



**News
of the Iowa Mission District
of the North American Lutheran Church**

www.iowamissiondistrict.com

February 2019



A Word from the Dean

THE MAIN THING

*"For I decided to know nothing among you
Except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."
~ I Corinthians 2:2*

Stephen Covey, the author of "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," has written that one of the most important principles he wished to pass on was this:

The main thing is to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing.

It is a rather circular point, of course, and it is not something original to him, but he saw it as key to being effective in business, work, school, athletics, or almost any human activity. The point is to remember what is most important and keep that "main thing" uppermost in your mind. It is always so easy to be drawn into peripheral issues and distracted by secondary concerns and lose sight of the central focus of one's endeavors. This is especially so when those peripheral and secondary items appear flashier and more attractive than the "main thing."

The apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthian congregation makes much the same point to them. He urges them to "make the main thing the main thing" in their life of faith. To do this, of course, one must first establish what that "main thing" is. For the followers of Jesus, that "main thing" is the cross. As Paul puts it, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

The church at Corinth was a congregation blessed with many gifts. They had people filled with the Spirit in a number of ways. Some were blessed with the gift of prophecy. Others had the gift of ecstatic speech. Still others excelled in wisdom and interpretation. And the church as whole was rich in resources and with a wide diversity of people.

But they had taken their eyes off of the "main thing." Instead of focusing on Jesus' gift of sacrifice and service, they were focused on their own talents and gifts. Instead of following Jesus' example by using their gifts to be of service to others, they were involved in conflict and competition amongst themselves. Rather than a blessing, the gifts they had in abundance had become objects of pride and personal achievement.

Yet, when our focus is on the cross and upon Jesus' sacrifice for our sake, all of our worldly concerns for position and power and personal gain fade into insignificance. We are blessed by God in many ways, as well, and it is tempting for us to treat these gifts as if they are our own personal possessions – as if the "main thing" in our life together is to protect what we have. But if the cross of Christ is the main thing – if we, like Paul, are committed to "know nothing except Christ Jesus and Him crucified" - then our pride lies not in ourselves, but in Him, our wealth lies not in what we can accumulate, but in what we can share, our energy is spent not in competing with one another, but in building up one another in Christ. Then the main thing is the main thing.

Pastor Marshall Hahn, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Sola Gratia – Grace Alone: *Grace. Alone. Period.*

Pastor Gary Burkhalter

Mission in Christ, Strawberry Point, Iowa

This month we turn our attention to the doctrine confessed in the first of the Solas: *Sola Gratia* - Grace Alone. Perhaps it is because it is so catchy that we are deceived into believing that it is simple. It is anything but! The real punch that this core Lutheran tenet delivers is that in spite of its ubiquity (bumper stickers, refrigerator magnets, T-shirts, coffee mugs, etc.), most of us don't really believe it, or perhaps worse, don't even want to believe it! The problem can be boiled down by taking each word separately: *Grace...Alone.*

Grace. While there are lots of helpful ways of understanding this word (i.e. God's *Riches At Christ's Expense*), I prefer the simple definition *undeserved favor*. The aspect of favor that concerns us most here is God's favor that finds expression in forgiveness: undeserved forgiveness. *Undeserved* means just that. It does not mean that if we beg and plead enough that God will forgive us. It does not mean that if we repent first, then somehow forgiveness is owed us. It means that forgiveness is God's to give...or not...solely as he chooses completely independent of our activity. He is not required to grant forgiveness if we beg hard enough; nor is he prohibited from extending it if we do not beg at all.

We get a sense of the problem when we reflect on the Brief Order of Confession and Forgiveness with which we begin worship: "We confess that...we have not loved you with our whole heart..." Drawing upon the Explanation of the First Commandment, we are confessing that we do not "fear, love, and trust God above all else." Part of our problem is that we do not take our own confession seriously! We want the Explanation to read, "*They* don't fear love and

trust God above all else." We want to confess the sins of other people: "I used to be like that, too, but now I fear, love and trust him!" Somewhere deep down inside, most of us are pretty sure that we're not really, totally underserving. Not to be confused with our neighbor, we're pretty sure that God is right to extend salvation to us because we're not really *that* bad – certainly not as bad as some! We secretly believe that God is on fairly solid ground when he offers *us* forgiveness, that on some level we somehow deserve it. But there you have it: *grace deserved* is not grace at all! And so we find ourselves seeking to reject God's grace after all!

Alone. The other problem arises when we consider the word *alone*. Alone means just that: alone. Not "grace-plus-some-hard-work-on-our-part"; not "grace-plus-my-choosing"; not "grace-plus-my-good-decision". No, not even "grace-plus-my-repenting"! It is grace ALONE.

Of course, immediately we want to object saying, "But don't we have to repent first?" There is no question that repentance is necessary if a person wishes to obtain forgiveness of sins. Jesus said, "Repent and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). While he names repentance first, whenever this term is placed in opposition to faith, it really means nothing else than remorse over sin, what Luther called "contrition" in the Small Catechism's explanation of Holy Baptism. The great Lutheran preacher, C.F.W. Walther, explains that such remorse cannot be regarded as a cause of forgiveness – it's solely an effect of the Law. Contrition cannot even be a good work! The kind of remorse that precedes faith consists of anguish, pain, torment – a feeling of being crushed – all of which God has brought about with the hammer of the Law! We cannot bring about that kind of repentance on our own. Such repentance is produced by God, and the faith that works salvation comes to us (Wait for it!)...by Grace...Alone.

Thanks be to God!

This and That from Around The Iowa Mission District



At the eighth annual meeting of Peace Lutheran Church in Northwood, on January 21, 2019, members of the congregation voted unanimously to purchase the building they have been sharing with the Northwood Baptist Church for the past several years.



2019 Youth Mission Trip

Hey gang!! It is time to start thinking about mission 2019!!! This year's big response from the NALC was North Carolina...just 25 miles different from last year!

We have marked July 21-28....same week as last year, knowing that some can't come, but having a consistent week helps congregations plan. We need to meet! Find the doodle poll below.

Please pass this onto your youth team or if you don't have youth, please begin to pray for our mission team for this year!

Rev. Tony D. Ede

<https://doodle.com/poll/yk2ky49kgn42gz7r>

Steadfast In God's Word

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

"[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" (Luke 11:1)

Last month we introduced the subject of conversations with God and began to think about how to enter into prayer in a deeper way than simply calling on the Lord as a last resort or to provide the things we want or need. The disciples, also, wanted to grow in their lives of prayer. They were Jewish men who had been raised in the faith. No doubt they regularly attended Sabbath services and knew by heart many of the liturgical prayers used in their services of worship. But there was apparently a hunger to know more about how to pray. They had seen John the Baptist with his disciples and were aware, either first hand or from conversations with some of John's followers, that he had introduced the topic of prayer with them. Jesus was the One John had pointed to as "greater than" John, and the obvious conclusion would be that Jesus would know more about prayer than even the fiery prophet. Jesus' disciples had also seen their Master go apart to pray—most likely for hours at a time. Surely there was more to prayer than simply asking for help in times of stress or reciting the liturgy during worship. And so one of the disciples approached Jesus and asked for instruction.

If you've read some of the many prayer books on the market, you will know that people have many ideas and methods for approaching the Lord in prayer. Some are even presumptuous enough to imply that their method is the best or most appropriate. Jesus didn't give the disciples tricks or techniques—He gave them a prayer. We call this prayer "The Lord's Prayer" or the "Our Father". Some Christians view this prayer as a sort of "model", but while we can certainly expand our requests or concerns regarding each petition, our Lord gave us this prayer intact. It covers all the important aspects of our lives as God's people, and it follows our Lord's instruction regarding verbosity in prayer. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to the disciples, "*And in praying, don't heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them. For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*" (Matthew 6:7-8) Although the Lord's Prayer uses few words, each one carries a lot of weight and a depth of meaning. Unfortunately, we so often recite the words without discerning the meanings, and sometimes race through as if the main point is to finish as quickly as possible. Jesus didn't give us a short prayer so we

could finish quickly! Rather, it's likely that He gave us this short prayer to help us discern and focus on the things that are most important in our relationship with God and others.

While praying, we should never simply "say" the words, but rather concentrate on the One to whom we pray and offer these familiar words as our *prayer!* When people pray in a group, it would be most helpful if the leader would slow the pace and pray meditatively. In the Small Catechism, Luther helps us think about the full meaning of the words we're using in our prayer. After the introduction in which we address God, Luther divides the prayer into seven petitions, and offers an explanation for each one. The "doxology" with which the prayer is concluded are words of praise to the Lord. Some of the English versions of the Bible include it, and some do not. This is because some of the ancient texts have it, while others do not. Whether or not the Bible you use includes the doxology, Protestants through the centuries have included it in the prayer as it has come down to us. It is always appropriate to offer praise to our heavenly Father. And at the end of the prayer, Luther gives us reassurance, encouraging us to trust that our prayer is pleasing to God and that He hears us.

"*Our Father, who art in heaven,*" introduces the prayer, and Luther reminds us that in this prayer our heavenly Father invites us to understand our relationship with Him. While many people many have never had a healthy or loving relationship with their earthly fathers, this does not mean we quit calling God our Father. Rather, in this holy relationship we learn what true fatherhood is all about, and we are encouraged to understand that we may approach the Lord God with the confidence of a child who knows that he or she is beloved by the one who provides for their protection and daily needs. The petitions in between cover our proper relationship to the Lord and one another, and prayers for God's provision, protection and care—physically and spiritually. It is eloquent and inviting.

As we all grow in our prayer life, it is good to use this prayer often. Read again Luther's explanations. Contemplate the various avenues of intercession and request each petition opens to you as you pray. And meditate on the great love our Lord reveals for us in the words He used to teach us to pray.

Pastor Barbara Wills

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2019 Upcoming Events

July 21-28 – Youth Mission Trip. Contact Pastor Jason Cooper (cooper_jd@yahoo.com) or Pastor Tony D. Ede (tonyede@gmail.com) for more information.

April 29-30 – Mission District Pastor’s/Lay Minister’s Retreat

August 5-9 – Luther Week in Indianapolis, IN. (Note: **Election of NALC Bishop!**)

September 14 – Iowa Mission District Convocation, First Lutheran, Manchester, IA

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Iowa Mission District Website

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 the mission district site, please send the web address to Pastor Barbara Wills at barbaramwills@gmail.com.

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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.



Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: Our Saviour's, Dan Buhs, Lay Minister
Avoca: Trinity, Pr. Eric Meissner
Badger: Badger Lutheran, Pr. Scott Meier
Boyd: St. John, Pr. Mark Lund
Dorchester: Waterloo Ridge, Call Process
Eagle Grove: Evangelical Lutheran, Pr. Jason Cooper
Eagle Grove: Samuel Lutheran, Pr. Rich Taylor
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, Call Process
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
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, Pr. Crai
+Sibley: Faith, Pr. Tim Nappe
Spencer: Trinity
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 David Steffenson—253-302-9845 (Sundays)
Pastor Paul Weeg- -641-381-0675

Iowa Mission District Leadership

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Craig Lease, Secretary—
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Pastor Burkhalter, Treasurer—
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Mission District Council Members:

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Kathy Scharnhorst—
gaf@butler-bremer.com
Mission District Communicator
(newsletter editor/web master):
Pastor Barbara Wills—barbaramwills@gmail.com



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