

Faith & Fellowship

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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

God is Greater

H.E. WISLØFF



The devil will not leave a living, believing child of God in peace. He begrudges them peace and rest in God. He did not leave even Jesus in peace but pursued him to his death.

Off and on it may seem that he whispers the truth into the soul. But it is not the truth, for it does not dwell in him. He is a liar and the father of lies. Is it not strange that it is often easier for us to believe what he says than what God says? What he says seems often so reasonable, it harmonizes both with our thoughts and our feelings. But never forget that what he says is a lie, and it is spoken for the purpose of leading you astray.

He also knows how to dress in such a way that we do not recognize him. He is the deceiver. Resist him! Do not believe him!

How good it is to know that Jesus is the strongest. What he says is truth—absolute truth. Even though our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. That Word is truth. How blessed is that truth—that we are loved by God.

Hans Edvard Wisløff (1902—1969) was a Norwegian theologian and writer. He was also the Bishop of the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland from 1959 until his death in 1969.

Wisløff, H.E., Quiet Moments on the Way Home. Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 1993.

The Morning Star

TROY TYSDAL

The planet Venus is known as the *Morning Star*. It circles the Sun faster than the earth and often appears in the east just over the horizon before dawn. As the earth rotates it gives the appearance that Venus is leading the sun, bringing the light, to the earth. In biblical times, shepherds would watch for the planet, waiting for it to appear, and when it did they knew the terrors of the night were almost over.

The Latin *Vulgate* translated the word *Morning Star* in the book of Isaiah as *Lucifer*. The *King James Version* kept the word, and that is how Lucifer became a proper name for Satan in English. I have been asked many times during my ministry, “Why did God allow Satan to be in the Garden of Eden?” And I believe the answer is this: Satan was in the Garden of Eden because he was created to be in the Garden of Eden. He was not there to tempt, but to bring light, to be a messenger of God, one who brings truth! That is what angels do, but Satan forgot his purpose. He was so caught up in his own splendor, his own apparent perfection, that he lost sight of who he was created to be.

ISAIAH 14:12-17

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star [*Lucifer*], son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: “Is this the man



who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a wilderness, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?”

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul calls Satan the god of this world (4:4). Jesus said, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18). As Christians, we live in a hostile world, a world that clings to different ideals, hopes, and goals than those set forth in Scripture. This should not surprise us. Satan plays to our sinful desires. He tells us to seek fame and fortune, to live as if we are gods, but the Bible tells us something very different. It tells us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Those are two radically different philosophies, and they are not compatible.

The devil would have us shrink back, to lose sight of who we were created to be, but that is something we must never do.

We have been placed in this world with a purpose. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). We are to be a constant and consistent reminder to a world lost in darkness that dawn is coming. Jesus said, in the book of Revelation, “I am the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16).

Satan may have forgotten his purpose, but in the Scriptures we are given the story of *One* who will never forget his. In Jesus Christ we have a Savior, *One* who was dead and rose again, *One* who has set the captives free, *One* who is making all things new.

In this world we are surrounded by darkness, but there is light.

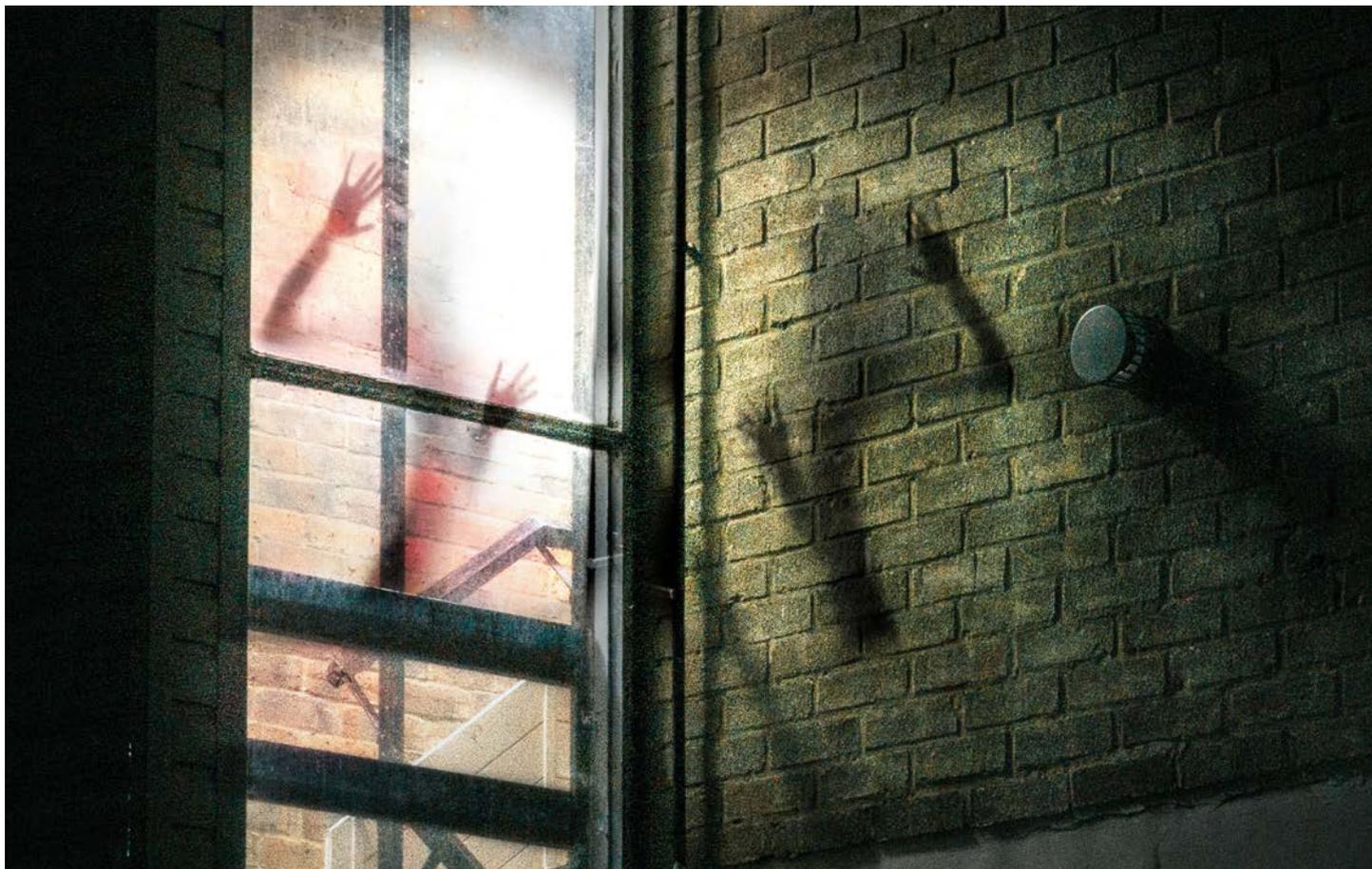
Look to the light!

The *Morning Star* sits just over the horizon, reminding us that night is nearly over; the day is almost here.

Rev. Troy Tysdal is Director of Communications and Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and serves as editor in chief of Faith & Fellowship magazine.



Visit: www.CLBA.org



Thomas Willmott on Unsplash

Fear and Lies: Understanding the Kingdom of Darkness

ROBERT H. BENNETT

The idea of a Kingdom of Darkness attempts to describe the ongoing reality of the devil's work on earth. This includes demonic activity and the sinful thoughts, words, and actions of humanity. We are a fallen people always being led astray by fallen angels. Yet, most of us will never actually see the evil forces that oppress us. The reason for this is that evil works best when it is not recognized. That is why St. Paul informs the Ephesians about the hidden forces that war against them and all of creation. This is best demonstrated in Ephesians 6:12. Paul writes, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." These forces desire to

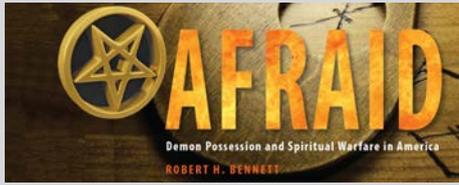
operate in the background, concealing the manipulation and destruction they bring upon God's creation.

Why do they hide? Because the most effective tools that the devil and his demons have at their disposal are the power of fear and lies. They run a deception campaign that can only be understood as we are enlightened by the Word of Holy Scripture. If God had not revealed these things to us, we would have no chance of defending ourselves against such powerful tools. These evil forces sometimes come out of hiding by taking different forms—such as disguising themselves as "ghosts" or through the lies of mediums and fortune-tellers. Yet, while taking a more visible form, they still function within the realm of fear and lies. Indeed, they are the only

tools that are needed to accomplish their destructive plans.

The demonic use of fear is focused explicitly on the original sin within all of us. The essence of this original sin is a lack of trust in God's Holy Word. We wish to avoid pain and suffering; therefore, we do things we know we should not do (e.g., steal from our neighbors, keep quiet when we should be speaking out against evil, etc.) Fear has been a motivator due to our sinful condition since our first parents fell into sin. When we have a fear of poverty, we might steal. Maybe we have a fear of loneliness, so we are unfaithful to our spouses. Many have a fear of having a child, so they seek out abortions. There are too many examples to explore in this short article. Suffice it to say, if we are honest, we can recognize

Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare in America



Summoning demons, interacting with *ghosts*, and holding séances has led many to horrifying hallucinations and even schizophrenia. Yet, these things for many

Americans are their spirituality. How can we break free from the despair and crushing fear that such encounters can bring? How do we come to the aid of our neighbors who are lost in Satan's deceptions?

Dr. Robert H. Bennett points us to the only way out: God's grace and the medicines he gives to his people.

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how fear is behind many of the bad decisions we have made in life. Behind this fear and the decisions we make as a result, lie doubt, sin, and death. However, when fear and lies are combined into a single strategy, it can be devastating to our spiritual well-being. At the essence of any fear is the lie that is behind it.

The lie is the most potent weapon that the demonic world uses against us. If we believe a lie, it becomes our reality, even though it is still a lie. Think about how the devil brought sin into the world. The story is found in Genesis 3:1-5.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

This shows the effectiveness of the devil's lie. While much of what he said to Eve could be understood as the truth, the devil "bent the truth" to create doubt in Eve. So she took the fruit and touched it, but she did not die. She looked at it, saw that it was "good for food and

pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom..." (Genesis 3:6). However, the only wisdom that she or Adam, who also ate from the fruit, gained was the knowledge of sin and death. This is just the first of many examples that Scripture provides of the devil's deceit. Jesus makes this point clear when he tells the Pharisees that they are children of the devil and then explains the devil's origins. "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44b).

The problem we face is that we live in a world full of lies. Many people feel as if there is no one who can be trusted these days. This leads to a distrust in our institutions and churches. It turns people away from confessing their sins by telling them they have no sin. The Bible becomes something less than the Word of God because we let our desire for the lie overshadow the truth. Yet, the truth is found in Jesus. John tells us, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus says of his Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

While the devil and his demons continue their campaign of fear and lies, we have the truth. John summarized this when he told us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). The crucifixion of

Jesus undid the Kingdom of Darkness by casting the devil from his throne. While the devil once had other tools to afflict us, his defeat left him with only the weapons of fear and lies.

The only way to overcome the fear and lies of this world is in the presence of the One who is full of "grace and truth." When we immerse ourselves in the Holy Scriptures, and the promises of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, these fears begin to lose their control over us, and the lies are illuminated so that we can see the truth—the truth of God's love for us and the promise that the devil and his demons' powers over us are removed in Jesus. Fear not, for the Lord is with you. He has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).



Dr. Robert H. Bennett is the Executive Director of Luther Academy and also serves Concordia Theological Seminary as International Missions Specialist and visiting professor of missiology.



Satoshi-Ki/Stock

gods: on Trial

Moon Blocks, Jesus, and Answered Prayers

BEN HOSCH

A TOSS OF THE BLOCKS

“Will Miss Kuo have a boyfriend before next semester?”

This seems like a silly question to ask a god. And yet, as the two red crescent-shaped blocks clattered across the floor they stopped with one round side and one flat side both facing up—a very obvious “Yes!” Everyone erupted in laughter and shouts of “Oh!”, as another student wanted to try his hand at throwing moon blocks.

Of all the sounds one may hear in a Taiwanese temple, the clack of wooden moon blocks across a stone floor is certainly the most common. The Taiwanese call it *bwa bwei*. Patrons in a temple will bring a gift for the god, then light incense sticks and bow three times to get the god’s attention. If they have a

very pressing question or request, they then throw moon blocks to receive the god’s answer.

Moon blocks are an ancient religious practice originating in China, so old that there are arguments about when the practice started. They are crescent-shaped (explaining why English speakers call them “moon blocks”) and painted the auspicious color red. One side is flat, the other round, and when thrown in pairs there are three common landing combinations. Two round sides means “no.” One round and one flat means “yes.” Two flat sides are called the “laughing answer,” either because the gods find the question ridiculous and refuse to answer, or they are laughing because the answer is just too obvious.

My classmate looked over at me and

asked, “Do you want a turn?” I glanced around at the others attending this semester’s language center cultural trip. Some were Muslim, some Buddhist, a few Hindu, most had no religious affiliation, yet all were having a good time asking ridiculous questions and throwing moon blocks to see what answer they might get. (And if it’s any consolation, Miss Kuo still doesn’t have a boyfriend.)

However, throwing moon blocks isn’t like flipping a coin or consulting a magic eight-ball. Even if more and more young Taiwanese don’t believe in the traditional religions and just go along with these practices to please their parents or preserve their culture, moon blocks still have spiritual significance. They are a connection to an unseen world, a pathway for the gods to speak with humans, to

Update from Taiwan



Ben and Sara Hosch have made good progress at learning language and culture in Taiwan. Their next step is a transition to more intentional and focused ministry. Along with their LBIM colleagues and national Church leadership, Ben and Sara Hosch are considering a possible partnership with three potential congregations for the purpose of outreach and mission to the unreached of Taiwan. Thank you for joining us in prayer for this process!

affirm that prayers have been heard, and to give an answer. Throwing moon blocks isn't a parlor game or even just a cultural experience; it is an expression of prayer, an appeal to a higher power, a request for help. And let's be honest, everyone would like to have a tangible sign that their prayer has been heard and an answer is on the way.

There are many gods in Taiwan, each with their own area of expertise, so there are different avenues for help if one god seems unwilling or unable. If I throw moon blocks and one god answers "no," there's a chance a different god may say "yes." Yet I always wonder, if help is received, just who is the "helper"? As a Christian and a missionary, my affirmation of prayer coincides with the Psalmist's: "I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2, ESV). There is only one God who created all that is. He is powerful enough to help, able and willing to hear me, and if I lift my prayers to him, he promises to answer. So my response to my classmate was, "No. I can't. There's only one God whom I ask for help, and I don't have to do anything to know that he hears me."

WHY NOT GIVE JESUS A TRY?

After our daughter was born, we had a particularly long stretch of sleepless nights. It was winter, everyone was sick with a cold, and because our bodies were still adjusting to Taiwanese germs, this cold seemed to stay with us for the whole

month. Our youngest was particularly uncomfortable and unwilling to sleep. We were told by a Taiwanese friend that many parents go to a certain temple when their children are sick, and that we should go there and ask for help. "It's at least worth a try," she said.

The most common objection coming from our friends who practice traditional religions is this: "Why should I pray to your God? I'm not baptized, so he won't listen to me. He doesn't know me, so why should he hear my prayers?" Our friends are adamant about the rapport they have built with gods who seem to be helpful to them. Maybe the best we have to offer them is: "It's worth a try. Just ask Jesus and see if he answers your prayer."

There is the reality that the One who formed us in the womb certainly knows who we are (Psalm 139). David encourages us to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). In Isaiah 55, God admonishes all who thirst to come, and those without money to buy wine and milk without price. And as missionaries, we pray in a way similar to Elijah's taunting the 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) that the ears of these gods would be shut, the moon blocks be wrong, the answers received from the gods be empty and hollow, the requests left unanswered, and the only option left will be to call upon the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Even greater is the reality that prayer is possible and prayer is answered because of Christ Jesus. He is the agent of creation. He is before all things, in

him all things hold together, and we have peace with God through his shed blood (Colossians 1). He is the great High Priest and Sacrifice, the great Intercessor who brings our requests before God and prays for us (Hebrews 4 and 10). All prayers are "Yes!" and "Amen!" in him (2 Corinthians 1:19-20), and even God's "No" can be the best answer to our prayers. In a world full of options, we know Jesus to be the only viable one. Whether our friends practice another religion or no religion at all, it is always worth it to encourage them to give it a try and ask Jesus for help, because he is willing and able to do so.



Rev. Ben Hosch serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as a missionary for Lutheran Brethren International Mission to the unreached people of Taiwan.



Museums Victoria on Unsplash

Have You Committed the Unforgivable Sin?

MATTHIAS SZOBODY

If you type the words “the unforgivable sin” into a google search bar, you will be promptly drowned in *several hundred* articles on the subject. Apparently, there’s something here that weighs on the minds of many a Christian googler!

If you scroll a bit through the results, you may also find that this flood of links isn’t content to just stay behind your screen. Instead, it bursts through the tempered glass like waves of anxiety. This anxiety is perfectly expressed by one of the bold page-titles in front of your eyes: “Have You Committed The Unforgivable Sin?”

If you click on image results, things get worse. One of the very first images is a cartoon drawing of a goblin-like pastor angrily stooping over his pulpit to point

his bony finger at the face of a terrified parishioner in the front pew. The caption: “You committed the unforgivable sin!!! It’s over!!!”

As someone who has nervously made these searches before—several times, in fact—I’ve recently felt the need to go back to the story that is quoted when people refer to this sin. A particularly convicting version of this story can be found in Mark 3:20-30.

Why is Jesus speaking of an unforgivable sin? What *is* the unforgivable sin? How does the mention of this sin fit into the larger gospel story? And most importantly, have I committed this sin? Have *you* committed the unforgivable sin?

Jesus is sitting in a house, trying to eat, but he can’t even finish his meal

because of the droves of people who have crowded into the home to catch a glimpse of him. At the very same time, Jesus’ family members are trying to kidnap him because they think he is insane! And if this situation isn’t already chaotic enough, Jesus also must worry about a group of religious leaders who are out to kill him. Great!

Under these circumstances, we see Jesus engage carefully and thoughtfully with each of these groups of people. When the murderous religious leaders try to discredit Jesus by accusing him of being possessed by Satan, instead of completely losing it—the guy was just trying to eat lunch!—Jesus gives a striking message about forgiveness of sins.

Indeed, we often emphasize the harshest

“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

Mark 3:28-29

words in Jesus’ response “whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.” This is what we call the unforgivable sin. But notice the words that come just before, “...people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter...” If Jesus himself puts more emphasis on the condemnation, it is because of who he is talking to, namely, those who are opposing his divine mission. But to Jesus’ own followers the words of forgiveness are more relevant.

But we want to know what the unforgivable sin actually is. What do the Pharisees do that constitute blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

Well, the answer to that last question seems clear enough: the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being possessed by Satan. And since Jesus in fact is anointed by the Holy Spirit, as Mark tells us in Mark 1:10, the Pharisees are misidentifying the Holy Spirit as Satan. This is deeply dishonoring to God, in other words, blasphemous.

But let’s delve deeper: *why* do the Pharisees make this accusation? What is going on in their hearts?

We’re only at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, but there is already a short history of tension between Jesus and the Pharisees that we can explore to understand what lies *behind* the Pharisees’ accusation. What is their motivation? In the Gospel of Mark, the very first time the Pharisees take issue with Jesus is when he says to a paralytic man in Capernaum, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). “Why does this fellow talk like that?” the Pharisees squawk, “He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (2:7).

At the heart of the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus is their rejection of his divinity—only God can forgive sins, and Jesus most certainly is not God! Conversely, notice how that rejection of divinity plays out

at the beginning of Mark: it plays out in their rejection of his divine mission to forgive sins!

The Pharisees’ accusation that Jesus is possessed by Satan is so serious, then, not only because their *words* dishonor the Holy Spirit, but even more because it is an expression of their underlying rejection of Jesus’ divinity and *his divine mission of forgiveness*. Similarly, when Jesus reprimands the Pharisees by saying that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, he is not just talking about their words; he is not saying that you can say whatever you want about his Father and be fine, but utter a word against the Spirit and be forever lost. He is in fact seeing beyond the Pharisees’ words to what has been in their hearts ever since Capernaum. He recognizes that by misidentifying God’s Spirit in him, they are rejecting his own divinity and in doing so his divine mission of forgiveness.

Now this is how the controversy over Jesus’ divinity is relevant to forgiveness in our specific text: Jesus says that all sins will be forgiven, even blasphemy (3:28). But if the Pharisees reject God’s Son, who is anointed with God’s Spirit (1:10), and through whom forgiveness itself comes, then how will they be forgiven their blasphemy? The Pharisees have rejected Jesus’ divinity and, as a result, his mission to forgive sins. Now how will they be forgiven such a sin? Forgiveness is found in God’s Son Jesus, whom they reject!

Mark is drawing attention to an irony here in his storytelling. When Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic in Capernaum, the Pharisees accused *him* of blasphemy. Mark is now circling back to that theme of blasphemy to show the listener that true blasphemy of the worst kind is when one rejects Jesus’ divinity

and his divine mission of forgiveness—the very mission that was on display when Jesus forgave the paralytic. This is the worst form of blasphemy because it attacks the Son of God through whom forgiveness of sin comes—and God’s forgiveness is exactly what blasphemers need!

What amazes me about this story is that even as Jesus delivers harsh judgement on those who reject him and his forgiveness, in the same breath he affirms the truly striking hope for those who receive him as the Son of God who forgives. For if there is no forgiveness for those who reject forgiveness itself by opposing Jesus, then there is abundant forgiveness for those who receive him in faith. Yes, *every single* sin will be forgiven, even blasphemy!

Was this story included in the Gospels so that we would anxiously doubt Jesus’ ability to forgive us our sins? On the contrary, Jesus’ words are instead an invitation to repent from all the ways in which we have dishonored God, and through the life and death of his son Jesus to receive his forgiveness for *all* our sins!



Pastor Matthias Szobody is a second-year seminarian at Lutheran Brethren Seminary and serves as associate pastor at Liberty Lutheran Brethren Church in Fargo, North Dakota.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$1,158,635

Received Through 12/11/20

\$2,650,000

2020-21 Contribution Goal

\$1,695,742 Anticipated Through 12/31/20 --

The CLB Fiscal Year Ends April 30, 2021.

One Little Word!

ROY HEGGLAND

One of my favorite hymns is Martin Luther's *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. The second part of the first verse paints a pretty bleak picture of our position on earth compared to the Prince of Darkness:

*For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe
His craft and power are great
and armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal*

We are terribly outmatched. In fact, we do not stand a chance before the greatest of all angels who believed he should be god.

It must have been child's play for him to beguile Adam and Eve into believing that they should be gods, too. Adam and Eve were perfect, lived in complete harmony with their creator, and wanted for nothing. Yet they ushered in the reign of death over all creation after one little conversation with the serpent! What sheep! How could they have been so easily deceived? And yet we learn this about ourselves in Isaiah 53:6, "All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own..." (NLT).

How can we be so naïve, and so easily leave the path of life for the path of death? A good friend once used this analogy for what happened to all of us when Adam and Eve fell: In the fall, all humanity was infected with the serpent's DNA. We now

see with serpent's eyes and understand life from a serpent's point of view. God appears to be the ultimate enemy who seeks our destruction, and we must be the source of our own salvation. That may seem exaggerated to you, but have you listened to or read the news lately? Doesn't it seem like the forces of the dark kingdom are being united against *their* ancient enemy and his followers?

Yes, we are desperately outmatched. How can there be any hope for those who identify with the kingdom of light? Of course, there is much more to the story of darkness and light, just as there are more verses to *A Mighty Fortress!* As powerful as Satan is, he is still a created being. Before Lucifer became Satan, God planned our rescue. Matthew 1:21 tells us very simply, "And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (NLT).

There is a line in the third verse of *A Mighty Fortress* that has always sent a thrill through me as I hear it or sing it. The second half of that verse goes like this:

*The Prince of Darkness grim
We tremble not for him
His rage we can endure
For lo! his doom is sure
One little word shall fell him*

"One little word shall fell him" are the words that make this hymn one of my favorites. One word from the Living

Word is all it takes to completely destroy the reign of evil and death and make everything new. The one who outmatches us has been supremely outmatched!

Not only is that good news for later, but it is also good news *now!* That same Word who will destroy the serpent already lives in us. The same power that raised Jesus from the grave and will annihilate sin and death is able to destroy the power of sin in our lives. Thank God he has already won the victory and will give us victory everyday as we live in and breathe the life-giving Word.

Most of the world does not even know that they are in the fight of their lives with an enemy they cannot beat. Will you give so that their eyes may be opened to see the One who loves them with an eternal love? So that they can know that "one little word" from the Living Word, Jesus Christ, can defeat the enemy of their souls and give them eternal life?

Roy Heggland is Associate for Biblical Stewardship for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

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Finding Light in the Darkness

SHELLEY ANTUÑA

Anyone else feeling like we are under attack? I am referring to a spiritual attack, of course. When COVID-19 hit North America earlier this year, it was a dark time for all. Many of us find peace and joy in our faith through our fellowship with others. I found that my faith was depressed because I was being prevented from the fellowship I desired and truly needed. But, before I could begin to wallow in that depressed state, our churches responded to our need to stay connected and created a presence in our lives despite the pandemic shutdowns. Zoom meetings, Facebook Watch viewings of Bible studies, and church services began to pop up everywhere on the internet.

Now, I know that if I were a “good Christian,” my faith should never be depressed. I should have immediately responded to the issues by diving into the Word, praying and laying my cares at the foot of the cross. The only problem is, I am human. I don’t always choose the right path the first time. That being said, our God is good and strong and faithful. He knows us and he knows we sometimes need a knock at the door to help us choose the right path. For me, he did just that and it spread like ripples in a lake.

Just prior to the start of the pandemic, the Lord led me to accept a position on the board of the Eastern Region Women’s Ministry of the CLB. Our biggest job during the year is to plan the Fall Women’s Retreat at Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center. How interesting that the theme God had put on our hearts for the retreat was, *Resting in God in a Restless World!* Our first planning meeting of the year... cancelled. Let the battle begin! We pushed on. We scheduled all subsequent monthly meetings via Zoom. We decided early on that we would plan the in-person retreat, pray, and let God take care of the



The Fall Women’s Retreat at Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center.

pandemic obstacle. After all, he is the one to fight the spiritual battle; our job is to have faith and trust in him.

So plan and pray we did, every month checking off another confirmed detail that would get us closer to the live, and more importantly, in-person event. As the year pushed into the summer months, the pandemic issues lightened up a little and we all “took a breath.” All our plans were set. We even arranged for our speaker to get tested before her arrival so there would be no issues preventing her from attending... unless she tested positive—but we wouldn’t even think that thought.

Flash forward to a week before the retreat. Pennsylvania, the location of Tuscarora, was added as a “red” state for those of us living in Connecticut. That included two of the four members of the board. One other board member was unable to attend as well, so we had to get creative. Everyone in the country was “Zoomed out,” tired of virtual meetings, so we had to make this work. We looked at the state regulations and learned that we could go to the retreat (because we were coordinating it), we just couldn’t stay overnight. Thankfully, Tuscarora is situated on the New Jersey border. We

got on the phone and booked lodging just over the state line.

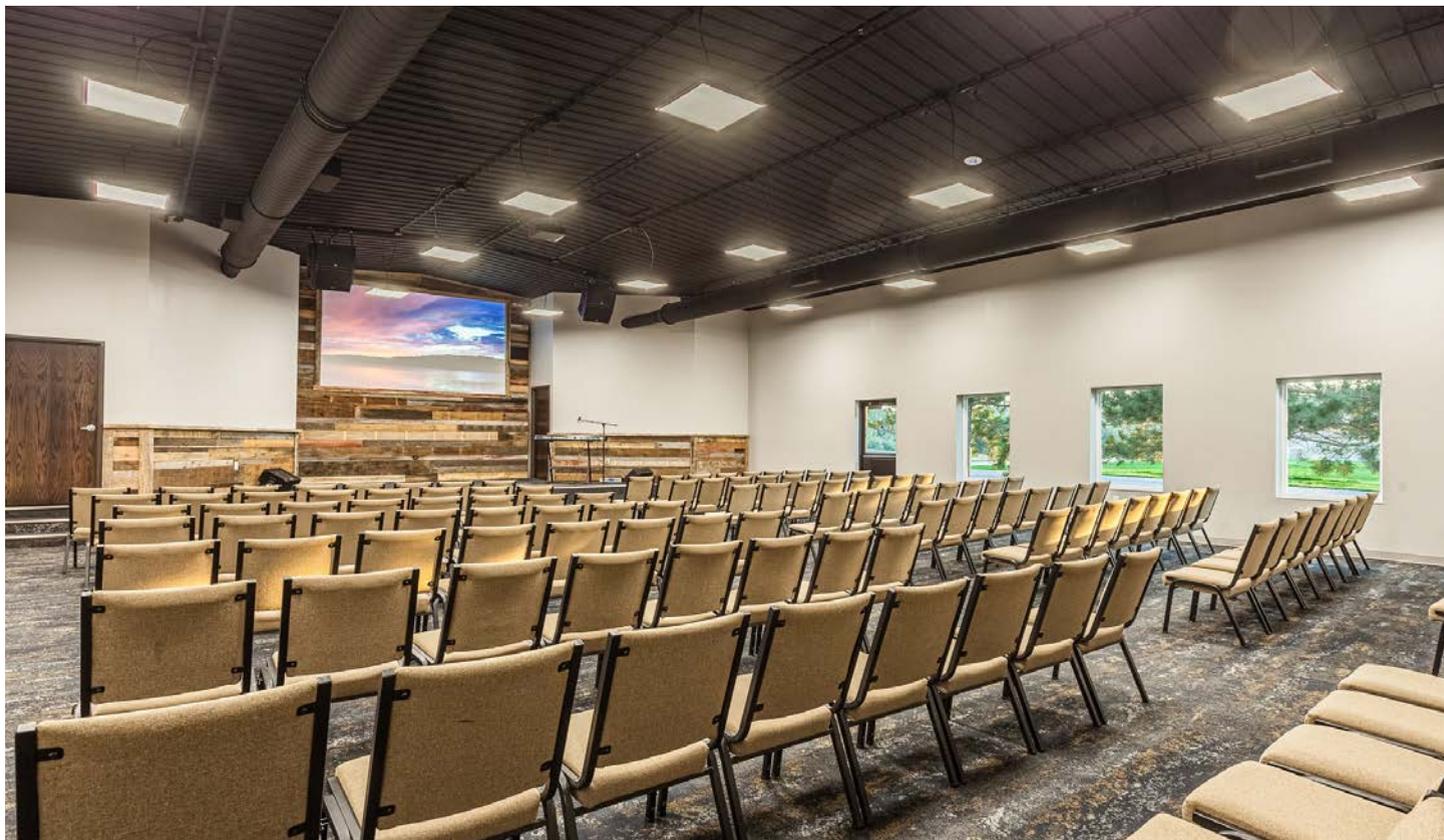
This battle turned into a juggling act. Some people who were scheduled to run retreat events had to cancel, but as they did, others swooped in ready and willing to fill in for them. If you were looking down on the situation you could see the attacker firing at us, threatening to ruin the event, and then the hand of God coming in to turn it around. Back and forth it went, right up until the first night.

The retreat was wonderful and refreshing for all who were able to attend. The speaker, Rebecca Meidinger, was terrific. The weather was warm and beautiful for November in the Northeast. The women were blessed by the fresh air, the prayer, the message, and the fellowship. We even did a bit of ax throwing! And, looking back, I was guided down the right path even though that wasn’t my first thought.

Shelley Antuña is a member of the Eastern Region Women’s Ministry board.



Visit WMCLB online: www.WMCLB.org
Email: WMCLBcontact@gmail.com



Inspiration Point at Twin Oaks.

Inspiration Point: God Provides

GREG ANDERSON

The Bible is loaded with instances of God calling people out of their surroundings and leading them to the outdoors, sometimes as discipline, but always for learning. Paul, Elijah, Moses and the Israelites, David, and even Jesus, all experienced defining moments during times away in the wilderness. Still today, God uses outdoor ministry to draw people to himself.

Many of us have read the troubling reports of young adults leaving the Church, and we wonder, “What can we do?” The 2014 National Study on Youth and Religion reported that “kids who attended camp, versus their peers who did not, are three times more likely to remain in the church five years beyond high school.” And it isn’t only kids who benefit. Barna Research’s 2017 Pastors Poll reported that 39% of U.S. pastors received their call into ministry while at camp! At camp, there is a powerful marriage of general (creation) and special (God’s Word) revelation. Creation tells us there is a God, and the Scriptures tell us who that God is and what he has done.

A number of years ago, a middle school student exclaimed following his week at Inspiration Point, “Spitzer Lake screams of a Creator, and I met him right over there,” as he pointed to the spot where his cabin had studied the Bible for the last four days.

Spitzer Lake was a beautiful setting, indeed. If you are one who has a long history with Inspiration Point, the camp and retreat center owned by the CLB Central and Western Regions, you might remember playing volleyball near the lake. You might remember kids standing for photos on a boulder near the swimming area or recall canoeing and bumping into submerged trees. That boulder and those trees are now several feet underwater as Spitzer has risen more than five feet higher than it was in the early 90s. There have been years that were drier than others, but the lake level has climbed steadily.

Significant flooding in 2011 covered the front lawn and impacted the roads. After a substantial financial outlay, our camp was able to hold the water back for

several years, but now can do it no more. In fact, it seems the days of ministry on that peninsula have come to a close.

Here’s why...

The high water has caused significant damage to the site and several buildings. The lower floor of the main building is below lake level. Despite our efforts sandbagging, cutting concrete and laying drainage tile, and running many pumps continually, the intense hydrological pressure causes water to constantly seep through the floor. Lawns and trees have also been damaged.

If it were only about waiting for the water to subside, it would need to drop at least three feet and then stabilize before we could justify spending the hundreds of thousands of dollars necessary to restore the property. That means that on a lake the size of Spitzer, nearly 800 million gallons of water would need to evaporate or be moved; that doesn’t take into account any water added from rains and runoff.

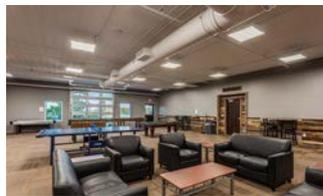
Camp leadership has also worked with engineers and the governing authorities to see if constructing an outlet on the lake

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is a possibility. But even if an unlikely approval were granted, it would take several years to complete the project, at a probable price tag of \$4-5 million. And, there is no guarantee it would work.

We thank God for the rich history of ministry at the Spitzer Lake site, celebrating as we remember how God used that special property as a setting where the gospel could be heard. There is a wonderful story of a fifth-grade camper who exclaimed at a campfire, “I know God doesn’t speak any louder at camp, but I sure can hear him better!”

Now Inspiration Point looks forward to seeing how God uses another setting, Twin Oaks, to continue the mission of “providing time, space, and biblical teaching with the aim that people encounter and follow Christ.”

Someone told our staff this past spring that with Spitzer Lake flooding, God seems to have provided the Twin Oaks property as an ark! We are regularly reminded of how incredibly and generously God has provided in bringing camp to a new location. God has been

faithfully at work ensuring that the vital, life-changing gospel will continue to be shared through the ministry of Inspiration Point, providing the same Christ-central ministry in a new place.

When Inspiration Point purchased the Twin Oaks property in 2018, it was done as a response to significant growth—the camp needed more space so it could serve the more than 300 kids who had to be turned away each summer. God brought Inspiration Point to what we thought would be a second location, only for us to learn that it would become the only location. And what a location it is! Twin Oaks is a former private estate on 1,075 acres of woods, prairie, and water. It already had asphalt roads, 12 miles of hiking trails, four lakes, numerous ponds, and stunning buildings ready for use. Over the past two years, we’ve been able to add infrastructure, nine cabins, a very nice shower house, and a swimming pool, while remodeling several other buildings. The result is a fantastic camp and retreat facility. The response of visitors has been extremely positive. Following a tour in

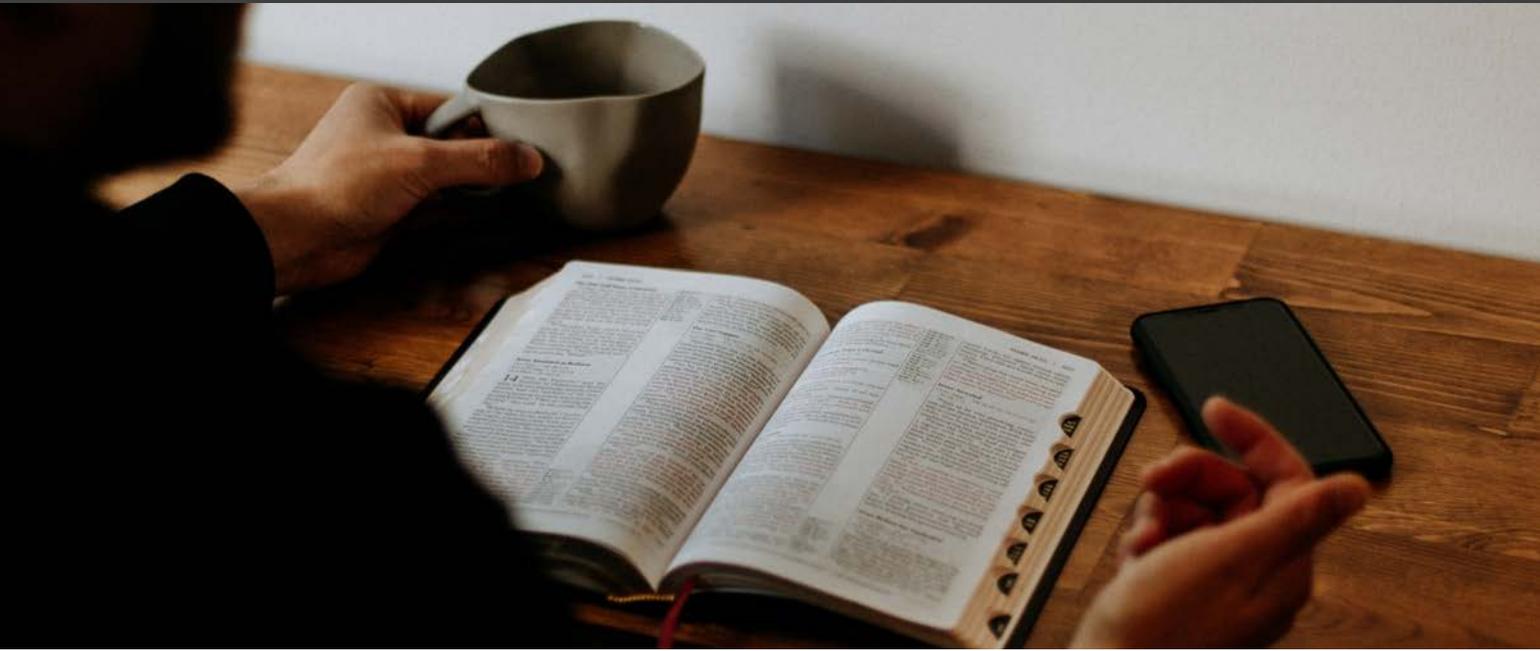
September, one gentleman remarked, “I couldn’t believe it when you showed me pictures of this place last year. But to see it in person is even more incredible!”

The necessary financial outlay has been significant, and there is still a long way to go to pay off the purchase price. However, God’s provision has been right on time thus far, and we are trusting him to continue to raise up people who will provide what is required to wrap up this massive project.

If you’d like to learn more, please contact me at office@ipoint.org.



Greg Anderson serves as President of Inspiration Point Christian Camp and Retreat Center. He arrived at Inspiration Point in 1990, serving as the director until 2015. He has since transitioned into the role of president.



Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

What Does the Word Say?

DAVID VEUM

This question has become a hallmark of Dr. Eugene Boe’s teaching. As seminary students grapple with the many issues of theology, their quest for the answers does not end in a textbook. It ends in *the Book*, as their teacher asks, “What does the Word say?”

They are taught to ask this question at Lutheran Brethren Seminary because the Word of God is our foundation. The Word is the only foundation we can depend on. The Word is the one and only foundation that we can trust.

Jesus himself relied on this foundation as he faced Satan in the wilderness temptation. Satan had attacked the Word in the Garden of Eden. “Has God said...?” He openly lied to Eve by contradicting the Word. In the wilderness as he attacked the Word made flesh, he twisted God’s Word in tempting Jesus to doubt that he was the Son of God. Each time, Jesus met the temptation with the same dependence on the foundation: “It is written.”

So can we. When we feel alone, it is written in God’s Word that our Great High Priest has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5, ESV). When we fear the future, it

is written in God’s Word that the King of kings has promised, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,” and “Behold, I am coming soon” (Revelation 1:17-18; 22:12, ESV). When we doubt that our sins are forgiven, it is written in God’s Word that through our Savior’s death and resurrection we can trust this promise, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Rev. A.A. Pedersen, a past president of LBS, illustrated the value of having this solid foundation of the Word with this story. He told of a pastor who was visiting with an elderly parishioner, a woman who had begun to doubt that her sins were forgiven. The pastor pointed to the Scriptures which should have assured her that Jesus had taken all her sins to the cross. He almost chided her for not believing the promises. She remained unaffected.

So, he took a different tack. He asked her about the home where she lived and if she owned it. It had been her home, but she had deeded it to her son. He asked

how long she could plan on staying there. She responded that her son had promised that she could stay until she died. Then the pastor asked, “What happens if your son decides not to keep that promise?” To this question she had a ready answer. “Oh, he must keep his promise. I have it in writing.”

That’s when she realized the answer to her bigger question, “Are my sins forgiven?” She was now assured by the promises from the Word. She had it in writing. The promises were in the solid foundation of God’s Word.

Back in my farming days I learned the importance of a solid foundation. A construction crew was digging footings to pour a foundation for building a 60-foot-tall concrete silo. The backhoe seemed to be scooping out dirt far deeper than I thought necessary. Knowing that I would be paying for the cement to fill those deep footings, I questioned the construction foreman. He pointed out that the building site had several feet of fill that had been added over the years. He silenced my question by saying, “We need to dig down to solid ground for the foundation.”

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”
Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)



Drew and Holly Skog.

Drawn to the Word

DREW SKOG

Like paying for all those yards of cement for that foundation, our students pay dearly for their foundation in the Word. They invest more than \$20,000 in tuition and at least 2,500 hours in study while earning their degrees, as they learn to answer the question, “What does the Word say?” But the investment in this solid foundation is worth it, so that they can confidently tell you, “Your sins are forgiven. You have it in writing.”



Dr. David Veum serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary.

I grew up in Bloomington, Minnesota a few blocks away from the house that my father grew up in. I now live with my incredible wife Holly in the same neighborhood, a few blocks away from my father and mother. We look forward to having children who will also get to experience the joy of having their grandparents a short walk away! I was baptized and raised Lutheran and began attending Oak Hill LBC in 5th grade (2005). I never left. After graduating from Bethel University and working for a few years in finance, I began studying at Seminary and accepted a role at Oak Hill as the Youth Director. I currently serve as the Director of Community Life and have been so blessed to see God at work allowing me to serve the congregation that helped me grow as a person and in my faith.

From my earliest memories, I felt called to ministry. I began to be affirmed in such a calling when I was in middle school and always knew that I would end up in Seminary someday. As I waited on the Lord to see where he was guiding me in my finance career, it slowly but surely became evident that I was going to be in ministry sooner than I imagined. As I began to seriously consider Seminary in 2018, the Lord began opening doors and clearing a path so wide that even a cautious man like me felt comfortable moving forward. I have always been drawn to the preaching of the Word and the spiritual care of people. Even in times when I’ve thought I couldn’t do it, the Lord was faithful in using me. I’m so thankful to have this opportunity to love people, to learn more about God’s Word, and to use the gifts he has given me to help build his kingdom. There is nothing on earth more fulfilling for me than to sit down with a person and get to hear his or her story—both the good and the bad—and talk about how the Lord moves in the Word and life.

Drew Skog is a second-year seminarian at Lutheran Brethren Seminary and serves as the director of community life at Oak Hill Church in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Why Jesus?

STACIA RAY

I had the privilege of being Stacia's pastor for a number of years. She is a woman who loves Jesus and people—what a powerful combination! As you read this article you will be encouraged to meet people where they are. It is from this starting point that God can do amazing things. Stacia is one of us and isn't it amazing that Jesus came as one of us too! The Light of the World shines in us and through us. There is no darkness that is too dark for light to conquer. Let's join with Stacia and let Jesus shine!

*Rev. Nick Mundis, Director
North American Mission*



Kipras Streimikis on Unsplash

My close relative is a self-proclaimed “skeptical deist.” He believes in God, but his idea of the Creator is hands-off, with no Trinity or Bible or active involvement in our lives. During our many theological discussions, I’ve shared examples of my “God-incidences” (the name my mother always called Divine non-coincidences), relayed countless anecdotes of times I’ve prayed for something impossible that God then made possible, and even told stories of my kids’ chilling “God-incidences.” And this relative has come close to believing in the gospel a time or two. But there’s always one hurdle he just can’t get over.

“Even if the things you say are true,” he once said, “even if I accept the idea that Jesus miraculously left that tomb and ascended into heaven, what’s the point? If God is all-powerful and can restore my soul on his own, then why Jesus?”

Why Jesus? I suddenly realized the truth on which I base my entire life means virtually nothing to a doubter who doesn’t fully appreciate the *purpose* of that truth. And this got me wondering: Do I fully appreciate the purpose of that truth?

How often do we as Christians live our faith walk on autopilot while completely missing the awesomeness of *why* God sent his only Son? To my relative’s point, God certainly didn’t need to send us

Jesus. The world could have continued under the rule of disciplinarian Old Testament covenants, with a handful of people seeking forgiveness from a vague concept of a mysterious, unseen God. Or the all-powerful God could have just eliminated our free will in a snap or even wiped away disobedient humankind in a Divine do-over.

But God so loved the world—infinately, unconditionally, immeasurably. And to show the depth of that love, he voluntarily surrendered to the cross the most relatable part of himself: His only Child.

Jesus’ arrival came at a dark period in history. Satan was busy corrupting many hearts, and the fallen world was filled with turmoil and evil. And that darkness was part of a bigger plan: The darker the environment, the easier it is to see the beam of a flashlight. People don’t seek God much when life is going great.

That said, it’s not easy to relate to extravagant pageantry of burning bushes or an unseen, distant deity—just ask my relative. So God sent Jesus to make himself—and his gift of eternal life—accessible.

Jesus could have been born to experienced human parents, surrounded by the most skilled doctors and nurses, fanciest crib, finest linens—the works. He could even have arrived as a superhuman adult. But would that be relatable? Could my skeptical relative ever feel connected to that?

Instead, Jesus came into the world as a baby (just like we did) through a young, poor, unprepared couple struggling with real-world problems (just like we have). His birth story was filled with difficulties and obstacles (just like our lives are). He arrived in disgraceful circumstances (literally—Mary was considered a disgrace, as you can imagine what people thought of her when she tried to explain her virgin birth). That tiny, helpless baby arrived in a relatable way—and that same tiny, helpless baby carried all the strength to save anyone who looks to the cross and believes.

The next time you feel overwhelmed, pause to prayerfully reflect on *Why Jesus?* The hands-on Creator, the God who brought planets into existence through his very Word, longs to connect with us daily... yes, us, even with all our flaws and selfishness! He deeply desires to engage in our lives on a personal level.

Yet despite how intimate he is with us, he’s still mighty enough to deliver us from our ongoing darkness like a flashlight. And in a time as dark and difficult as this, that Light of Jesus might just be brighter and more important than ever.

Stacia Ray is a member of Oak Hill Church in Bloomington, Minnesota.

The Time for Outreach is Now

SHAWN BOWMAN

When the pandemic ends, some churches will emerge weaker, and some will emerge stronger. One of the consistent themes that I see with churches that are growing and strengthening during this season is that their leaders are optimistic, energized, and willing to try new forms of ministry and adapt to the rapidly changing conditions of our mission field. Pastor Shawn and the other leaders at Victory LBC in Jamestown, North Dakota are an example of the type of leadership attitudes needed during COVID. I pray that you'll find encouragement and inspiration from Pastor Shawn's article.

*Dr. Ryan Nilsen, Associate Director
North American Mission*



Ben White on Unsplash

become much worse, but either way, now is a time of great opportunity! Never in my lifetime have I observed such a hunger for truth and a willingness to listen to the gospel. People are in need. The Church has a mission to fulfill, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. Mission can be as simple as leaving a bag of groceries on the doorstep of a COVID-19 sufferer, calling shut-ins and praying with them, or starting an online devotional. These are grand opportunities to carry a gospel light in your community.

Many of our CLB churches are small, so perhaps it is tempting to believe that the mega-church across town has all the fun of amazing ministries. But as I reflect on the heritage of the Lutheran Brethren, it is our size that has been a source of strength. The small congregation nurtured faith through deep love for the Word of God and love for each other. Pastors would walk, ride horse, or share rides if needed, to bring a carton of eggs and communion to the rural shut-in. Our size was never an excuse; rather it served its purpose for building community.

During the history of our Church body, people have suffered hard times and world wars. Turmoil has often caused us to focus attention on prayer. As the Church prays, great fruit is produced. As the Church reaches out through its own suffering, evangelists emerge from the faithful body of Christ and the Church community fulfills its commission.

Now is our time. Share your faith! Start praying for opportunities to help a neighbor, and then listen to their fears. Love them by offering to pray for them, and when the time is right tell them your faith story. Then stand back and watch the Lord create their faith story. It is as simple as that. As a believer you need to know his story and share your story, so that your neighbor can have a spiritual story of their own and experience conversion from darkness to light.

The time for outreach is now. Instead of pulling back, why not step up and step out like young David as he stood before Goliath? David didn't worry about his size or ability; he simply trusted in God's promises and completely believed that God would be glorified. By applying his basic shepherd skills, he experienced God's miraculous deliverance from the lion, the bear, and a giant warrior. The Lord's mighty arm is strong to deliver many more victories through the small, the weak, and the simple. This is your time.

Rev. Shawn Bowman is Pastor of Victory Lutheran Brethren Church in Jamestown, North Dakota.

Turbulent times, national unrest, worst pandemic in a century... our time. These times will cause one to consider their faith in God. Looking back through our Church history, we have been here before. So now would be a good time to ask, "How did our forefathers of the Lutheran Brethren respond?"

The ministry and writing of Hans Nielsen Hauge, who was imprisoned no less than 14 times for his preaching of the gospel, had a profound influence on the spiritual lives of people in Norway. As Norwegians immigrated to North America in the late nineteenth century, the Haugean influence impacted the founding of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Men and women of God had a fervent love for the Law and Gospel understanding of the Scriptures. Believers preached and taught this to the hearts of unregenerate persons—and watched them blossom in faith. The CLB embraced one-to-one witnessing, revival meetings, sermons, and Sunday School as means of converting souls for life in Christ. Missions to unreached people groups and mission to the next-door neighbor was considered a high call—and still is.

The distressing events unfolding in our nation today may calm down or may

Wonderful Adventure

NATHANAEL S.

I live in the very heart of Africa, 200 miles from the nearest paved road, in a region cut off by water in every direction for four months out of the year. Sound exotic? Exciting? It *kind of* is—until we run into other people. There are 5,000 of them in our village, so that happens on a fairly regular basis. And that’s the point. You, the Church, have sent me, my wife Carrie, and our five children, to bring God’s good news of salvation to a people who do not know him. We’re here for the people, not the scenery. And people are complicated.

Our village chief invited us to settle here for the good of their village. A couple of years later, he had a falling-out with the government. They stripped him of his credentials and installed a new chief. Happens to be the old chief’s neighbor. So that’s awkward, right? But the majority of the village people don’t give a bird’s nest what the government says, they still like the old chief. He still acts like a chief, fulfills the duties of a chief for his supporters, and in fact, is the chief. We now have two chiefs. And their partisans don’t talk to each other. Village relationships and power structures have been upended. When I first came to this village, all the men gathered together to give us a plot of land. Today, all the men will never show up to a meeting together.

Here am I, foreign missionary, bringing a message of God’s peace for all people to a village hopelessly divided. How do I do this? Shall I go around saying, “Believe in Jesus and he’ll fix it all”? I don’t think it’s quite like that. These are people of a different faith, and often their teachers are able to bring about peace in conflicts through the teachings of their religion. I am certainly not some traveling salesman peddling one religion over another. But what am I? What are you in your divided community? A warring partisan? A disinterested outsider? Neither of these can speak to the heart of divided people.

It seems a lot of Christians have been thinking on these very questions of late. That must be why Pope Francis has written an encyclical on the topic called *Fratelli Tutti*—“*All Brothers*.” He addressed this encyclical not just to Catholics, or even Christians, but to “all people of good will.” That’s us, I presume. He pleads for a fraternal



Left, Nathanael S. in Chad, Africa.

love between all people, such as the Good Samaritan showed to a man, beaten and bloody, in Jesus’ parable (Luke 10:25-37). It is a reminder that I need: we share the love of Jesus not because we are Christians and they’re not, but because of our common humanity. We are all divided and broken, and Jesus gives to us all a great, unshakable hope.

Francis writes: “Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together!”

He acknowledges that “a plan that would set great goals for the development of our entire human family nowadays sounds like madness”—and yet that is what Jesus gives! His blood forgives our sins and heals our wounds so that we can be healers like the Good Samaritan. And like Jesus himself, as he ate with sinners, traitors, and prostitutes, and helped them in real, daily, physical ways. Francis hit me between the eyes with this statement: “The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social, and religious project.” That includes my work in this divided village.

No, I’m not jumping into the fray. I cannot fix this village and resolve the conflict between two chiefs vying for power. But that does not put me on the sidelines. We simply have another agenda, you and I. The kingdom of heaven has a different politic, another power structure that “lifts up the lowly,” in the words of Mary when she was pregnant with this kingdom’s King.

This kingdom has an exceptionally large embrace. In fact, Francis says, “all things human are our concern.” In the embrace of our crucified and risen Savior, those people whom this world does not even take the time to consider—divided villages in the heart of Africa, a girl who walks the streets of Ishinomaki, a neighbor who can’t kick his opioid addiction—these are the ones who get lifted up. That lifting is done by you and me, the hands and feet of Christ. But “if the music of the gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth” (Pope Francis, “*Fratelli Tutti*,” 2020).

Nathanael S. and his wife Carrie serve the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as missionaries in Africa.

Werdal Called Home



Esther Evelyn Werdal, 100, went home to be with her Heavenly Father on October 11, 2020. Esther was born December 11, 1919 to Pastor Ole and Caroline Aadland. Esther graduated from Ferndale High School and spent two years at the Lutheran Brethren Bible School in Fergus Falls, MN. On September 20, 1941, she married Phil Werdal. Together, they felt the call to serve as missionaries. They served in China from 1946 to 1948, until they were forced to flee violence and unrest. In 1950 they began serving in the Yamagata and Akita prefectures of Japan. In 1964 they returned to the states and settled in Shoreline, WA.

Venberg Called Home

Helen (Rodland) Venberg, 80, of Fergus Falls, MN went home to be with the Lord on Tuesday, November 24, 2020. Helen was born July 8, 1940. She was baptized and confirmed at 59th Street LBC in Brooklyn, NY. She graduated from Fort Hamilton High School in 1958, received an RN degree from Lutheran Medical Center in 1961, and graduated from the Lutheran Brethren Bible School in 1964. On August 22, 1964, she married Rodney Venberg. In 1966 Rodney and Helen arrived as missionaries in Africa. They served there for 30 years. As the Church in Chad and Cameroon became increasingly self-sufficient, Rodney and Helen returned to the states. They were called to Bethesda LBC in Eau Claire, WI. They served there for 18 years.



Martin Installed as Elder



L to R: Rev. Bob Heggestad, Rev. Nick Mundis, elders Kurt Helfrich, Dave Martin, and Dallas Rodgers.

On September 27, 2020, Dave Martin was installed as an elder at Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church in Mentor, Ohio. Rev. Nick Mundis officiated.

Andersons Called to Boston



Rev. Kristian and Mary Anderson.

Rev. Kristian Anderson and his wife Mary have accepted the call to serve as church planters with Cultivate New England, the partnership of CLB New England churches. Pastor Kristian is from Brooklyn, NY, where he came to faith and began his discipleship journey. He served as youth pastor at 59th Street LBC. He received an M.Div. from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in 2017 while serving as Lead Pastor of Living Faith Church in Fergus Falls, MN. He is currently completing his call as Campus Pastor of Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church's East Campus in Moorhead, MN.

Kristian and Mary share a passion for city centers and church planting. Kristian was a founding board member of Fifth Act Church Planting, the CLB affiliate organization created to support CLB city church planting, and Mary has extensive work in education and ministry experience in city environments.

Kristian will begin a pre-launch residency at Bethany LBC in East Hartland, CT as their interim Executive Pastor, with plans to move into the Boston area in mid-2022. Kristian and Mary will be moving to Connecticut in February 2021.

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The Other Side of the Battle

We tend to think of spiritual warfare only from the perspective of the Satanic realm warring against believers, as dramatized in C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. But God also battles, both against sin and to win lost souls from Satan's domain. For example:

Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me..." (Genesis 18:20-21).

What is the outcry? Who is crying out against the cities? The victims of their sin and crime? The outcry may have also come from Abraham, in his prayers, and from Lot himself, living in the city.

...[God] rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)... (2 Peter 2:7-8).

We might assume that Lot, who chose to live in that evil place, must have serious issues in his spiritual life, in his relationship with God. Yet Lot knows right and wrong very clearly. He is tormented by what's going on. He must be crying out to God for some remedy—interceding for these people, his neighbors—every day. And he is called righteous, three times! Just as Abraham is called righteous, in Hebrews 11. Both of these righteous people are interceding for loved ones—and for the community as a whole. In his bargaining with God (Genesis 18), Abraham is praying not only for Lot, but seeking mercy for all the souls in that community.

Like Abraham and Lot, we have been called by God, through Christ. And, like them, we have been invited into the conversation with God about what's happening in our world. We must pray for the people we love, and we must pray for the people we don't love. These days especially, we tend to think judgmental thoughts about many people. But Abraham doesn't do that; he pleads for the souls of those people. Abraham isn't their judge, and he knows it. He is their intercessor.

In his pleading for the people of Sodom, Abraham asks the rhetorical question: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). Yes! God will do right and judge rightly, in Abraham's day and in ours. With a spiritual battle raging around us these days, we don't judge; we intercede.

Be bold in your talking to God about people. Consistent. Persistent. This is your calling.

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