



News

of the Iowa Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church

www.iowamissiondistrict.com

October 2019

A Word from the Dean

THE FREE LUNCH

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”
Isaiah 55:8

There is a story told about a pilgrim who went on a journey to seek the meaning of life. He traveled all over the world searching for the answers he sought. Then he heard of a wise, holy man who lived by himself on a high mountain. And he was determined to reach him and ask him what secrets he had discovered. So he went there, half-way across the world – by plane – bus – on the back of a truck – by donkey – finally climbing the last 5 miles on foot. At last he stood at door of the holy man’s hut on the mountainside. He entered, approached him, and said, “I have traveled half-way across the world to see you. I have come by plane, bus, truck, and donkey to get here. I have come to ask you what secrets you have learned in your many years. Tell me, O wise and holy one, what is the secret of life?”

The old man lifted his head to look at the eager pilgrim, and told him, “The secret of life is – there is no such thing as a free lunch.”

It is an old story, maybe not a particularly enlightening one. But what the wise man had to say is probably what most of us believe. It is what we have learned over the years ourselves. There is no free lunch in life. You get what you pay for. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. You have to work for what you want. And by and large, these are sentiments that serve us pretty well in life. It is something that most parents try to instill in their children – the ability to stand on their own two feet and make their way in the world by working hard and accomplishing what they can. Indeed, even in Scripture, we can find such advice. Way back in Genesis we are told, “*By the sweat of your brow you shall earn your bread.*”

But that is not the whole story – no, not even half of it. There is another word in Scripture, too. In Isaiah, God tells us, “*My ways are not your ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” The problem is that once we learn that we need to earn our keep in life, we begin to think that is all there is to life. The problem is that we start to think that our real life – what is really important – is all bound up in what we can do – what we can accomplish – what we can accumulate – by our own strength and wit.

What we sometimes forget is that life itself – everything we have, everything we can do, everything that we are, the very universe itself – IS a free lunch. All of it is a gift from God, from the air we breathe to the talents we possess. What that pilgrim sought to discover from the holy man was right in front of him all the time. The secret of the universe is that it is all gift – all unearned – all free – given to us out of God’s gracious and unending love. As we see once more the abundance of this earth brought to harvest and gathered in for the winter, we can see an example of the abundance of God’s care for us in the world He has made. This is the great and precious truth we proclaim on Reformation Sunday- indeed, on every Sunday: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” Ephesians 2:8-9

Pastor Marshall Hahn, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Sola Gratia—Grace: That's It!

*Pr. Christopher Staley
First Lutheran
St. Ansgar, Iowa*

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

(Luke 15:1-2)

We know what happens next, Jesus tells a parable. Or, more accurately, Jesus tells three parables, the parable of the lost sheep, then the lost coin, then the lost son (or Prodigal Son, as it's more commonly known).

In each parable there is something that has been lost, but when that which had been lost is found, the one who had suffered the loss rejoices with great enthusiasm. Of the three parables, the middle one about the coin is most easily acceptable to our ears. Which of us hasn't gone to great pains to seek out something that we have lost. A coin, after all, doesn't get itself lost, anymore than a set of keys, or a wedding ring, or a pair of glasses that we, in our absentmindedness, put down somewhere, or had slip off our finger. I'd dare say that I lose at least five minutes nearly every day in my searching for such a thing. In most cases, the lost thing is by no means irreplaceable, but I am driven to distraction until I can find it.

The first of the parables involves a sheep that is lost. Jesus doesn't say how the sheep ends up lost, though knowing sheep as we do, it's not surprising. Sheep are proverbial in their wont to go astray. In telling this parable, however, a detail that Jesus mentions is that the shepherd would do the unthinkable in his search for the singularly lost sheep: leave the other 99 in an open place. As this little parable wraps up, the shepherd is rejoicing with his neighbors about the single sheep, while the other 99 still seem to be left out in the open place. And you know what they call free-range sheep? Prey.

But it is the final parable that is the infamous one. The man with two sons has the younger one ask the father to hand over the share of the inheritance that would fall to the young man so that he can make a life for himself away from the family farm. Whatever the size of that share is, we only know that he fritters it away in a distant

land on reckless living. And when that wealth has failed him, a famine strikes that region where he had sought to make a life. He is so desperate that he hires himself out to a local pig farmer, except that his wages are so pitiful that they couldn't even have bought a single pig's daily ration. Unlike the previous parables, it is the 'lost' that realizes his plight, knowing that the workers at his father's farm are better treated than he is in this pig sty. Vowing to swallow his pride, he reckons on asking for a job as a servant for his father.

But, as soon as the father see his bedraggled younger son trudging up the road, he races to meet him, hearing the boy's confession. But even before the boy has a chance to offer himself up as a servant, the father calls for the best robe, shoes for the boy's feet, and a ring for his finger, and that a feast is in order since the son who had been lost has been found.

The older son, however, doesn't see it quite this way when he learns what all the hubbub is about. He is in no mood for a party. He is determined to stay away, righteously angry. I say righteously because it seems fitting. This returning son has not deserved a party, rather a strong rebuke and punishment.

But such is the nature of grace. If this younger son had earned this welcome-home party, this would be called a reward, or even a wage. But what makes it grace is that it is absolutely undeserved.

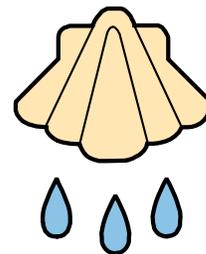
So, too, the tax collectors and sinners who were so eager to draw near to Jesus and hear Him. They didn't deserve anything from God's own Son other than punishment. But "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). The Pharisees and Scribes didn't see it way. And they are determined to stay away, righteously angry. But it is at this point that the parable plays itself out: The rejoicing father realizes that he has lost something, and he goes out to seek his lost son. And, oh, what rejoicing there could be!

This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District

Pastor/Congregation Anniversaries



Two pastors in the Iowa Mission District are celebrating 25 years of continuous ministry in the congregations they serve. Pastor Ken Kimball (right), the first Dean of the Mission District, serves Old East and Old West Paint Creek Lutheran Churches. Pastor Marshall Hahn, our present Dean (left), serves Norway and Marion Lutheran Churches. Congratulations to Pastors Hahn and Kimball and their congregations!

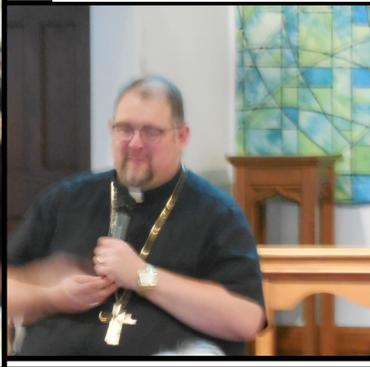


Eleanor Jean Lund, daughter of Pastor Mark and Hope Lund, was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by her father at St. John's Lutheran Church, Boyden, on September 29, 2019.

Iowa Mission District 2019 Convocation



The Iowa Mission District Convocation was held at First Lutheran, Manchester, on Saturday, September 14, 2019. The convocation opened with a service of Holy Communion. Pastor Tony D. Ede, hosting pastor, officiated at the service, and Mission District Dean, Pastor Marshall Hahn, preached. Presentations were given by Mary Bates, NALC Domestic Disaster Relief coordinator; Pastors Ede and Hahn, who shared pictures and information about the July Youth Mission Trip to Wilmington, NC; and Pastor Ron Voss, on the stewardship workshops being presented in the Mission District this fall. Each of these presenters also led forums after lunch. Elections for Secretary of the Mission District (Craig Lease was re-elected) and positions on the Mission District Council were held (elected were Pastor Ron Rasmussen—3 years; Chris Schlee—re-elected for 3 years; Glenda Plozay—elected to finish the last year of a 3-year position). Next year's convocation will be at St. John's (Villmar) in rural Greene.



Announcements

2019 Upcoming Events

October 5—**Stewards of God's Influence** workshop, First, Manchester, IA

These workshops are presented by the NALC's Living and Giving Stewardship Team.

Both are from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Presenters are Pastors Tony D. Ede and Ron Voss. For more information or to register, please contact Pastor Voss at 312-513-3567 or servantofchristnalc@gmail.com.

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

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.





Steadfast In God's Word ***Reflecting on Martin Luther's Favorite Psalm***

Martin Luther loved the Psalms and wrote extensively about them. He believed that the Psalms contain Christ and that all of them pointed to Christ. Luther also prayed the Psalms, finding words of comfort that sustained him in his times of trial and comforted him in times of grief. Like most of us, Luther also had a “favorite”—it was Psalm 118. This is what he said about this Psalm:

“This is my own beloved Psalm. Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, I fell in love with this psalm especially. Therefore, I call it my own. When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even the saints could not aid me, this psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles.”

As we read through the Psalm, and reflect on Luther's early life and the angst he felt in trying to live a holy and righteous life, as well as the events that followed Luther's posting of the 95 theses on the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, we can begin to understand why this particular Psalm held such a special place in the life and faith of the great Reformer. There are many resources—Luther's own writings and the commentaries of others—that give explanations and details. But I also find it helpful to ponder Luther's life in light of the verses in this Psalm to gain a more personal sense of why he might have found this Psalm helpful—and in the process to find resonance with my own faith struggles and challenges.

One of the first things that drew me to Luther—and ultimately Lutheran theology—were the stories of Luther's early struggles to be right with God. Luther feared the Lord so deeply that he spent most of his time pondering his unworthiness and the judgment of God. Christ was a terrifying judge, and most of us are aware of Luther's constant visits to the confessional to recount the most minute sins he could remember. This didn't satisfy his need for forgiveness, so he also engaged in self-flagellation—that is whipping himself with a small whip designed for this purpose. What a glorious relief for him, when he encountered the Apostle Paul's words in Romans, explaining how our righteousness depends on our faith in Christ, and not on our own works: *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”* (Romans 3:21a, 22a)

As we read the first few verses of Psalm 118—

“Oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever!” the repeated emphasis on—and reassurance of—God's steadfast love must have been balm to Luther's soul after the years of believing that the Lord hated him. Verse 5 is particularly comforting, *“Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.”* How many times in our own lives have we felt overwhelmed and imprisoned by our own inadequacy to live up to the expectations of the Lord—and how many times have we tried to atone for our own sins, forgetting that our Lord Jesus is the only One who could do that? To know that the Lord has set us free allows us to quit looking inward at ourselves and our inadequacies and to look outward—to love the Lord and share that love with our neighbors.

Not only did Luther find comfort in knowing he was loved by the Lord, he also found courage. In verse 6 the psalmist says, *“The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”* Another difficulty Luther faced was that of disappointing his father. When he made the decision to enter the monastery, Luther's father denounced his decision and was very angry. In the years following his posting of the 95 theses, Luther faced criticism and physical danger from the Pope and others in authority (in that time the Church could imprison, torture and execute people for heresy—which meant any teaching that differed from the official doctrines of the Church). How this verse must have encouraged him and helped him keep his priorities straight as he faced down the most powerful men in the world of his era. Likewise, we can find courage and strength to follow our Lord's guidance and teaching. Whether the criticism comes from within our families or among our neighbors or friends, we need not fear, remembering that even death cannot harm us when we belong to the Lord.

It is said that Luther's favorite verse in this favorite Psalm was verse 17. Knowing that some of his friends had been imprisoned and burned at the stake, Luther was very aware of the dangers he faced. He had this verse posted on the wall in his study: *“I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.”* He was under no delusion, but understood that true life in Christ is for eternity, and whatever happens to us in this life will not separate us from the love—and life—of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

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
Boyden: **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**, 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**
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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Pastor Burkhalter, Treasurer—
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(newsletter editor/web master):

Pastor Barbara Wills—
barbarawills@gmail.com

*The Iowa Mission District
has 36 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