



News
of the Iowa Mission District
of the North American Lutheran Church
www.iowamissiondistrict.com

March 2020

A Word from the Dean

THE DISCIPLINE OF LENT

*"He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?"
-Micah 6:8*

The season of Lent is a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal in preparation for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection at Easter. From the earliest days of the Christian church, this season has been observed in some form or another. Traditionally, Lent was the time when the newest converts were instructed, or catechized, in the faith and prepared for Holy Baptism on Easter morning. In time, Lent became a season of renewal for all the faithful, involving the disciplines of repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love.

The 40 days of Lent are a reflection of both the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness in preparation for his public ministry, and the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. In our parishes, this Lenten discipline is most readily seen in the series of midweek Lenten services, beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 26. This rhythm of worship and reflection intensifies during Holy Week as we follow the path of our Lord from Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, culminating with the celebration of the glorious good news of our Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday, April 12.

This discipline of worship, prayer, and meditation leads us to reflect on our Lord's sacrifice for our sake. It creates a space and time to hear again His call to take up our own cross and follow Him in lives of holiness and obedience to his will. It is also an encouragement to follow our own personal discipline of prayer, Bible reading, and reflection.

May this Lenten season be a time when we can grow in our faith, both as communities of faith, and as individual believers, so that we may be empowered to follow our Lord in lives of faithfulness and service – doing justice – loving kindness – and walking humbly with our God.

Pastor Marshall Hahn, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Sola Fide—Leaning Into the Arms of Jesus

*Pr. Barbara M. Wills
Peace Lutheran Church
Northwood, Iowa*

John 3:16 is perhaps the most quoted and beloved verse in the New Testament, if not the entire Bible. Martin Luther called it “the Gospel in miniature”, because in this verse our Lord Jesus says that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him has eternal life. He follows this up a few chapters later by saying that what it means to do the work of God is to believe in Him—Jesus—the One sent by God the Father. (John 6:29) These verses are also foundational for our understanding that we are saved through our faith in Christ, not from our own efforts or works. In a similar vein, the Apostle Paul strongly emphasizes that our only righteousness comes from Christ and not from our own works: *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”* (Romans 3:21-25a)

The formula sounds simple enough, but people take it in many different directions—sometimes viewing faith alone as permission to ignore the implications of faithful living—or, on the other hand, turning faith into a “work” that becomes as heavy a burden as the law. Faith itself can be understood in different ways. The writer of the book of Hebrews defines it this way: *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* (Hebrews 11:1) Thus, faith is more than mere “head knowledge”. It requires trust—trust in the message and the messenger. Jesus calls us to trust in Him, but He also calls us into love—the kind of love He and the Father have for us, as expressed in John 3:16, and which implicitly necessitates a response from us in the same vein. In fact, Jesus makes this necessity clear in the New Commandment He gave the disciples in John 15:12-14. This command does not negate the understanding that we are saved by faith in Christ, it clarifies it. Paul states the connection this way: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.”* (Galatians 2:20-21) And in his letter to the church in Rome he frames the assertion this way: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his*

death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:3-5) It is clear, then, that faith is not just a way to avoid eternal death—it is a transformative change of direction from following a way of living that leads to destruction, to following Christ, the Way to the fullness of life—here and hereafter.

Thus, in our daily living, we turn to the Lord Jesus and put our trust in Him to lead us. There is also another aspect to faith. Although we know that Jesus told His followers that they must take up their cross to follow Him (Luke 9:23), and in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) He says we are blessed when persecuted, yet He also offers comfort and reassurance. In His lament over Jerusalem He cried out, *“How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”* (Matthew 23:37, Luke 3:34) He offers help to us when the burdens of life become too heavy: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11:28) And to the distressed, as He did to the disciples on the last night of His life, He offers solace and encouragement: *“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”* (John 14:1-3) Jesus also described Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10) and chided His disciples for their lack of faith when they feared for their lives in the storm at sea, *“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”* (Mark 4:40) Such texts remind us that our Lord cares for us as His children and is concerned with our daily struggles. He thus invites us, in our faith, to lean on Him, and put the whole weight of our concerns into His faithful keeping. Visual prayers—imagining ourselves as tiny chicks under the protective wings of our Lord, or little lambs held safely in His arms—can help us sense this aspect, too, of our faith in Christ.

Jesus never promised us freedom from the trials and struggles of this world, but He did promise to be with us always, to the very end. As we walk through the darkest valley, we are not alone, we fear no evil, for the Lord is with us. Follow where He leads, and rest in His care.

This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District

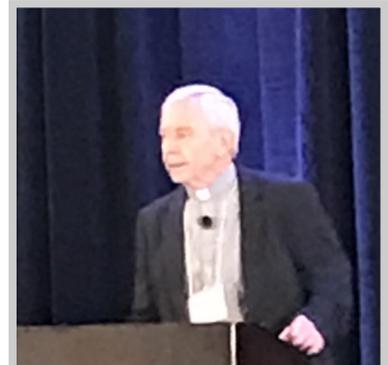
Faith Lutheran NALC Women, Monona, Iowa, together with a Thrivent grant, hosted a Youth Mission informational presentation by Pastor Tony Ede on the afternoon of February 23, 2020. The afternoon included information about what has been done during recent youth mission trips, an explanation of why youth mission trips are important, the expectations of the coming youth mission trip in July, a brief overview of the costs of a youth mission trip and the dynamics of organizing a large group of kids. Following the presentation, attendees had an opportunity to ask additional questions. Special thanks to Pastor Tony Ede for sharing mission stories that highlighted how the Lord uses our gifts. After the presentation everyone enjoyed a time of fellowship that included pizza and ice cream. A free will offering was collected for the Iowa Mission District 2020 Youth Mission Trip.



On February 19th, the Confirmation Class and Little Lutherans midweek group of St. John's Lutheran Church-Vilmar, rural Greene, made 10 blankets and put together care baskets for the emergency department of the Waverly Health Center Emergency Department in Waverly, Iowa as an outreach to children and their families who end up in the emergency room. Each basket has a blanket, stuffed animal, a Bible story book, and a get well card, signed by the youth, as well as a business card with the church's contact information on it.

Disciple Life Conference Orlando, Florida

Last month at the annual NALC Pastors' Conference Bishop Dan Selbo presented his 20/20 Vision for the NALC. Other speakers included the Rev. Eric Reisen, President of the North American Lutheran Seminary, and Rev. Gemechis Buba, Assistant to the Bishop for Missions. Among the pastors from the Iowa Mission District who attended were Pastors Jason Cooper, Tony Ede, Ken Kimball, Scott Licht, and Christopher Martin.



Announcements

Upcoming Events

April 20-21, 2020—Pastors'/Lay Ministers' Retreat, Riverside Bible Camp, Story City

April 26, 2020—9:00 a.m.—100th Year Celebration of First Lutheran Church in Manchester. All are welcome to attend and join in the celebration!

July 20-27, 2020—Youth Mission Trip to Nebraska

August 3-7, 2020—NALC Luther Week, Pittsburg, PA

September 19, 2020—Iowa Mission District Convocation, St. John's (Vilmar), rural Greene.

Donations and Correspondence

Checks sent to the Mission District for support should be made out to the *Iowa Mission District, NALC*, and mailed to Pastor Gary Burkhalter at **312 E Mission St, Strawberry Point, IA 52076**.

Correspondence for Mr. Craig Lease, Mission District Secretary, should be sent to **405 7th St. N., Northwood, IA 50459**

Items for the Mission District newsletter (pictures, news, etc.) are best sent via e-mail to Pastor Barbara Wills at barbaramwills@gmail.com.

The Iowa Mission District website may be found at: www.iowamissiondistrict.com. If your congregation has a web site, and you would like to have the web address linked to your church name on the Mission District web site, please send the web address to me, Pastor Barbara Wills, at barbaramwills@gmail.com.

Prayer Concerns

Please keep Amy Cooper (wife of Pastor Jason Cooper) in your prayers. She continues to battle cancer and is facing some new challenges in her treatments.

Note:

If you have a personal prayer concern, or have permission to share a concern, feel free to send it to me via email. (barbaramwills@gmail.com) In James 5:14, the Apostle encouraged people in this regard: *“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord....”*



Sharing the Faith Grace-fully

The Faith of Abraham

Throughout the Bible we find the witness of God's faithful people. Beginning with the patriarch, Abraham, we find examples of how the Lord God called people into His service and used them to bring about the salvation promised from the beginning of time. It begins with Abraham, even though there were faithful people, like Abel and Noah, who worshiped the Lord from the earliest times. But it was Abraham who was chosen to be the progenitor of the nation through which the Lord would send the Savior, our Lord Jesus, to fulfill the promise in Genesis 3:15, when the Lord said to the ancient serpent, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he shall [crush] your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* As we consider what it means to share our faith in Christ in a way that fulfills our Lord's command to love others as He loves us, it is helpful to consider those who have gone before us through the ages so that we may learn from them and follow their example of faithfulness. It is the Lord who initiated the process of salvation, and it is He who calls, sends and sets the parameters of time and place for our response to His call.

Abraham was a "wandering Aramean" who was called by the Lord God while still in the land of Haran. (Deuteronomy 26:5) In Genesis 12:1-3 we find the details of Abraham's "call story": *"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.'"* At the time the Lord called Abram (whom He later renamed Abraham) to leave Haran, he was 75 years old. His wife Sarai (later renamed Sarah by the Lord) was 65, barren, and obviously well past the age of childbearing. At this point we may notice a huge "disconnect"—this couple had no children, and the promise rested on the potential descendants of Abraham and Sarah.

From a human perspective it might have seemed that Abraham either misunderstood the call of God, or that he was supposed to come up with some ideas to help the Lord figure out how to bring about the desired results. Throughout the years that followed, Abraham and Sarah had many ups and downs. There were, indeed, times of questioning whether the Lord was going to fulfill His promise (e.g. Genesis 15:2-3), and at least one occasion when Sarah and Abraham tried taking matters into their own hands

(i.e. Genesis 16:1-4). But despite his human frailty, Abraham never turned away from the Lord, and when God was ready, He fulfilled the promise of a child through whom all nations would be blessed. Twenty-five years after leaving Haran, Sarah bore a son to Abraham. Isaac was born when Sarah was 90 years old, and Abraham was 100. God was in control—Abraham was not the one to initiate his journey of faith, and he and Sarah were not the ones who could determine the timing or the shape the fulfillment of God's promise would take.

As we ponder the lives of Abraham and Sarah, it may seem that what they were called to do has little bearing on our own understanding of what it means to be a witness. But think again. 1) Their call to be parents was essential to the eventual birth of our Lord Jesus. 2) Their faithfulness to the Lord, despite their human frailty, gives us hope in our times of weakness. It helps us remain faithful to the Lord who also calls us to our own unique situations and gives us the guidance and gifts we need to follow His will. 3) The witness of Holy Scripture relates their experiences, assuring us that in His own time the Lord will fulfill His will in our lives, as He did in theirs.

The apostle Paul cites Abraham's **faith**, not anything he did, as the factor for his justification: *"What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'"* (Romans 4:1-3) Likewise, in the book of Hebrews we find the same argument: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval.... By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go."* (Hebrews 11:1-2, 8) As people of God, we live by faith. The Lord has claimed us in Holy Baptism, given us the gift of His saving love in Christ, and will lead us by His Holy Spirit to share that love with others day by day. We witness by following where the Holy Spirit leads us, and in doing so, we become the means through which the Light of Christ shines into the darkness of this world.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: **Our Saviour's**, Call Process
Avoca: **Trinity**, Pr. Eric Meissner
Badger: **Badger Lutheran**, Pr. Scott Meier
Boyden: **St. John**, Call Process
Des Moines: **Unity Evangelical Lutheran**,
Pr. Donna Joseph; Pr. Diane Joseph
Dorchester: **Waterloo Ridge**, Call Process
Eagle Grove: **Evangelical Lutheran**, Pr. Jason Cooper
Eagle Grove: **Samuel Lutheran**, Call Process
Ellsworth: **Trinity**, Pastor Jon Rollefson
Emmons, MN: **Emmons**, Pr. David Schafer, Interim
Gilmore City: **First**, Tracy Nerem, Lay Minister
Grafton: **Emmanuel**, Pr. Solveig Zamzow
Greene: **St. John (Vilmar)**, Pr. Christopher Martin
Gunder: **Marion**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Harlan: **Bethlehem**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
+Huxley: **Shepherd of the Prairie**,
Scott Licht, Lay Minister
Irwin: **St. Paul**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
Laurens: **Bethany**, Pr. David Klappenbach
Manchester: **First**, Pr. Tony D. Ede
+Monona, **Faith**: Pr. Mel Harris
Northwood: **Peace**, Pr. Barbara Wills
Palmer: **St. John's**
Plainfield: **St. John**, Pr. Kim Thacker
Readlyn: **St. Matthew**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Readlyn: **Zion**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Robins: **Servants of Christ**, Pr. Ron Voss
+Rochester, MN: **Emmanuel**, Pr. David Steffenson
Ruthven: **Zion**, Pr. Thomas Summerfield
St. Ansgar: **First**, Pr. Christopher Staley
St. Olaf: **Norway**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Sheldon: **St. Paul**, Call process
+Sibley: **Faith**, Pr. Tim Nappe
Spencer: **Trinity**, Call Process
Strawberry Pt.: **Mission in Christ**, Pr. Gary Burkhalter
Thor: **Ullensvang**, Pr. Darryl Landsverk
Waterville. **Old East Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball
Waukon: **Old West Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball

+ indicates mission congregation

The following pastors are available for pulpit supply:

Pastor Paul Breddin—515--528-2284
Pastor James Glesne—563-380-8110
Pastor Jack Miller—(507) 798-2408
Pastor David Steffenson—253-302-9845 (Sundays)
Pastor Paul Weeg- -641-381-0675

Iowa Mission District Leadership

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Mission District Council Members:

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Chris Schlee—
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Kathy Scharnhorst—
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Mission District Communicator
(newsletter editor/web master):

Pastor Barbara Wills—
barbaramwills@gmail.com

*The Iowa Mission District
has 37 congregations.*



Pastor Tim Nappe is also available for pulpit supply. His primary focus is his ministry with “Reaching the Unreached”, and he will share information about this mission work whenever he does pulpit supply for a congregation. Contact information: 712-331-4245. Or email at pastortim.milford@gmail.com

