



From Pastor Telloni . . . A Holy Week Story

A Surprising Encounter

There's a first for everything! On Palm Sunday, a gentleman wearing a double-sided body placard that said, "You must be born again!" stood at our parking lot entrance and shouted through a bullhorn towards our members leaving the service. If they heard him, he was telling them that they should stop coming to this church because of its false teaching. He also cried out that the pastors here are lying to them about salvation, that they preach that you must be baptized to be saved, while he was saying that you must be born again and believe in Jesus Christ. So Lutheranism is a false religion, and to him the Lutheran Church is nothing more than reformed Catholicism.

I found out about this man as I was getting ready to leave the church and walk out the door. Some members who were still around then asked me if I was going to go out and talk to this individual. I admit that I thought about heading out the back entrance as some actually did (!), but I decided to go right to the exit and have a word with him. When I pulled up in my car, he obviously saw my clerical collar. Right off the bat, he told me I was dead wrong because we Lutheran pastors demand that people must be baptized in order to be saved. I listened to what he said – basically he hates Catholics and even Martin Luther, among other false accusations about our church body. Trying to break into his incoherent lecture, I told him as kindly as I could that we Lutherans believe that we are saved by Jesus Christ alone as we hear the Gospel of His death and resurrection for forgiveness and eternal life. This is the essence of our teaching and our faith. He disagreed that this was our teaching!?

At this point I knew there was no way to have a rational or even friendly conversation with him, plus he insisted that he had done all the research that proves that he is right. He asked me if I had ever read Luther's catechism or the Augsburg Confession, two of our statements of faith. I answered that I studied not only those documents but the whole Book of Concord which are the official confessional statements of the Lutheran Church according to Holy Scripture. I would not be a pastor or an ordained pastor if I had not studied them. He did not seem impressed.

So I invited him to come back the next day to have a conversation about these matters, and even suggested that he come and listen to our two pastors preach so that he can hear what we truly believe. If I heard him right, he did not feel that that would be necessary. At that point I thanked him for the conversation and wished him God's blessings.



Some Thoughtful Questions

What do you think? I will let you think about what we believe about salvation and faith and the power of the Gospel. Do you believe that our church is teaching the true Gospel according to the Holy Scriptures? Is it worth it to come and worship here around the Word and Sacrament and the preaching that is heard in our sanctuary? How would you have acted if you encountered this individual at the parking lot entrance or anywhere else? Would you have been able to witness sincerely to your faith in Christ? These are some good questions especially as this article is written during Holy Week and after this situation in our parking lot on Palm Sunday, of all days!

The Crucial Surprise and Its Meaning – Alleluia!

Holy Week takes us profoundly into the source of our salvation, starting with the depths of Good Friday and ending with the radiant heights of Easter.



The supreme truth: Jesus Christ saves us by His death on the cross. When He said, "It is finished!", He had reached and completed an important goal of His saving mission, atoning for the sins of the whole world and thereby earning forgiveness for all people. He was then buried in the ground in a new tomb, a real death! – and then on the third day He was raised from the grave, fully alive and victorious and glorified! And now He was prepared to grant eternal life to all forgiven sinners.

How was that going to happen? It will come to pass through the power of the Holy Spirit,

(continued on page 2)

bringing the power of God's creating and redeeming and strengthening Word in order to birth faith in folks in order to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The means, or the ways, in which faith is created and strengthened in human hearts are preaching and teaching and witnessing to the Word of the Gospel, through Baptism, and through the Sacrament of His body and blood.



So now faith is derived from the divine Word to create and strengthen saving faith. Jesus saves and His Word is received in such a way that one can say that He is alive within the mind and heart of the forgiven child of God. In other words, all glory to God for His true and loving Word. We receive Jesus and salvation by His power and grace, and not because of our decision – as we then do not reject Him, which is our only other possible response. He gets the credit for our faith and we get the judgment if we reject His gracious Word.

This whole matter and method of salvation is compressed in Holy Week as we remember Jesus' death and resurrection! Good Friday and Easter – we celebrate our salvation, which has its source solely in Jesus Christ our Savior, the Word made flesh, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. The One whose Name is exalted above every name. We then are born from above, or born again, only through the power of God who makes a new creation with the gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

This is Jesus's story. This is also our story. Our salvation. Blessed and joyous Easter in the Name of Jesus Christ who is the Resurrection and the Life - gloriously and totally!

Pastor John Tallon

Outreach Update

The Church Plant Core Group is continuing to shape and form our "missional" habits as we get to know each other more and more when we gather together. I would dare say that when we get together and share our habits (*reading/studying Scripture, meaningful connections with our neighbors, having a heart to serve the community, praying for each other and the mission*), we are truly taking shape and forming the Word of God that says, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).



At the same time, we are thankful for the support provided by the SELC District by the means of a \$5,000 grant.

This was given to St. John's missional work upon the completion of Stage 0 of the official Funding Benchmarks provided by Rev. Dr. Mark Larson, Executive Missions Director of the SELC District.

The Core Group is dedicated to taking the necessary steps to complete the next stage. In stage 1 we will establish the context of our mission by identifying who will partake in the work, to whom we are reaching and in what way, and to start financial contributions in the ensuing 12 months. Upon completion of Stage 1, the Core Group may request up to \$15,000.

In the future, the Core Group will work on completing Stage 2 where we define the mission, and Stage 3 where a vision will be cast.

Continue to pray for us. We have been blessed in getting to know each other and our stories. We have had many meaningful conversations with each other and with our neighbors that bring all of us closer to Christ – the One who draws all to Himself. Pray that we continue to seek the Lord who is faithful and steadfast in His love for His people who call out to Him in every need. - In Christ, Pastor Jon Carpenter

Stewardship Corner Spring Into Stewardship

April is a perfect time for us to reflect on stewardship within our church family. Stewardship is not merely about managing resources; it's about embracing a mindset of gratitude and our responsibility to manage the gifts God has blessed us with.



Everything from the air we breathe to the talents we possess are entrusted to us to be used wisely and for the greater good. We are called to be faithful stewards, acknowledging our role as caretakers of God's creation. April offers a unique opportunity for us to reflect on this theme of renewal. Just as the earth awakens from its winter slumber, we too can rejuvenate our commitment to stewardship. It's a perfect time to assess how we are utilizing our time, talents, and treasures for God's work.

By pledging a portion of our income to support the ministries of the church, we demonstrate our trust in God's provision and our commitment to advancing His kingdom. Each and every contribution plays a vital role in sustaining our mission to "Restoring Broken People to Life in Christ", whether it's through regular giving or sacrificial offerings, each contribution plays a vital role in sustaining the mission and ministry of the church.

This April, let us cultivate a spirit of generosity and gratitude and recommit ourselves to the principles of stewardship. Our faithful stewardship has the power to transform many lives and glorify God. May God bless our actions on this journey of stewardship and faith.

May your thankfulness and trust in the Lord be reflected in your Stewardship!

- Board of Stewardship – Luther Russert, Chairman

In Memoriam

It has pleased God to call to Himself Donald Michael Elavsky, who passed away on Monday, March 11, 2024, after a long illness, at the age of 87. A Funeral service was held on Friday, March 22nd, at 12:00 Noon, at Paquet & Arnold-Lynch Funeral Home, Massillon, with Pastor Carpenter officiating, and a committal service at Massillon's Oakwood Cemetery. May our gracious God comfort his beloved wife of 63 years and the whole family with the hope and peace of resurrection in Jesus Christ Who is the Resurrection and the Life.



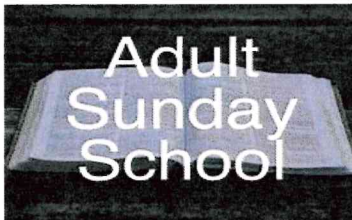
Sunday School



is held from 8:45 to 9:45 a.m. for kids in Room 109, led by Mary Kay Pershing.

Adult Bible Class

The current topic is *"The Gospel According to St. Mark*. The session begins each Sunday at 8:45 am in Rooms 112-113 (note the room change!). The events of Holy Week and Easter will be considered for the next month or so. Pastor Telloni is the discussion leader.



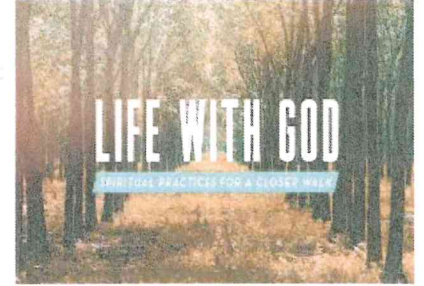
The Monday Bible Class

meet on Mondays at 10:00 a.m. in Rooms 112-113. Topic: St. Paul's *"1st Timothy – The Present and Future of Christ's Church."* This letter is the first of Paul's "Pastoral Epistles" in which he addresses church life: organization, leadership, worship, fellowship, and above all the witness to the saving Gospel – issues which by the power of the Spirit determine the present and future of the Church – and timely topic for St. John. All are invited to join the learning and conversation. Pastor Telloni is the discussion leader.



Life With God

is a brief 6-8 week session covering the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the basic teachings of the Scriptures along with Martin Luther's Small and Large Catechisms. This easy course of study is geared for those who are considering becoming members of our family of faith or members who would like a basic review of church body. The goal is to celebrate our faith in Christ and discuss the joy of living the faith through worship, witness, and sacred work to the glory of God and for the blessing of our neighbors. Pastor Telloni, who also has a degree in Education, has also developed supplemental materials that will be shared during the sessions. If you are interested, please sign the sheet on the front bulletin. A schedule will be offered if there are people willing to participate.



The St. John Quilters

meet on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm through May. If you like to quilt and are willing to serve others in need by making quilts and bed coverings, etc., please see Janet Dyer or Jeanette Tennant. Bring a lunch and enjoy the fellowship! 7 colorful quilts and 1 baby quilt were blessed by Pastor Telloni in a brief Rite of Blessing on February 28th. All the quilts were delivered to CommQuest Services Family Living Center in Massillon. We commend Arlene Guynn, Janet Dyer & Jeanette Tennant for their faithful service! Also, thanks are expressed to those who kindly donated materials. *Additional donations of monetary gifts for shipping and supplies are also welcomed!*



Spring is in The Air!

That means it is time for the annual Scout Flower and Vegetable Plant Sale! Orders and payment are due by Tuesday, April 9th, and the plants will be delivered on Saturday, May 11th (in time for Mother's Day). Order forms are made available on the Project Central Table in the Gathering Place. If writing a check, make it payable to "Cub Pack #257." Please place your order form and payment in the Cubmaster (Mike Ott's) mailbox. To see examples of all of the types of plants being offered, please visit: <http://bit.ly/flowersvarieties>



St. John Lutheran Church, Hazleton, PA

Just when they thought their Lententide was busy, having doubled their services in anticipation of Easter, as usual, St. John's Lutheran Church in Hazleton, PA has ramped up their efforts from warp speed to ludicrous speed, looking at five baptisms (Including Lydia Rose Naumann, Pastor Naumann's eighth child), in these last couple months, to serving a community luncheon Palm Sunday Eve, after which they will be offering an additional divine service.



St. Paul Lutheran Church Celebrates their Organist's 40th Anniversary



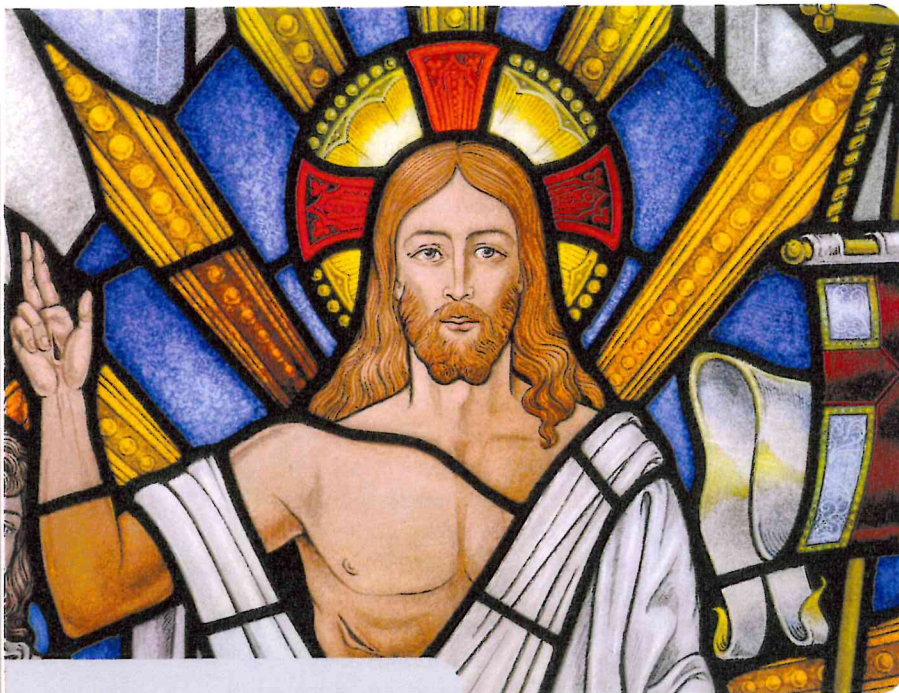
St. Paul Lutheran Church in Raritan, New Jersey celebrated Organist Tom Mizov and his 40th Anniversary of serving the Church. Pictured from left to right are: Geri Stapleton, Tom Mizov, Rev. Andrew Dzurovcik, and Jerry Sanseverino.

District President Meets Navy Chief of Chaplains

District President Wally Vinovskis met with several District Presidents in Williamsburg, Virginia at King of Glory Lutheran Church and School in Williamsburg. Williamsburg is in the Southeastern District (SED) of the LCMS. They met the Navy Chief of Chaplains, Rear Admiral Greg Todd who is pictured with President Vinovskis.



Left to right: Pres. Bill Harmon, SED; Rev. Dr. Lannon Martin, Pastor King of Glory L.C, Williamsburg, VA; Pres. John Pingel, Eastern District; Rear Admiral Gregory N. Todd, Chief of Chaplains of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations/Director of Religious Ministries; President. Kevin Wilson, Ohio District; President Vinovskis; Pres. Bob Beinke, New England District; Pres. Dien Ashley Taylor, Atlantic District; and Rev. Martin Schultheis, Chief Ministry Officer SED



Today, we have numerous options for receiving the news. "Snippets" does not replace those but simply offers short updates and thoughts on events we think are newsworthy in the life of the LCMS and the world.

Many church workers and youth leaders in ministry wonder how they can best serve the youth in their congregations. As many churches are experiencing dwindling engagement and attendance, leaders are striving to measure their effectiveness in ministry now more than ever. *Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry*, a new book from LCMS Youth Ministry's Julianna Shults and Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling, connects research with realistic practices to help youth leaders care for youth in their churches. The book is now available for purchase from Concordia Publishing House (cph.org).

The new *Set Apart to Serve* curriculum is now available for schools to pre-order. Thanks to a generous

gift from Lutheran Church Extension Fund, the curriculum comes at no cost to all LCMS schools. The curriculum consists of the same units tailored for each student level. These units address what the church is, who our LCMS church workers are, how the church cares for its workers, and how the church creates a culture of church work formation and recruitment. LCMS schools may pre-order a curriculum kit at cph.org/set-apart-to-serve.

Registration is now open for the 2024 Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music, July 9–12, 2024, at Concordia University, Nebraska in Seward, Neb. The institute, which is being presented by LCMS Worship, returns under the theme, "Songs of Deliverance: Psalms in the Great Congregation." With the Psalter as its focal point, this conference will feature fresh and perennial topics on music,

leadership, preaching, pastoral care, art and spiritual growth in Lutheran worship. Participants will be able to choose from a variety of instructive and interactive sessions addressing practical topics of interest to musicians, pastors, teachers, interested laypersons and many others. Register now at lcms.org/worshipinstitute.

All church workers and laity are invited to attend the *Created Male and Female: In His Image Conference*, which will provide an overview of Christian sexual ethics and help church workers and families alike care for those experiencing difficulties related to sexual identity and orientation. Hosted by LCMS National Mission and DOXOLOGY, the conference will be held April 15–16, 2024, at the LCMS International Center in St. Louis. The conference offers three different tracks geared toward specific audiences — clergy, laity and educators/church workers — and will include topics ranging from pastoral care for LGBT people, the Christian worldview and sexuality, and pastoral care for cohabitating couples.

This month on the *LW* blog, stay tuned for articles on healing divides in the family and in the church, on the errors of the prosperity gospel, and on the struggles of early American Lutheranism and the encouragement this history can give us today. We will also feature reflections on Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* and Maurice Denis' painting "Easter Mystery," and two more installments in Molly Lackey's church history series: *Perpetua and Felicitas*, and *Augustine*. Visit witness.lcms.org or follow *The Lutheran Witness* on social media to keep up with this content.

DO YOU HAVE NEWS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE SNIPPETS?

Please submit your news items as a letter to the editor at witness.lcms.org/contact.

During a United States Senate hearing held Jan. 31, **senators questioned Meta Platforms' Mark Zuckerberg, TikTok's Shou Zi Chew and other tech CEOs about what measures they have taken to protect children online.** The CEOs came under scrutiny for failures to prevent online sexual exploitation and child abuse. The hearing was held as part of a bipartisan effort to pass new legislation that will make it easier to hold tech companies accountable and to prosecute online criminals. Facebook launched 20 years ago, and it has since been hard to imagine life without it. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that legislation has not kept pace with the rate of criminal activity online.

Child Evangelism Fellowship, a Christian nonprofit that offers after-school care for children, teaching children about the Bible and sharing the Gospel with them, **sued the Hawaii State Department of Education and four superintendents on the grounds of alleged discrimination.** Several elementary schools in Hawaii did not allow the nonprofit to offer its Good News Club as an after-school program because it was a religious program. A similar case went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2001, where Child Evangelism Fellowship sued a New York elementary school for denying their application to use classrooms for their after-school programs. Child Evangelism Fellowship won the case, with Justice Clarence Thomas writing the majority opinion: "What matters for free speech clause purposes is that there is no logical difference in kind between the invocation of Christianity by the Club and the invocation of teamwork, loyalty, or

patriotism by other associations to provide a foundation for their lessons."

Following the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, French president Emmanuel Macron promised to enshrine a woman's "right" to an abortion in the French Constitution. In January, **France's National Assembly took the first steps to act on this promise,**

majority vote necessary to amend the constitution. Abortion is legal upon request in most countries in Europe.

Construction of a new temple to the Norse gods is underway in Iceland. It is the first new pagan temple to be built in Iceland in 1,000 years. Ásatrú, or Norse paganism, is the second most popular religion in Iceland, after



approving with overwhelming majority a bill to amend the constitution. Now the bill will be turned over to France's Senate for approval. Once the bill is passed in both houses of France's parliament, Macron intends to call a special session of parliament in order to achieve the three-fifths

Christianity. The new temple is another indication of the worrying uptick in the practice of paganism, witchcraft and folk magic, all of which are becoming increasingly popular in both the United States and Europe.

Quiet Despair

and Its Remedies



A sadness pervades the Christian church in our country. A sense of loss, vague and enormous and brooding, permeates our church life. Off in the distance, we seem to hear what sounds like the trumpet of retreat. While some of us run pell-mell in terror, others fall back by careful steps. All sense that the church's high-water mark was somewhere in the past, and the future we face is dark and unsure.

We do not express our sadness openly because it seems cowardly to speak of gnawing worries about fewer pews filled on Sundays, fewer men willing to be pastors or fewer schools to teach the faith to the rising generation, fewer in number as those children themselves may be. What fills our speech when we do speak of closing churches or closing schools or whatever else the future may bring is that quiet desperation Henry David Thoreau, in his

book *Walden*, thought was characteristic of the "mass of men." What Thoreau imagined as a common human malady in every time is indeed common to our circuit meetings and church council sessions. Will we

be able to get a pastor when our current pastor retires? Who knows? Will we be able to keep the school open in five years? No one can say. Will our church be around when my grandchildren are ready to be on the church council? It is anybody's guess.

What we fear to say aloud or do not know, Jesus says boldly and truly knows. Our Lord does not leave us in quiet despair about Himself or His Bride, the church. The disciples who feared

Our quiet despair is always our forgetfulness of His resurrection and our refusal to see how it changes everything.

everything were the disciples Jesus visited with His peace on Easter evening (JOHN 20:19-23). If you find despair to be a familiar companion or know someone in despair — whether it is your pastor or your friend or your teacher or your father — consider these things:

1) Christ is the Head of the church.

We cannot live our lives by our own sense of how things may go. Christ is alive. He had many apparently mighty foes, and He triumphed over them all, crushing death and Satan under His feet. At the head of every single Christian congregation is a living, triumphant Victor and King. To His voice we listen, and to Him we answer. His will is not that anyone in the United States of America should perish, but that all should repent and believe the Gospel of His death and resurrection for every sinner. If someone else had risen from the dead, if our doubts and fears had risen from the dead, then perhaps we should listen to them. But only He is the conqueror, so only His Word and His will have the say in our lives and in our churches.

2) The Head is our hope.

The more we focus on our uncertainties and fears, the more power they have over us. After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples were still so afraid of the Jewish authorities, who had conspired with Pilate in Jesus' death, that when they gathered, they locked the doors. Their locked doors expressed their closed-off sense of the church — worthwhile enough to gather the already-convinced, fearful enough to make any newcomers impossible. Since our hope for the future is laid entirely on the triune God, we need not succumb to fear. Christ's peace is our present possession because the Lamb's blood cleanses us from all our sins. We do not wish that things would be otherwise than they are. We know that God's Son is working all things together for our good. The future is an unfolding of Christ's plan and ends with His triumphant return, to which we look forward with love and hope.

3) Our Head has a bright future.

Despair is only possible between Good Friday's darkness and Easter's brilliant light. You can hear a familiar quiet despair in the reproaches the Emmaus disciples offer to the unknown Jesus who walks beside them: "But we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel" (LUKE 24:21). You can almost see the shrug of resignation in their shoulders and the sigh of despair on their lips. Remember that even the women's Easter morning report of Jesus' resurrection was not believed at

that time (LUKE 24:22-24; MARK 16:14) — too incredible, too wild, too hopeful, a piece of wishful thinking. Our quiet despair is always our forgetfulness of His resurrection and our refusal to see how it changes everything. Since death is behind Him, the whole future is open to Him. And His future is bright.


4) His bright future is ours too.

If Christ had not risen, then the disciples as a group at that time and your congregation as a group of Jesus' disciples today would have no purpose. We could go the way of all purely human organizations: After their purpose has passed, they go the way of all flesh (JOB 34:15). That would make sense if Christ were dead. Then we could throw up our hands in resignation and accept death ourselves. Since He is risen, we have not been joined to a body of death, destined to perish, bound to fade away. We were baptized into a death like His that we should all share in a resurrection like His. Christ's church moves always from life to life, alive in Him now and headed for life everlasting.

Act on what is always true: He is alive, and heaven is open to all believers in His promise.

5) Despair is not your master. Christ is your Lord.

Forget what lies behind, the steps your family or your congregation could have taken but did not. Put aside the bitterness of the past and the regrets that you did not see earlier or grasp sooner what would make for the Gospel's growth in your home or in your town. Christ is not only Lord of the past, reigning over black-and-white photographs of large confirmation classes or happy baptismal parties in churches now closed. Christ is also Lord today and now and always.

Think of who in your area needs the hope He brings today. Ponder what would deepen your church's knowledge of His peace right now. Act on what is always true: He is alive, and heaven is open to all believers in His promise. Our despair is rooted in our forgetfulness of His victorious life; our joy and hope are rooted in our remembrance of this conquering hero. After every enemy sought to destroy Him, He stepped forth from the grave, wounded on our behalf, crowned with life and victory. In Him, we more than conquer. 

THE REV. DR. ADAM KOONTZ serves as associate pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Denver, Colo.



Democracy of the Dead

Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our [stable hand]; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father."

— G.K. CHESTERTON, ORTHODOXY

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936) was a 6-foot-4-inch, 300-pound mountain of a man who usually had a cigar in his mouth, a crumpled hat on his head and a cape around his shoulders. It would be impossible not to notice him walking toward you. He was also a devout Roman Catholic layman and one of the most brilliant thinkers and writers of the 20th century, an apologist who battled the evils of his day (and our day) with joy and wit. You may not know much about him and his writings, but I am certain that you have heard some version of his quote on tradition being the “democracy of the dead.” It is that quote that we want to consider now both on its own terms and in a broader sense — looking past the question of tradition to an even deeper and more fundamental issue.

Many congregations in the LCMS are now shrinking. Churches that used to be full of men, women and children have dwindled down to a handful of people struggling to pay the bills and wondering how much longer they can keep the doors open. Can Chesterton's words about the “democracy of the dead” give these churches any hope?

We commune not only with each other but “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.”

As Lutherans we have been taught, correctly, that when we go to the Lord’s Supper, there is more present than meets the eye. We confess that we commune not only with each other but “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.” This means that we are never closer to those who have died in the faith than at the communion rail. The reality is impossible to comprehend fully — as we receive Christ’s body and blood, we are united both with Christ and with all those, living and dead, who are joined to Him in faith. This truth often brings comfort and hope to those who are sorrowing and grieving, as it should. But let us take this a step further.

Every time a local church gathers around Word and Sacrament — no matter how big or small the crowd — Christ’s people receive the fullness of Christ’s gifts. A small church does not receive less of His grace because it is small, and a large congregation does not receive more because it is big. Every church where Christ is truly proclaimed and His Sacraments rightly administered is packed to the rafters — with angels, archangels and the whole company of heaven. Those who have died in the faith, who are now experiencing the joys and glories of heaven, worship together with us and the angels. They are not “disqualified” from the Divine Service by the “accident of death.”

When we get discouraged by the lack of people in the pews, we must open our eyes to this heavenly reality and learn to see our church the way our Lord does. This is exactly what the epistle to the Hebrews teaches us:


Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (HEB. 12:1-2).

The saints in heaven are cheering us on, both as individuals and in our congregations. We do well when we heed Chesterton’s counsel and choose “not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father.” What do our fathers and mothers tell us by their words and example? First, they encourage us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We are not to let the trials and tribulations we face in our local congregations take our eyes off the hope we have in Jesus. We know that we and our churches are ultimately victorious in Jesus. He will fulfill His promises to us.

Second, the saints remind us that they, too, have been through difficult times in their local congregations. A young

pastor needs at least a few older lay elders who can look him in the eyes and say, “We’ve seen worse here in this place. The Lord brought us through that, and He can bring us through this as well.” In the same way, the saints who are with our Lord have stories to tell. They lived through the ups and downs of a congregation’s life. Some of them experienced the lowest of lows. As you learn their stories — as you get to know the history of your own congregation (and various congregations throughout the history of the church) — you will find that they still speak to you and your church’s situation. To neglect their stories is to neglect the wisdom that they still offer us. Let us once again pick up the stories of the martyrs and the saints who have gone before us for the last 2,000 years.

The saints in heaven are cheering us on, both as individuals and in our congregations.

Do not misunderstand what I am trying to say. I am not saying that our churches are not facing real issues or that we shouldn’t be fighting and striving to grow our congregations. I am saying, however, that we must always look at current issues through the eyes of those who have gone before us. We are not alone. An immense cloud of witnesses, the great “democracy of the dead,” still speaks to us. When we “give them a vote,” we find that they are cheering us on, encouraging us to run with endurance the race that is set before us and directing our eyes always to Jesus, on whom they now gaze with unending joy. Their faith was not put to shame. They were not defeated, and we will not be either. 

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