLC Paraguay missionaries Pastor Matthew Ednay Abel.

For more information on future ministry trips with Journey Missions, visit their webpage at aflcworldmissions.org/ministry-trips.

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary's subsidy reporting, at right, are now combined as of January 2025 receipts.

JANUARY MEMORIALS

Ambassador Institute

Arthur Arneson

Evangelism

Arthur Arneson

FLBCS

Ardis Twedt
Melva Boe
Cadence Hartman
Carol Grieger
Ruth Claus

Lutheran

Ambassador
Arthur Arneson

Home Missions

Joan Quist

Parish Education

Ardis Twedt

WMF

Carol Grieger
Ione Prebe

World Missions

Josiah Carlson
Eugene Jorgenson
Arthur Arneson

Register for Annual Conference

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 11–14 at the Association Retreat Center located near Osceola, Wis. Registration is now open (aflc.org/about-us/conferences). Prices are \$55/single or \$95/couple. To register for meals and lodging on site, visit the ARC website (arc-aflc.org/2025-annual-conference).

Online registration, which includes registration for nursery, vacation Bible school, and youth activities, will close on June 6. Walk-up registration will be available for the conference, nursery, VBS, and youth.

Nursery is available for children aged 3 and younger. A VBS program will be provided for children entering preschool through those entering sixth grade. The youth track is offered to those entering seventh grade through high school (aged 17 and younger). All activities will take place on site.

Area hotels/rentals/campsites are available as alternate housing options.

Conference committees will meet on June 11. The conference schedule and nominees will be included in the May issue.

Rekindle the Fire, June 10

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will host Rekindle the Fire, a revitalizing and equipping event, on June 10 at Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis. With the theme, "You Shall Be My Witnesses," the event is open to clergy and lay members. The event will include a meal and a time of worship and prayer for the Annual Conference. The event is free. Registration can be found at aflc.org/evangelism/events/rekindle-fire.

WMF Day, June 11

WMF Day will be held prior to the conference opening on June 11 at the ARC with the theme, "The Light of the World Is Jesus" (John 8:12). The schedule begins with worship at 9 a.m. followed by devotions and recognition of missionaries in attendance. Workshops will be presented by Dr. Nathan Olson and Becky Abel (AFLC missionary to Brazil). After lunch, Linda Mohagen will present a session on chalk art. A memorial service and business meeting will close out the day. Pastor Matthew Ballmann will speak at the Mission Festival service (June 12).

Registration (\$25/person before June 11, price increases to \$30) can be found online (aflc.org/women/wmf-day). You may register for the WMF Day meal (\$15) on the WMF registration site if purchasing just one meal. To include the WMF meal as part of the conference meal package, visit the ARC webpage (arc-aflc.org/2025-annual-conference).

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-January 31, 2025

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$64,075	\$64,075	14	\$48,720
Evangelism	15,037	15,037	11	15,269
Youth Ministries	13,396	13,396	9	13,675
Parish Education	12,827	12,827	7	12,374
FLBCS	70,833	70,833	9	75,448
Home Missions	34,432	34,432	8	36,672
World Missions	42,964	42,964	9	46,871
Personal Support	54,881	54,881	7	67,373
TOTALS	\$308,445	\$208,445	9	\$316,403

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

Remembering God's timing.

BY CLARA GUNDERSON

Yesterday, while sitting on our veranda, I had an overwhelming desire to put into poetic words my deep love for my children. I didn't, however, because I am not the poet I would like to be. Yet, this morning the desire pushes forward, and I write.

I am a woman fulfilled with the faithful love of my husband of almost 70 years and the gifting of six children.

We were young and expecting our first child, going from one event to another, always looking forward to the next thing. It came to me then that with the birth of this child, I would not have to look forward to anything else to make me happy. Immature? Oh yes, but real. I was, indeed, fulfilled in the birth of Christine Ann.

However, once again, God put in my heart the deep longing for new life. The words, "But God," would continue to be important in my life. In Scripture we see this also, how God changes the direction of a nation or an individual to bring about his will.

We had moved to Viroqua, Wis., where Dick began his ministry as a youth director. Here, in the fullness of God's timing, Daniel Richard was born. Like Hannah in I Samuel 2:27, "I prayed for this child and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the Lord." I not only had been given one pearl of a lifetime, but two! Truly, the day a baby is born is the day from which all other days would take their arrangement. Don't I remember saying,

"It was just after Christine was born—" or, "When Dan was just two months old—"

How sweet it was to see these two together, big sister protecting and caring for her baby brother. He, looking for her and claiming his enviable position as the youngest and therefore privileged. Who can define or explain the love of a mother for her babes? My heart overflowed with happiness and thanks to the Lord.

Be that as it may, it isn't the end of my poem! We mortals tend to think we know it all, and so we lay our plans. Proverbs 16:1 tells it plainly: "We can make our plans, but the final outcome is in God's hands."

Sensing God's call into full-time ministry, we made our plans to return to Minneapolis when Daniel would be a year old. I would get a job to supplement our income while Dick went to class and worked. We took our plans to the Lord for his blessing. Through my parents and siblings, God confirmed our plans.

And then the Lord planted within me another perfect pearl of a lifetime! As yet, I didn't know the depth of his love for me, his trust in me to take care of this pearl. I questioned him, "Now, Lord?" I asked. "Yes, now my child—it is a perfect time." And so it was that Peder William was born, bringing joy and a sense of completeness into my heart.

Dick finished his studies and was ordained into the ministry. During this time, the Lord called us to overseas mission work, and we left for Bolivia. My children were in boarding school. Perhaps their absence from

our home is what stimulated the ache in my heart to have yet another. Unable to carry another child, we sought adoption. I had a little girl babe in mind, yet when the doctor called and said there was a 1-year-old boy available, my heart said yes. Through various circumstances, we met Virginia and her baby, Jose Luis, whom she desired to give to us, unable to care for him herself. With a new name, Jonathan David became a Gunderson forever. In the adoption process, he was given a new birth certificate declaring him the legitimate son of Richard and Clara. Jon was a beautiful, dark-skinned, black-haired Bolivian Aymara. Arriving back in the United States with him, he drew attention wherever we went.

That attention was soon to be heaped upon Andrew and Ruth, born 11 months later. Finding myself pregnant, I prepared birth announcements by tracing Jon's hand with the words, "You may think we have our hands full, but our cup runneth over with joy." That was fine for the fifth child, but here were the fifth and sixth! So, I added another little finger indicating the overflowing family.

Why have I told you all of this? I am remembering God's plans, his faith in me, and his love for children. As I look back on these memories, I am reminded of God's faithfulness and his perfect timing. I pray that you, too, will take encouragement and see life through the faithfulness of God's plan.

Gunderson lives in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

BUILDING THE BASE \ \ THE LORD'S PRAYER \ Part 2

Willing, and able.

BY PASTOR NICK SCHULTZ

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In Matthew 8:1–4, right after Jesus came down from the mountain where he had been preaching, he entered quite a startling scene. A man who was a leper approached Jesus. This was startling because lepers were supposed to keep their distance, yet this man came right up to Jesus and prayed to him, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Jesus responded by touching him—shocking!—and saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

What is most remarkable about this little scene is that what happens is the opposite of what we would expect. Normally, when someone touches someone who is ritually unclean, like this leper, then the clean person becomes ritually unclean. But when Jesus, the Son of God, touched the leper, the leper became clean.

This is exactly what happens when God's kingdom comes to us. Christ's present reign and rule as King is constantly being extended by the Holy Spirit through

the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. When a sinful person hears of Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and, by the work of the Holy Spirit, believes, the Kingdom of God has come upon that person. Notice the Holy Spirit's work in this. The advancement of God's kingdom is dependent upon God's action. If someone hears and believes, it is God's work. If the one who hears and believes was already a Christian, then that person will grow in assurance and sanctification. If the one who hears the Word newly believes it, then that person has undergone a kingdom transfer out of the kingdom of darkness and into God's kingdom of marvelous light (I Peter 2:9).

The leprous man prefaced his prayer to Jesus by saying, “If you are willing ...” When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done,” it is quite possible the disciples thought of this man and his pious, faithful prayer. There was no presumption or demand in it. He simply and humbly requested that God's will would

be done and that he would be cleansed from his leprosy.

All three petitions—“if you are willing,” “thy kingdom come,” and “thy will be done”—recognize two very simple theological truths: God is God, and I am not. If the leper was to be healed, it was not dependent upon his prayer but on Jesus' will. God's kingdom is going to come; it is not dependent upon your work but on God's. God's will is done; it is not dependent upon your desire, but God's.

This does not mean that you should do nothing. As we saw in January, God invites us to pray. Likewise, God graciously invites us to hear his Word and believe the gospel. Through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, God graciously gives us new hearts and transforms our minds so that we would walk in his commandments, carrying out his will.

Schultz serves St. Olaf Lutheran, Chamberlain, S.D., and Pukwana Free Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D.