

**EMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF
ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA**

BEDROCK BELIEFS

**Newsletter articles first appearing in the 2012 monthly
Cross Connections of Mount Cross Evangelical Lutheran
Church, University Place, WA.**

**A brief summary of what Lutherans believe, authored
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Table of Contents

Month	Title	Page
January	Bedrock Beliefs	3
February	“The Priesthood of All Believers”	5
March	“sIn”	8
April	“A Community Called Atonement”	10
May	“The Resurrection of the Body”	12
June	“The Holy Trinity”	14
July	“Experiencing Koinonia”	17
August	“Fair-weather Fans, or Fully Devoted Followers?”	19
September	“Scripture: Law & Gospel”	21
October	“Justification By Faith Alone”	24
November	“Lift High the Cross”	27
December	“The Heart of Christmas”	29

[“Bedrock Beliefs” – Jan 2012](#)

The Grand Sweep is coming to an end. Our Year of the Bible has run its course. The Sacred Text is mastering and having its way with us; serving as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for correction, for teaching, for reproof, and for training in righteousness, that the child of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”—II Timothy 3:16-17. On January 8, we’ll have our final Grand Sweep conversation during the Adult Education Hour. We’ll discuss “the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth”. On Christmas Eve we begin the celebration of the Twelve Days of Christmas. On January 1 (10 a.m.) we will embrace the gift of a New Year with our traditional Bell Ringing Service. On Sunday, January 22 we will officially be saying farewell to our Youth Director, Beth, and wishing her Godspeed as she departs for a new ministry opportunity in Australia. As we say goodbye to 2011, may God grant each of us the wisdom and joy of a faith-filled 2012.

During 2012, I will be selecting one of our Bedrock Beliefs each month and offering reflections for your consideration in our monthly newsletters. It is my conviction that bedrock beliefs are the non-negotiable essentials of our Christian Faith. Grace may be free for all, but grace, costly grace, is not a “free-for-all” where the redeemed do and believe as they please. The twelve month journey that awaits us will be a kind of an adult catechesis; a review of what we learned in Confirmation. This month, as we prepare to celebrate the Baptism of our Lord on January 8, I thought I would begin by addressing the topic of Holy Baptism, our entrance rite into the life of the church. What is it that we believe about the Sacrament of Holy Baptism? The hymns of our church provide confessional fodder for our theology of Baptism. “All who believe and are baptized shall see the Lord’s salvation (Mark 16:16). Baptized into the death of Christ, they are a new creation (Romans 6:4 & II Cor. 5:17). Through Christ’s redemption they shall stand, among the glorious heavenly band of every tribe and nation (Revelation 7:9-17)”—LBW #194.

We baptize infants and adults, because we have a Great Commission with a great promise! Our resurrected Lord, who has *all authority*, commands his church to make disciples of all nations everywhere, in God’s name (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). We are commanded to make disciples and to teach obedience to the commandments of Jesus; lo, Jesus is with us always! In Baptism we become the bride of Jesus. In Baptism we are born again (John 3); birthed from above. Our first birth (biologically born into sin) requires a second birth (heavenly conception), which guarantees a third birth (resurrection unto eternal life). What about eternal security; once saved, always saved? Can one fall out of grace? Can the promises of Baptism become null and void?

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is always a spiritual danger. Baptism isn't hocus-pocus, medicinal inoculation, or a human insurance policy. Read Hebrews 10:26-31, I Corinthians 10:1-13, John 10:27-30 & Romans 8:28-39. Scripture doesn't flip-flop. God doesn't speak out of both sides of His mouth. In Jesus, God's Word for us is always "Yes!" Personally, I don't understand how a person could fall out of grace, unless it wasn't costly grace to begin with. God, who began a good work in us, guarantees its completion at the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the meantime, let baptism have its full effect! In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther writes: "What does baptism mean for daily living?" "It means that my sinful self with all of its evil deeds and desires should be drowned though daily repentance, and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever." Recently in the Grand Sweep, we read Romans, Galatians, Colossians, Titus, and I Peter. Each Epistle makes reference to Baptism. The Letter of Romans reminds us that it is impossible for a baptized child of God to sin all the more that grace may abound. Why? Because we have been buried and raised with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:1-14); game on and game over. Galatians and Colossians remind us that we are "clothed so to speak" (Gal. 3:27-29 & Col. 3:1-17) in the righteousness of Jesus in Holy Baptism. Baptism is the great equalizer; making human distinctions no longer important. Baptism is the rite whereby the Gentiles are made sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah; heirs according to promise. Titus reminds us that we are saved not because of deeds done on our part, but solely on the basis of God's goodness, mercy and loving kindness. How are we saved? Through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Justified by grace, we become heirs in the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure (Titus 3:4-8a)! The baptized devote themselves to good works. Martin Luther writes: "You are saved by faith alone, but if faith is alone, it is not faith."

The letter of I Peter is a baptismal homily, reminding persecuted Christians that they have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus and set apart for godly living as members of a royal priesthood. Sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever, we should not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that comes our way. Suffering, for Christians, is for just a little while, but the living hope and heavenly inheritance is forever. Baptism, which is prefigured in the Flood Story, now saves us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Peter 3:21). Baptism is our ordination into the priesthood of believers. We are servants of a new and better Covenant.

Having read and preached on the Book of Hebrews recently, I've been thinking a lot about the word BETTER. Some scholars refer to Hebrews as the "Better" Book of the New Testament because the word "better" is used 13 times. Jesus is the better priest, sacrifice, mediator, hope and way. Why would anyone settle for an inferior when they've already got the Superior? Reflecting on "better ways" and the "priesthood of

believers” I got to thinking about church life efficiency at Mount Cross. Currently, a church staff member makes dozens of phone calls every month soliciting worship helpers. What if we found a better way? Instead of one paid staff person making 50+ calls trying to solicit people for service, wouldn’t it be better to have the priesthood of believers call the church office and volunteer their time and talents? Imagine how much easier it would be if each member of Mount Cross called and said for example, “This is baptized Billy. I’ve got the spiritual gift of Scripture reading. I checked my calendar and here are the Sundays I have free for the next two months. When would you like me to use my gifts and read Scripture?” Instead of an office staff member trying to fill worship helper slots for the monthly calendar, members would be calling to offer themselves for service. I realize it’s just an idea, but for those who embrace a “better way” (Jesus), it might reduce the stress and workload of the office staff. Martin Luther writes: “There is enough in Baptism to study and practice our whole life.” From womb to empty tomb we are christened. Let the redeemed say, “I am baptized”.

Walking Wet,

PASTOR DAVE

[“The Priesthood of All Believers” -Feb. 2012](#)

Each month in 2012, I am reflecting on some of the bedrock beliefs of our Christian faith. Coinciding with the Season of Epiphany and the Baptism of our Lord, I began our year-long journey with the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Baptism is our entrance into the Church, the Redeemed Body of Christ. This month I am reflecting on a related topic, namely: “The Priesthood of All Believers” and the gift of “Vocation”. In baptism we are called to “let our lights shine before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven”. We are saved for a purpose! We are God’s calling cards. We are God’s portable temples of worship and praise in daily life. Once again hymnody leads the way: “We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly. We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God”—ELW #720. “Here I am Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart”—ELW #574. “Jesus calls us; o’er the tumult of our life’s wild restless sea, day by day his clear voice sounding, saying ‘Christian, follow me.’”—ELW #696.

Who’s calling? God is the author of our calling. Whose calling? The call belongs to the priesthood of all believers. Scripture recites numerous call narratives. In the Creation Story, God calls Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, to till the earth and keep the

Garden. God calls Cain to be Brother Abel's keeper. God calls Abraham to be a seed of blessing for all nations. When God calls Jeremiah, the prophet complains that he's too young and inexperienced. When God calls Isaiah, the prophet says, "Here Am I LORD. Send Me!" It took three tries for Eli to recognize a call from God and on the fourth try Samuel said, "Speak LORD for your servant is listening." God called a reluctant and run-away Jonah to speak words of repentance to sinful Nineveh. People usually catch fish, but God uses a big fish to catch Jonah, and forgiveness to catch sinners. God is a persistent caller, refusing to take "No" for an answer. The call creates the response and guarantees the catch. God goes fishing and never gets skunked. "Rabbi, where are you abiding?" Jesus says, "Come and you will see." Jesus guarantees Epiphany! Walking along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus commands four fishermen: "Follow Me and I WILL MAKE YOU fish for people."

I Peter is a baptismal homily. St. Peter reminds us of our priestly calling: "We are scattered seeds and living stones. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own people." We are consecrated for a purpose: "To proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called us out darkness into His marvelous light." In baptism we receive a new birth and an imperishable inheritance; the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. In Baptism we receive a "Great Commission" Calling/Vocation. Baptism, prefigured in the waters of the Flood, now saves us (I Peter 3:21). Baptism is our ordination rite (I Peter 2:5).

Martin Luther writes, "All Christians have the same status. Citing I Peter 2:9 ('You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm') and Rev. 5:9-10 ('Thou has made us to be priests and kings by thy blood'), Luther describes that status as 'priest' and ascribes it to every Christian, 'As far as that goes, we are all consecrated priests through baptism.' So what differentiates Christians is simply the work that God has given them to do: There is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate....But they do not all have the same work to do. For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope." —WA 6:407.22-23 and WA 6:408.11-12, 26-30. Our stations in life differ, but our calling is the same: "Having put on Christ in the waters of regeneration, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We are all one in Christ Jesus" —Galatians 3:27-28. We have different roles to play, but equal value to share!

So what's your calling, and how are you living it out your priestly vocation publicly in daily life? The Latin word for calling is "vocation". Lutherans use the word "vocation" to refer to our common calling as sons and daughters of God living out our lives in the world. "Vocation" is not merely a reference to clergy who are paid professionals living

out their baptismal calling in the station of Church. Each of us is called to glorify God and serve our neighbor in our various stations of daily life; as spouse, parent, child, citizen, student, employee, boss, etc. “Vocation” includes one’s occupation or job, but is not limited to what one does for a living. Our baptismal calling demands that we build an altar in the workplace, home-place, and play-place. Christians are on call 24-7. In truth, there is no distinction between secular and sacred work. All work is sacred service, because our justified-by-faith-alone-bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Vocation is God’s work; a mask of God. God is hidden in vocation; Christ is hidden in our neighbors. Our stations and callings in life are all opportunities, as well as duties, for faith to be lived out fruitfully, publicly, for the sake of the neighbor and the glory of God. Worship is what we do 24-7, not just for an hour on Sunday mornings. They may, or may not, know we are Christians by our love; “vocation” allows us to show and tell!

Vocation doesn’t mean that daily life is all fun and games. We may not always enjoy our jobs or the tedious elements of our daily stations. Our callings are not intended to simply increase self-esteem or bring us personal fulfillment. The Rev. Dr. Marc Kolden, in his book *Called by the Gospel*, writes, “The creative purpose of vocation is to help us to serve God and keep his world going; but the redemptive purpose of our vocation is to discipline us.” “Without vocation, the gospel would be cheap grace—resurrection without crucifixion.” “Vocation is the way of life with a cross at its center.” “In the demands and sufferings of our callings we are crucified with Christ.” —Pages 57-58. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship* writes, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Martin Luther reminds us that “Christians preoccupied with their families, struggling to make ends meet, living their mundane lives are all in a state of holiness, living holy lives before God.” The doctrine of vocation is the theology of the Christian life.

St. Paul writes, “Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned you, to which God called you” —I Corinthians 7:17. As members of the “priesthood of all believers” we are called to practice our vocations in daily life, for the love of Jesus, the glory of God, and the good of the neighbor. We priests and priestesses present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). Baptism gives us our calling. God lives and breathes in our portable temples at home, at work, and at play. Build an altar and enjoy your callings!

Vocationally Challenged,
PASTOR DAVE

[“sIn” – March 2012](#)

Remember these hymnic words? “I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God; He bears them all and frees us from the accursed load. I bring my guilt to Jesus to wash my crimson stains; clean in His blood most precious, till not a spot remains” —LBW #305.

A woman once said to me, “Pastor, I don’t do guilt.” I paused and replied, “Then you must not do forgiveness either.” If guilt doesn’t exist, then sIn isn’t a problem and forgiveness isn’t necessary. If forgiveness isn’t necessary then Jesus didn’t need to die on a cross and we don’t need to be saved from sIn. Death is simply a nuisance, or an inevitability, from which we may or may not wish to escape. Furthermore, Christ’s words are meaningless: On the night in which he was betrayed, while sharing a Passover Meal with his disciples, Jesus said, “Take and drink. This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:27- 28). Is Jesus telling the truth or proclaiming a lie? In Truth, sIn is a problem. Scripture, human experience and observation, life itself, assures us that “we are in bondage to sIn and we cannot free ourselves.” Evil exists and its killing us.

This month we continue our conversation about bedrock beliefs with a fresh look at sIn. I spell sIn with a capital “I” because sIn is an “I” problem; sIn is not only our acts of disobedience, lawlessness, unbelief, and idolatry, it is also our shared condition; it is what we do and who we are. Another word for sIn is concupiscence, which is “the inordinate desire for the lesser good, the self curved in upon the self”. A friend jokingly speaks the truth: “I’m tired of talking about me. Why don’t you talk about me for awhile?” Original sIn is our genesis. We are born into sIn and we actualize it in words and deeds daily, by what we do and by what we leave undone (sins of commission and sins of omission). Refusing to believe that our Creator knows what is best for us we fall upwards, grasping for something more...and we die! Death is our separation, estrangement, from God.

Imagine this: God creates human beings in God’s image to be in relationship; naked and not ashamed. Everything is good! God creates human beings to be down-to-earth (humus); earthlings created from the earth. Only one law exists in the Garden of Eden: “Don’t eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for the day you eat of it you shall surely die.” The serpent calls God a liar, puts God’s Word to the test, and offers enlightenment & freedom to Adam and Eve: “You won’t die. Eat and you will be just like God. You’ll be your own God. You won’t need God. You can be your own boss. You can call the shots.” The serpent invites Adam and Eve to embrace the lie and transgress the law. Humanity sins and immediately knows guilt. The eyes of Adam and Eve are opened and they hide. They try to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. God strolls in the Garden and finds Adam and Eve playing hide-in-seek. Adam says that he

and Eve are hiding because they are naked and ashamed. God offers absolution: confession and forgiveness. Adam plays the victim and blames Eve and her Creator: “The woman YOU gave me, gave me the forbidden fruit.” Eve follows Adam’s lead: “The serpent YOU created tricked me.” We see that sin leads to guilt, shame, hiding, blaming and devastating consequences; sin is killing us!

So tell me, do you believe in sin? Is sin a problem for you? Here is what Scripture says about sin:

- “For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against you O God, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight....I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.”—Psalm 51:3-5
- “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” —Psalm 32:1
- “No one is righteous, not even one;” “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” — Romans 3:10, 23
- “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.”—Romans 5:12
- “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Romans 6:23
- “Anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.”—James 4:17
- “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”—I John 3:4
- “The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar and His Word is not in us.”— I John 1:7-10
- “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”—Isaiah 1:18
- “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

If Scripture is the final authority in all matters of faith and life (a bedrock belief for another day) then sin is an inescapable problem for us and Jesus is God’s only permanent solution (John 3:16). Why did God place the forbidden tree in the Garden? Why did God give Adam and Eve freewill? Martin Luther writes: “If someone at the last judgment were to ask God: ‘Why did you permit Adam to fall?’ God would answer, ‘So it might be known that I like the human race so much that I would give even my Son to

save men.” Luther adds that we would say, “Let the whole human race fall all over again so that Thy glory may be made manifest!” —WA, TR 5, 5071. God created us for Jesus! Jesus died for sinners. I guess I qualify!

Our Confessions remind us that “God creates us good, so we are not necessarily sinful, but we are in fact sinful.” The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, which means “missing the mark”. Martin Luther writes: “The main and real sin is unfaith, despising God, which is what takes place when a person does not fear, love, and trust in God as they certainly should.”—L.W. 14, 84. Sin is not just little white lies, misguided pranks, or hurtful words. Sin is our shared condition; idolatry which leads to death. We come by it naturally. I do guilt, because I do sin. I also do forgiveness, because I do believe in Jesus. Shall we sin all the more so that forgiveness may abound? By no means! How can we who have died to sin choose to wallow endlessly in it? St. Peter writes: “Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that free from sins, we might live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). If I forget that I am a sinner, as well as a saint, please remind me!

Doing Guilt,

PASTOR DAVE

[“A Community Called Atonement” – April 2012](#)

St. Paul, addressing the Church at Corinth, reminds them that they are called to be a Community of Reconciliation: reconciled and reconciling. “For our sake God made Jesus to be sin, he who knew no sin, so that in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God”—II Corinthians 5:21. Martin Luther called this divine transaction the “Blessed/Happy Exchange”. In baptism we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. In Christ, we are made Christian. Jesus takes all that we are and gives us all that he is. It’s a good trade! Sin is our problem, and atonement (AT-ONE-MENT) is God’s solution; what was separated is now at one!

If sin is unbelief, then God’s solution to the human predicament is justification by faith alone. If sin is estrangement (enemies), then God’s solution is reconciliation (friends). If sin is lawlessness, then God’s solution is the law abiding obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). If sin is concupiscence, the inordinate desire for the lesser good and the self curved in upon the self, then God’s solution is a new creation, a restored image, and a self set free from self preoccupation for the glory of God and the good of others.

“We are convinced,” Paul writes, “that one has died for all, therefore all have died.” Checkmate! Stare at the board if you must. Contemplate your next move, but the game is over. It is finished; mission accomplished (John 19:30). God wins, and by de facto so do we! Human beings are out of alignment and need of realignment. Human beings have missed the mark and need to be retargeted. If anyone is in Christ, and we are, they are a new creation. Everything old has passed away and everything has become new. Our justification is a matter of death and life.

St. Paul writes, emphatically, “I (I) have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I (I) who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I (I) now live, I (I) live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me” —Galatians 2:19-20. Armistice Day has arrived, but the Old Adam refuses to surrender and lay down his arms. The work of atonement continues. We are ambassadors for Christ. God makes His appeal through us: “Be reconciled!” —II Corinthians 5:20. The imperative is in a passive voice. We, who are birthed again from above (John 3), must be reconciled. Salvation and atonement demand it. God requires and guarantees it; by GRACE (God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense) alone!

Gerhard Forde, in his book, *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life*, writes, “We are justified freely, for Christ’s sake, by faith, without the exertion of our own strength, gaining of merit, or doing of works. To the age old question, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ the confessional answer is shocking: ‘Nothing! Just be still; shut up and listen for once in your life to what God the Almighty, creator and redeemer, is saying to his world and to you in the death and resurrection of his Son! Listen and believe!’ When one sees that it is a matter of death and life one has to talk this way. The ‘nothing’ must sound, risky and shocking as it is. For it is, as we shall see, precisely the death knell of the old being. The faith by which one is justified is not an active verb of which the old Adam or Eve is the subject, it is a state-of-being verb. Faith is the state of being grasped by the unconditional claim and promise of God who calls into being that which is from that which is not. Faith means now having to deal with life in those terms. It is a death and resurrection.” —p. 22.

Scot McKnight, in his book, *A Community Called Atonement*, reminds us that the Scriptures describe God’s atoning work in various ways. Jesus pays the penalty for our sin. Jesus makes satisfaction for our sin. Jesus gives his life as a ransom for our sin. Jesus is our substitute, taking sinners’ place on the cross and in the tomb; going to hell for us. Wolfart Pannenberg describes sin as “the universal failure to achieve our human destiny” (p. 23). McKnight says that atonement is God’s acts of resolving sin and bringing humans back home in their relationships with God, self, others and the world. The cross becomes God’s mercy seat. Jesus dies with us, instead of us. Jesus dies for us. Justification is God’s right-making. The future judgment is brought into effect in the here

and now— “not guilty for Jesus’ sake”. The cross reshapes all of life. Atonement is the creation of communities where God’s image is restored, and God’s will is done and lived out. We practice the atonement as we live out the gospel in our union with God and in our communion with others.

In Christ we are a new creation; all things are new. God has given us a ministry of reconciliation. God makes His appeal through us. We are ambassadors in Christ, for Christ, reconciled and reconciling. We are a community called atonement, the vessels by which God brings the forgiveness of sins to the world. Incorporated into the Jesus’ story, atonement works, producing the fruits of righteousness in the Kingdom of God.

Reconciled and reconciling...IN CHRIST,

PASTOR DAVE

[“Bedrock Beliefs: The Resurrection of the Body” - May 2012](#)

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! We find ourselves celebrating the chief festival of the church year, i.e. Easter. “This is the feast of victory for our God, for the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Alleluia. Alleluia.” —LBW page 82. Easter, also known as Passover, is a week of week’s celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus. The Season of Easter is 50 days long, culminating in the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, the arrival of promised power from on high. Our Easter word is Alleluia, which means, “Praise the Lord”. Every Sunday is a mini-Easter in the life of a Christian.

In our Confessions of Faith, we profess confident hope in the “resurrection of the dead” (Nicene Creed) and the “resurrection of the body” (Apostles’ Creed). The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life; which commences in resurrection. This month, I wish to explore with you the bedrock belief of resurrection; not resuscitation, which simply postpones death or makes dying a second time unavoidable (Lazarus, John 11), and not reincarnation (transmigration of the soul), which simply transforms the sinner into successive rebirths of sin. Resurrection is the core teaching of the church, the measure by which all bedrock beliefs stand or fall. One cannot be a Christian if one does not believe in the resurrection of the body/dead.

In I Corinthians 15, St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Corinth, probably during the Season of Easter, addresses the non-negotiable and indispensable teaching of the resurrection of the body/dead. The resurrection gives context and content to everything else Paul has to say to the Corinthians. The resurrection of the dead/body is the lens and

filter by which doctrine and ethics are formed and shaped in daily life. Paul begins his teachings on resurrection with a statement of *kerygma* and a litany of appearances. The resurrection of Jesus is not an idle tale (Luke 24:11), or a fabricated story of bribery and grave robbers (Matthew 28:11-15). Paul reminds his brothers and sisters, in Christ, through a catalogue of witnesses, that there is plenty of proof that Christ has been raised from the dead.

The *kerygma* is the core teaching of our faith; a tradition to be guarded and passed on, not reinvented. This is our *kerygma*: “We proclaim that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, was buried, and was raised on the third day” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Last of all, after hundreds of appearances, Jesus also appeared to Paul (Damascus Road conversion). Paul says that he was last and least of the apostles (like an aborted fetus) unfit to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God. Nevertheless, God’s grace to Paul was not in vain. God uses preaching to bring about our death and resurrection, our justification by faith alone.

Having reminded the Corinthians of their well-founded faith, Paul sounds a warning bell: “Don’t believe in vain!” Jesus’ resurrection and our resurrection are inseparably intertwined. Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruits, down payment, guarantee & pledge of more resurrections to come. Jesus’ dying and rising has transformed our mortality into a “falling asleep”. Our baptismal union with Jesus in His death and resurrection guarantees that our death is *das todlein* (Luther, “little death”). When one falls asleep, one has no conscious awareness of the passing of time; a thousand years is like a day to the Lord. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our awakening from “falling asleep”. Apparently, some believers in Corinth were denying the resurrection of the dead. Paul connects the dots and says, “If we aren’t going to be raised, then Christ hasn’t been raised, which means that our preaching and faith are in vain, which means that we are misrepresenting God, because God testifies to our resurrection in His Word. The bottom line is this: “Without the resurrection, we are still in our sin, perishable, and without hope. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

St. Paul counters the myths circulating in Corinth by digging in his heels and standing his ground for the Truth of the Gospel: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” It’s not a joke! Death is a disabled and defeated enemy. A human being (Adam) got us into this mess of sin, and a human being (Jesus) gets us out of this mess. Christ our Passover Lamb has been slain. We believe in the resurrection of the body, not the transmigration of the soul. What will this new body look like? Jesus was incognito to the Emmaus travelers. Jesus could walk through bolted doors, but he could also eat fish. Jesus was not a ghost; he invited disbelieving disciples to touch his wounds and place their fists into his side. St. Paul uses the metaphor of a

seed when imagining the resurrection of the body. A grown plant looks different from the seed planted in the ground. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable!

Allow mystery to remain. What will we look like in eternity? How old will we be? What will heaven be like? Will my dog be there? Is there a separation of body and soul at the time of death? Remember, temporal and spatial limitations don't exist in heaven. "Beloved, we are God's children now. What we shall be has not yet been revealed, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him for we shall see him as He is. And everyone who hopes in Jesus purifies themselves as He is pure." Because Christ is our future (I John 3), He becomes our present as well. The resurrection is not just future tense; it is also our present tense reality. We have been crucified with Christ and raised to new life. Theologian Wolfhart Pannenburg writes, "The evidence for the resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe that it happened, you have to change the way you live."—from: March/April 1997 issue of Prism Magazine. Christ's resurrection changed and changes everything! Christ is Risen Indeed!

Paul tells us a mystery! We will all be changed. Death has been swallowed up in victory. The mortal body must put on immortality! To a distraught Martha and Mary, Jesus proclaims the Truth: "I, I Am, the resurrection and the life; who-ever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26a). Do you believe this? Paul writes these words to the Philippians: "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we await our Lord and Savior Jesus who will transform our bodies of humiliation into the body of Christ's glory" (Phil. 3:20-21). "Therefore my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (I Cor. 15:58). We believe in the resurrection of the body/dead!

Because He Lives,

PASTOR DAVE

["The Holy Trinity" – June 2012](#)

Sing with me: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee. Holy, Holy, Holy, merciful and mighty! God in three persons, blessed Trinity!"—ELW #413. Sunday, June 3 is not only my birthday, and the baptismal anniversary of my daughter Jenna, it is also the Feast of the Holy Trinity. This month I

invite you to reflect with me on the doctrine of the Trinity. This is a bedrock belief by which Christianity rises or falls. “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” is not primarily a teaching to defend or explain; it is a first and foremost a relationship to experience and proclaim. The word Trinity is not found in the Scriptures, but the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments. A third century church theologian named Tertullian coined the word Trinity. Thomas Jefferson wanted Christians to abandon the doctrine of the Trinity and to focus instead on following the “simple Jesus”. The irony of course, is that the more we focus on following the “simple Jesus,” the more we end up at the feet of the Trinity. If you are interested in reading a great book on the Holy Trinity, I commend to you a short, concise, and excellent read by Darrell W. Johnson, entitled [Experiencing the Trinity](#). This book has significantly shaped my words to you this month.

The Trinity is the early church’s experience of the resurrected Christ. We find the Trinity confessed in all three of our ecumenical creeds. In the Great Commission, Jesus, the Resurrected One with all authority, sends his disciples out to make disciples of all people everywhere. The recipe Jesus gives for disciple-making is profoundly simple: baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and teach obedience to the will of God. Jesus reminds us that the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is God’s name, not God’s gender. In the Farewell Discourse of John’s Gospel, Jesus reminds His followers that “He and the Father are one;” whoever has seen Jesus, has seen the Father (John 14:9). Jesus also promises to send His Holy Spirit, thus allowing Christ to be more fully present with/in His church than was possible in the physical earthly presence of God’s Son. Remember, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit; the Trinity’s portable worship space.

Throughout the Bible we find repeated traces of God’s three-fold-ness: Deuteronomy 6:4 reminds us that “Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one”! Tertullian argued that “God from all eternity is one, but God is not alone.” Notice for example that the word for God (Elohim) in Genesis 1:1 is in the plural, but the verb for God is always in the singular. Genesis 1:26 reads, “Let us make human beings in our image.” When Yahweh comes to visit Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18, the LORD comes as three men, who then become the LORD and two angels. The LORD who is one, by virtue of God’s self-revelation is also a community, a fellowship. Even the Aaronic Blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 has a three-fold expression: “The LORD, the LORD, the LORD...” When Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River, the Spirit descends, the Father speaks and the Son is the vessel of divine pleasure. St. Peter reminds us that God’s people are chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood”—I Peter 1:2. Paul reminds the

Ephesians that there is one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of us all—
Ephesians 4:4-6.

The doctrine of the Trinity is confusing to say the least. How can Jesus be God’s Son and at the same time be God? How can Jesus be seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven and at the same time be always present with His disciples through the Holy Spirit. Questions abound. Our calling is not to answer the questions, remove the confusion, solve the puzzle, or resolve the mystery of God’s self revelation in Christ, but simply to preserve and proclaim the Trinity. Our calling is to experience the Trinity and proclaim the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the name given to us in Holy Baptism, by which we must be saved. St. Augustine (third/fourth century) offered the following reflection on the Trinity: “The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, and the bond of love between the Father and the Son is the Spirit.” God is at once “Lover, Beloved and Love itself” —page 63.

God is for us (Father), God is with us (Son) and God is in us (Holy Spirit). Johnson writes, “I am Christo-centric Trinitarian. For as I love and worship and obey Jesus Christ, I keep ending up at the feet of a Triune God” — page 54. John Duns Scotus (thirteenth century philosopher) concluded that those who are redeemed by Jesus Christ can only be called “co-lovers with the Trinity;” co-lovers of God (worship), one another (community) and the world (mission)—page 69. Together, in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, we experience life within the circle of “Us”. St. Paul reminds the Christians in Rome, “Likewise, in our weakness we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Holy Spirit prays for us with sighs too deep for words.” St. Paul tells us that God the Spirit prays to God the Father, in the name of God the Son, according to the will of God. God praying to God, in the name of God, according to the will of God, for us! This is the mystery of the Trinity. All we can say is AMEN!

In closing, I invite you to read Ephesians 3:14-21 and sing ELW #412. Ephesians 3:14-21 is Paul’s prayer for the Christians in Ephesus. Notice that Paul does not present us with a coherent theory or explanation of the Trinity. “Rather, Paul prays the Trinity... that we experience the Trinity” —page 91. The only thing Paul says that can finally fill us completely and fully is the Triune God. Come, Join the Dance of Trinity; in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. If we follow the “Simple Jesus” we will end up at the feet of the Triune God.

Christo-centric Trinitarian,
PASTOR DAVE

[“Experiencing Koinonia” - July 2012](#)

“Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the unity of heart and mind is like to that above. We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.” — ELW #656. Nothing is held in private or individually owned. All is held in common and mutually shared as property of Almighty God. Share a burden and you cut it in half. Share a joy and you double it. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (I Cor. 12:27). The Book of Acts says that the early church shared all things in common. Embodied in the washing of regeneration, Christians devote themselves to the Apostles’ teachings and *koinonia*, to the breaking of bread and the prayers—Acts 2:42. The Lord adds to our numbers daily those who are being saved.

This month we are embracing the bedrock belief of *koinonia*. The word literally means “sharing, participation, partnership, fellowship, common life together”. *Koinonia* is a relationship word. There are no solitary Christians in the family of God. A solitary Christian is an oxymoron. Baptism in the name of the Triune God makes us mutual members of the Body of Christ. Together we are the church. The feminine noun form, כְּנִסֵּת (knesset), is a “gathering.” The phrase בֵּית כְּנִסֵּת (beyt kneset) is a “house of gathering” and is the Hebrew word for a synagogue (a Greek word also meaning “gathering”). The word כְּנִסֵּת (knesset) is also used for State of Israel’s Legislature. Scripture tells us that Jesus attended synagogue weekly, as was His custom. Jesus remembered the Sabbath day to keep it holy. We can’t be the body of Christ and not be assembled and gathered around Word and Sacrament.

The church is the family of God. Songwriter Jay Beech reminds us that “the church (ecclesia—sembled ones) is not a building where people go to pray, not made out of sticks and stones, and not made out of clay. The church is not a building, a committee, or a board. It’s not a corporation for the business of the Lord. We are the church; the body of our Lord. We are all God’s children; we have been restored.” Jay Beech reminds us that church is not a location; it is a portable address—together we are a temple of the Holy Spirit; God’s chosen ones, the elect. Jesus says that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is present. Church exists where Jesus is Lord and *koinonia* in the Triune God is experienced. Church exists where Word and Sacrament are shared and members of the Body of Christ are assembled, gathered for the praise of God. “The church is a people, living out their lives; called, enlightened, and sanctified for the work of Jesus Christ.”

At Mount Cross one of our five standing Servant Teams is called the Fellowship of Believers. The role of this Servant Team is to help members of Mount Cross participate in, and experience genuine Christ centered *koinonia*. St. Paul in his letter to the Christians at Philippi uses the word *koinonia* four times; once in each of the four chapters. Paul says that we find our *koinonia* in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5). The Good News of Jesus is the source and substance of our life together. Paul says that we find our *koinonia* in the Spirit (Phil. 2:1). In baptism, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We cannot have the mind of Christ and then absent ourselves from the Body of Christ, the Assembly of Believers. Paul says that we find our *koinonia* in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10). We participate in Jesus' death and also in His resurrection. Paul says that we find our *koinonia* in giving and receiving (Phil. 4:15). We don't keep score. All property is communal. Sharing is a privilege, not an obligation. The Letter of Philippians is Paul's Epistle of Joy. Joy is found in a Christ-centered *koinonia*.

Koinonia is fragile, and must never be taken for granted. Paul begs his coworkers in Philippi who are in disagreement, to agree and have the same mind. We don't know what the disagreement was between Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3). Paul doesn't place blame. Merely mentioning the women's names is shame enough. It must have been a big enough mess if Paul, in prison, finds out about it. Notice that the entire Philippian community is responsible for the argument and its resolution; all are complicit when *koinonia* is eroded. *Koinonia* requires forgiveness and reconciliation.

Robert Coles, reflecting on the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer ([Life Together](#)) writes about *koinonia*: "Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter, or the daily community of many years, Christian community is solely this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others for the sake of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that from eternity we have been chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united for eternity" (Page 68 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, copyright 1998, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY 10545-0308). Coles continues, "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it...." —(page 73).

I've heard several people describe Mount Cross as "a family". A family is a group of people sharing common characteristics, mutual identity and *koinonia*. Jesus defines family as "those who do God's will", not just biological affiliation. The blood of Jesus

makes us members of a Passover Community. In our life together, may we know and experience the rich gift of Christian *koinonia*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.”

Sharing Community,

PASTOR DAVE

[“Fair-weather Fans, or Fully Devoted Followers?” – August 2012](#)

Echoing Matthew 28, we sing these familiar words: “Go, make disciples, baptizing them, teaching them. Go, make disciples, for I am with you till the end of time. Go, be the salt of the earth. Go, be the light for the world. Go, be a city on a hill, so all can see that you’re serving me. Go, make disciples.”—ELW #540. A church with a great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will make for a great congregation. This month we are wrapping our heads around the bedrock belief of discipleship in daily life. Salvation and discipleship are two sides of the same ministry coin. Believing (John 3:16) and following (Luke 9:23) have to go together. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book [The Cost of Discipleship](#), reminds us that “when Christ calls a man He bids him come and die.” There is nothing half-hearted, fickle, or fair-weathered about following Jesus. Jesus conscripts followers. He doesn’t ask for volunteers. “Volunteer” is an oxymoron in the Christian faith.

The appointed lectionary reading for July 15 was the “decapitation of John the Baptist” story, recorded in the sixth chapter of St. Mark. Jesus commissions the Twelve. Disciples (followers) are Apostles (sent out ones). Jesus sends His disciples into the mission field with minimal provisions. The Apostles will be God-sufficient, not self-sufficient. They will experience rejection. “Shake it off,” Jesus says, “and move on. Don’t conform to the culture, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds; infiltrate the culture with the Gospel.” The Apostles are sent in pairs, because according to the Torah, a valid testimony required the witness of 2 or 3 persons. St. Mark serves us a sandwich. Sandwiched in between the sending of the disciples (6:6b-13) and the return of the disciples (6:30) is the decapitation of John the Baptist. Disciples are willing to lose their heads and lives for Jesus’ sake. The portrait of John’s beheading is an ominous warning of what awaits Jesus and those who follow in His footsteps. Disciples are “caked in the dust and blood of Rabbi Jesus”.

The Gospel of Mark is a catechism addressing a faith question: “What does Baptism mean for daily living.” Answer: a Cross! Mark’s Gospel is a passion story with an extended introduction. Three times Jesus announces his impending death and resurrection (Mark 8-10). From the beginning the reader knows the rest of the story: “whoever loses their life for Christ’s sake will save it.” Mark’s story is a Gospel narrative (Mark 1:1); a guaranteed victory announced beforehand. Most gospels have “a beginning,” “middle,” and “an ending.” Mark’s narrative structure starts in the middle (baptism of Jesus), moves to the end (Passion), and then concludes with a beginning (Easter). Mark ends his gospel story with a preposition. Commissioned to “go and tell,” the women went and “said nothing to anyone, they were afraid for”. The preposition “for” is an abrupt and strange way to end a story, unless of course “we are” the rest of the story. We are the called and sent ones, baptized disciples. We complete the Jesus story with our lives. What does baptism mean for daily living? Not seats of honor, wealth and popularity, but a cup and a baptism. We will drink our Lord’s cup and we will be baptized with our Lord’s baptism. “When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die.”

What is it costing you and me to follow Jesus? After Jesus rebuked Peter and commanded him to assume the position (get behind me Satan), Jesus offered this definition for discipleship: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow me.” Jim Elliot, the famous missionary who gave his life trying to reach the Auca Indians of Ecuador, once described discipleship this way: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose”. Kyle Idleman, in his book Not a Fan, reminds us that Jesus is not interested in enthusiastic admirers or fair-weather fans; Jesus seeks fully devoted followers. Idleman fears that most churches are becoming fan factories and stadiums instead of Sanctuaries with a Great Commission consciousness. C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity writes, “Christ says, ‘Give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out.’” Discipleship is a matter of death and resurrection.

At our Leadership Retreat, on Sunday, August 12 (1:30-5:30 p.m.), we will be taking a closer look at Discipleship. We will begin with a Bible Study on “Being Disciples,” discuss “Faith Practices and the Marks of Discipleship,” look at a book entitled, Not a Fan — “Jesus wanted more than enthusiastic admirers,” and conclude with a look at a proposed laser focus that may sound something like this: “Discipleship at the Crossroads—intersecting the generations with the love of Jesus.” Jesus gave birth to the

church through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, for one purpose: To make disciples. We make disciples by being disciples; by bearing witness to the Truth—Jesus is Lord! We have a baptismal charge: “Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus doesn’t exhort us to be salt, light or a city on a hill. Jesus uses a present tense indicative verb and says, “You ARE!” It isn’t a matter of self-fulfillment or self-initiated becoming; it is a matter of being who we already are in Christ Jesus; i.e. disciples!

Have you decided to follow Jesus? No turning back; no turning back. Remember, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Leave the dead to bury the dead. Whoever sets their hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom (Luke 9). Hate and poverty are apparently requirements for discipleship (Luke 14:26, 33). When Elijah placed the mantle on Elisha, Elisha burned his bridges (1 Kings 19:19-21). No turning back! There is nothing safe or easy about following Jesus. That’s why Jesus didn’t ask for volunteers. He conscripted disciples.

My name is **PASTOR DAVE STEFFENSON** and I am not a fan.

[“Scripture: Law & Gospel” - September 2012](#)

Our bedrock belief for this month is law and gospel; but first a word about God’s Word. God’s Word is understood in three primary ways: Jesus, the Bible, and the proclamation of law & gospel. The Word of God is a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12-13). The Word of God accuses us and comforts us; puts us to death and raises us up to new life. God’s Word is our great heritage. The Sacred Text is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the child of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17). All Scripture is God-breathed! In song we confess our faith: *“Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; bright with Thine own holiness. Glorious now, we press toward glory; and our lives our hopes confess”*—LBW #233. Our lives are a Bible for some folks to read!

Scripture is not a paper Pope, but it is our final authority in all matters of faith and life. We don’t stand over Scripture; we bow beneath it. We don’t read and interpret the Word; the Word reads and interprets us. Martin Luther offers these words about God’s Word: “Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays

before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:12]. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear the treasure, Christ, who lies in them” (Luther’s Works 35, page 228).

God’s Word addresses us as law and gospel. Law is God’s gracious revelation. The first use of the law is a civil use, written on stone tablets and inscribed into the hearts and minds of God’s people. God’s will for the world is found in God’s ordering of creation. Law functions to restrain evil, to protect and promote good order. The law reveals what is right in the eyes of God. The law was given to free people. The second use of the law is a theological use, functioning like a mirror, revealing our sin. “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). The law reveals what is required and demanded of us. Revealing our shortcomings, the law always kills us. The law drives us to Christ, the incarnation of gospel where we are born again.

Theologian Marc Kolden, in his book Called By the Gospel writes, “When Christians speak about law and gospel together they refer to this second use of the law—it’s accusing use. Here the law is perceived as being against us: it reveals our sin, convicts us, drives us to despair, crushes us, and finally kills us. The law which guides us (first use) at the same time accuses us and reveals the depths of our sinfulness (second use). The amazing thing is that the law is not God’s last word. There is another word which reveals that God himself was at work in the law — working to put to death the defiant sinner so that he could raise us to life again as his own creature. This new word from God is gospel — the good news about Jesus Christ who came to forgive our sin, liberate us from bondage, restore our hope, end our warfare with God, and give us new life” (pages 44-45).

Scripture addresses us as both law and gospel. The law always attacks us with words of “should and ought and must.” The gospel gives what the law requires, and speaks in a future tense, indicative mood; a promising word. The law puts to death and the gospel raises up. Jesus is the end (*telos*) of the law; its goal, target, and fulfillment, not its eradication. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount we hear both law and gospel. Jesus doesn’t lower the bar of righteousness, He raises it. “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; ...I have come to fulfill them....Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:17-20). The Pharisees as you may remember memorized the entire Old Testament by age 15. According to the “works of the law” they were good people, but not good enough to justify or save themselves.

In Matthew 5, Jesus addresses various commandments and intensifies the law: “You have heard that it was said, but I say to you.” The antithesis ends with these words:

“You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). How do we hear these words of Scripture; as law or gospel — demand or promise? I can’t be perfect, but I must be perfect if I am to be saved. Hence, I am a lost cause. Wretched man that I am; who will deliver me from this body of death? Only the Word of God! What the law requires, the gospel fulfills. God places the “must” on Himself (i.e. the cross). The imperative is actually a future tense indicative mood verb; i.e. “you will be perfect.” We are not saved by works of the law. We are saved by grace alone, in Christ alone. The requirements of the law are not erased, but they are fulfilled in and through the gift of faith in Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One. You will be perfect! This is a promising Word! Christ satisfies the demands of the law and is the embodiment of gospel (good news) for sinners.

There you have it, law and gospel in a nutshell. The proper distinction of law and gospel makes one a theologian. It is important and essential lest the law become a tool of self-justification (legalism, moralism, or works righteousness) and the gospel become a tool of cheap grace (antinomianism, autonomianism, and libertinism). The law fixates on our DOING; the gospel delivers God’s DONE. Theologian Gerhard Forde once reminded me in a Seminary class that costly grace is a free gift from God where God does everything and we do nothing. Forde said, “When we do nothing, God gets everything, all of us, and we are saved freely for Jesus’ sake.” And then Forde added, “The real question is this: Now that we can’t do anything to add or subtract to our salvation, what will we do?”

In Mark 10, a rich man bowed before Jesus and asked about inheriting eternal life. Jesus asked the rich man, “Why do you call me good. No one is good but God alone.” Jesus sends the man to the Decalogue where the law does its proper work. The rich man considers himself blameless in his love of the neighbor, but what about his love of God? Jesus tells the rich man to sell all of his stuff and give the money to the poor, and then assume the position of a follower, not a fan. The rich man’s countenance fell and he walked away with great sorrow because he had much stuff. Stuff had become the God in his life; his first love. The disciples witness the Word in action, the filleting of the rich man. Jesus puts the icing on the cake, the final nail in the coffin, with these words: “It will be easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.” The law has done its work; death to the sinner. The disciples also breathe their last: “Then who can be saved.” Are you ready for a promising Word? Here it is: Jesus looked at the rich man and loved him. God doesn’t lower or erase His standards. God gives what God requires by joining us to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is impossible for us to save ourselves, but with God all things are possible; even the salvation of a rich man whom Jesus loves. This is a promising Word, a gerund; a *gospelizing* Word for those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. The Word of God will always have its way with us. Promise!

Preaching the Word,

PASTOR DAVE

[“Justification By Faith Alone” October 2012](#)

Lutheran’s are by definition *sola-ists*, not soloists. In Christ, we are alone together, an individual community, not a community of individuals. I am because we are. Our salvation is communal; personal, but never private. We are members of the Body of Christ; a community of atonement; reconciled and reconciling in Christ Jesus, alone. There is salvation under no other name. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Him, alone. As members of the body of Christ, a “solitary Christian” is an oxymoron. We profess that our salvation is by faith alone, through grace alone, in God’s Word (Jesus) alone. Together we sing, *“Salvation unto us has come by God’s free grace and favor; good works cannot avert our doom, they help and save us never. Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone, our only mediator”*—ELW #590.

Article IV of the Augsburg Confession (1530), entitled “Justification”, declares: *“It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.”*

This month, in honor of Reformation Sunday (October 28) and the affirmation of faith by seven of our confirmands, we are looking at the bedrock belief of “justification by faith alone”. In Baptism God does the confirming: “This is my beloved child with whom I am well pleased.” We are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. God gives us eternal security in Christ alone! Confirmation Sunday is known as “Affirmation of Holy Baptism Sunday”. Some people mistakenly see Confirmation as a believer’s completion of a contract with God. Supposedly, as the assumption goes, God does His part, but we must also do our part; i.e. in Baptism God gives grace, but only the faith of a believer validates this grace and makes salvation “mine” in a particular, singular, sense. This proposition falsely assumes that God does most of the work, but a

believer must still do something; i.e. accept the grace of God if s/he is to inherit salvation.

Sin always raises its ugly head: “I have to do something don’t I? I’m not a puppet. I have free will.” Acceptance of God’s grace becomes the believer’s self justification; my contribution to salvation. Justification in this corrupt system of atonement is a combination of God’s grace and human works. Grace is God’s work and faith is the believer’s redeeming contribution. The question needs to be asked: Who is the author and subject of my faith; me or God? Faith is the requirement for justification, yes, but faith is God’s work alone, and not my response. Jesus declares, “This is the work of God: that you believe.”—John 6:29. If we are saved by grace alone, then our daily affirmation of God’s daily confirmation is simply an “amen,” spoken by the power of the Holy Spirit (breath of God). God’s grace is God’s gift/work of faith in a believer’s life. Even our faith in Christ alone is God’s by grace, alone.

We are justified by faith alone. Justification is “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned; forgiveness imputed freely for the sake of Jesus Christ alone. To be justified is to be declared and made righteous, sanctified and glorified. Enemies become friends. Estrangement becomes reconciliation. Unbelief becomes faith. Righteousness is God’s restoration of a right relationship with us. Luther referred to this justifying grace of God as a “happy exchange” where God makes Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God—II Corinthians 5:21. Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we cannot be saved (Matthew 5:20). What God requires, God also gives; namely justification by faith alone.

For years, Martin Luther wrestled with how to calm his angst and placate the wrath of God. How does one satisfy the demands of a righteous God and experience the certainty of salvation? Luther’s breakthrough, tower experience (1519), came as he wrestled with the words “the righteousness/justice of God” (Romans 1:17). Shortly before the end of his life, Luther described his decisive conversion: *“But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, ‘Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?’ This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant. I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: ‘The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: “The just person lives by faith.”’ I*

began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is, by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.' All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. I exalted this sweetest word of mine, 'the justice of God,' with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise."

Luther's breakthrough is for our ears and hearts also. How do we obtain this faith; this alien, passive, righteousness of God? Article V of the Augsburg Confession declares, *"God provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."* Martin Luther, in his explanation to article 3 of the Apostle's Creed writes, *"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith."*

Lutherans are by definition *sola-ists*. We confess that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in God's Word (Jesus) alone. Don't we have to do something? What about good works? Truth be told, God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does. Faith without works is dead; an oxymoron! Those whom God justifies God also sanctifies and glorifies. A right relationship with God produces a right way of life. The righteous live by faith alone. Faith is always a verb! From beginning to end, Jesus is the author and finisher, the pioneer and perfecter, of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We are justified by faith alone! This is most certainly true.

In Christ alone,

PASTOR DAVE

[“Lift High The Cross” – November 2012](#)

“Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die” — ELW #623. In baptism we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We are branded with an instrument of death and signed for eternity in the name of the Triune God. God makes atonement and transforms sinners into saints. A signature hymn at Mount Cross includes these words: *“All newborn soldiers of the crucified, bear on their brows the seal of Him who died. Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim.”* St. Paul, writing to the Christians at Corinth, reminds us of the source and content of the Gospel: *“We proclaim Christ crucified.”* The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. God took an emblem of suffering and shame—*“cursed be anyone who hangs on a tree,”* and made of it the sign of our salvation. In baptism we become theologians of the cross. The cross isn’t simply a piece of jewelry; it is the coronation of Christ our King.

In an attempt to be culturally relevant and non-offensive, some churches have chosen to remove signature items of our faith; gone are pulpit, altar, font and cross. The cross can be especially offensive. It is not exactly an attractive marketing tool. Jesus said, *“Whoever would be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.”* Far more attractive than a theology of the cross, is a theology of glory. Human beings prefer strength and power, self-glory and a prosperity gospel. We want instant gratification and a life filled with *“healthy, wealthy and wise”*. A theology of the cross can be joy-killer, a downer. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God and then defines greatness as the first being last and the greatest being servant of all; even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. Those who lose their lives, save their lives. Thorns in the flesh are seen as signposts of strength and opportunity for boasting. Weakness and poverty are signs of blessing and a right relationship with God. God reveals Himself, not as mighty warrior sitting on a throne in a palace, but as a suffering Messiah, enthroned on a wooden cross and wearing a crown of thorns. When it comes to sanctification, the old Adam assumes that he or she is gradually getting better. But a theologian of the cross confesses, *“The closer I get to the light, the more dirt I see.”*

Martin Luther, in his Heidelberg Disputation (April 26, 1518), offers these rather nonsensical and obscure words: *“19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20]. 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and*

good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. 22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened."

The late, great theologian Gerhard O. Forde speaks about Luther's distinction between a theologian of the cross and a theologian of glory in his excellent work On Being a Theologian of the Cross. Forde writes, "**Theologians of Glory** – operate on the assumption that what we need is optimistic encouragement, some flattery, some positive thinking, some support to build our self-esteem. Theologically speaking it operates on the assumption that we are not seriously addicted to sin, and that our improvement is both necessary and possible. We need a little boost in our desire to do good works. Of course the theologian of glory may well grant that we need the help of grace. The only dispute usually will be about the degree of grace needed. If we are 'liberal,' we will opt for less grace and tend to define it as some kind of moral persuasion or spiritual encouragement. If we are more 'conservative' and speak even of the depth of human sin, we will tend to escalate the degree of needed to the utmost. But the hallmark of a theology of glory is that it will always consider grace as something of a supplement to whatever is left of human will and power. It will always, in the end hold out for some free will." (Forde, p. 16) – in short a theologian of glory sees the cross as a means to an end rather than the end itself. He/she is interested in progression to glory as opposed to death and resurrection."

Forde adds, "**Theologians of the Cross** – operate on the assumption that there must be – to use the language of treatment for addicts – a 'bottoming out' or an 'intervention.' That is to say, there is no cure for the addict on his/her own. In theological terms, we must come to confess that we are addicted to sin, addicted to self, whatever form that may take, pious or impious. So theologians of the cross know that we can't be helped by optimistic appeals to glory, strength, wisdom, positive thinking, and so forth because those things are themselves the problem. The truth must be spoken. To repeat Luther again, the thirst for glory or power or wisdom is never satisfied even by the acquisition of it. We always want more – precisely so that we can declare independence from God. The thirst is for the absolute independence of the self, and that is sin. Thus again Luther's statement of the radical cure in his proof for thesis 22: 'The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it.' The cross does the extinguishing. The cross is the death of sin, and the sinner. The cross does the 'bottoming out.' The cross is the 'intervention.' The addict/sinner is not coddled by false optimism but is put to death so that new life can begin. The theologian of the cross 'says what a thing is' (thesis 21). The theologian of the cross preaches to convict of sin. The addict is not deceived by theological marshmallows but is told the truth so that he might at last learn to confess, to say, 'I am an addict,' 'I am an alcoholic,' and never to stop

saying it. Theologically and more universally all must learn to say, 'I am a sinner,' and likewise never to stop saying it until Christ's return makes it no longer true." (Forde, p. 17) – in short a theologian of the cross sees the cross as the end where we die to our sin with Christ and are raised a new creation with Christ. The work is truly finished as Christ promised and there is no moving on from His cross."

St. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; and 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"—Galatians 2:19-20. The cross is God's checkmate. The cross is the end of my "ladder-climbing schemes". The Medieval church taught what some might call an "ascent or escalator" theology, whereby sinners climb a ladder of acceptance to God; contributing to their righteousness through acts of piety and good works, albeit by infused grace. Martin Luther, in his search for a gracious God and a promising Word, discovered that the direction was wrong. We don't ascend to God, God descends to us. Ours is an alien and passive righteousness; "be reconciled!" It was Luther's superior, Father Johann von Staupitz, who told Luther to look to the "bloody wounds of Jesus;" to say, "I am Yours, Save Me!"—Psalm 117. St. Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians with these promising words: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world . . . From now on let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body." Jesus plus nothing equals everything!

Marked with the cross of Christ, forever

PASTOR DAVE

["The Heart of Christmas" December 2012](#)

"Once again my heart rejoices as I hear, far and near, sweetest angel voices; "Christ is born," their choirs are singing, till the air, everywhere, now with joy is ringing." Jesus is the Heart of Christmas!

The heart is the main thing, providing oxygenated blood to the entire body. In Hebrew thought, the heart is not the center of emotions and feelings, but rather the hub of human will and volition. The heart is where choice happens; where decisions are made. This past fall we celebrated "The Heart of Giving". God loves and so God gives. We love because God first loved us. God's love, incarnated in Jesus and now in-fleshed in us, produces the fruit of giving—offerings of grace and mercy for the care of the neighbor.

The Season of Advent is knocking at our doors, inviting us to prepare our hearts and homes for the coming of Christmas. The gift of the Incarnation—God in flesh made manifest, is the reason for the season. This year’s Christmas theme is “The Heart of Christmas”. It’s easy I suspect, in the hustle and bustle of these busy days, to get distracted by lesser things and miss out on the main thing. Jesus is the heart of Christmas! Don’t fill up on cheese and crackers, leaving no room in your spiritual belly for the main course. Save room for dessert! The packages under the tree are not the main thing. Jesus is the real presence of Christmas.

During 2012, each month in our church newsletters, we have explored some of the bedrock beliefs of our Christian faith. Bedrock beliefs are the non-negotiable foundation of our life together in relationship with our Triune God. We believe that Christians are generous people; stewarding the inexhaustible resources of our heavenly Father. We own nothing, but are in truth the property of God. We believe that God’s Word is our great heritage; a living address, speaking to the heart, as law and gospel, putting to death sinners and producing a new creation. We believe that in our various stations in life each of us have holy vocations where we are called to love God and serve the neighbor. We believe that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. This faith is the work of God! We believe that Jesus is Lord and there is salvation under no other name.

This month we are looking at the gift of the Incarnation and the real presence of Christ’s Mass. Martin Luther said that there is enough in baptism to study and practice our entire life. I would add that we who practice the resurrection, in Holy Communion, have our holy work cut out for us. There are no shortcuts to heaven for those who are justified by faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. The means of grace, the paths by which God makes believers out of unbelievers, is Word and Sacrament. The Word of God is Jesus, found in the manger of Holy Scripture and proclaimed among the Assembly of Believers as law and gospel. The Sacraments are Baptism and Holy Communion. A Sacrament has three parts: a command, a visible means, and a promise “for you”.

Marc Kolden in his book Called by the Gospel writes: “The means of grace are not ends unto themselves, but means until the end. That the church exists on, and for, and of the earth is a point made most dramatically in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. There, we who have been baptized into Christ and his mission are nourished by Him on our death walk. The Lord’s Supper is not a feast but a foretaste of things to come—both crucifixion and resurrection. It is not a banquet, but a subsistence meal for the journey. It is not a ‘theophany’ but a simple mystery in which we are promised that the incarnate God Himself comes to us in the earthly elements of bread and wine” (page 95). People sometimes jokingly say, “Lutheran’s don’t do altar calls.” I say that every time the Christ Mass is celebrated God is calling His people to the altar to receive the real presence of

Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. In the Sacrament of the Altar, time ceases as we know it, and the past, present and future become an everlasting “NOW” where the communion of saints sing the “holy, holy, holy”.

Kolden adds, “At this meal we receive the visible, touchable, edible Word of God’s love for us.” “God doesn’t want something from us. He wants something for us” (pages 96 & 100). In Jesus, God’s Word is personalized “for you”. This meal is not primarily a sacrament of hospitality, although welcome is certainly present in this meal. It is primarily a family meal for sinners for the forgiveness of sins; the body of Christ for the redeemed body of Christ. Jesus celebrated His Last Supper with His disciples. He continues to offer Himself in this meal to the baptized, i.e. His disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). In Holy Communion we celebrate sacred community where all things are shared in common. A solitary Christian is an oxymoron. We are together the property of God, experiencing *koinonia* to the praise of God’s glory.

Lutherans do not attempt to explain how Jesus is present at this meal. We simply trust the words of Christ Himself: “This IS my body, given for you. This IS my blood, shed for you.” Jesus didn’t say that it was just a symbol or a representation of Himself. The main thing in the Lord’s Supper is not His presence, but His mercy; i.e. His real presence for us (Kolden). Everything depends on God’s promise. Faith is not the prerequisite for receiving the Lord’s Supper; it is the goal of the Sacrament. The Sacrament always gives what it requires, namely faith. We eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus. Remembrance is not merely an exercise in cognitive recall; it is a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus; an eschatological moment.

Scripture tells us that we are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Scripture tells us that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Triune God has chosen to reside in our earthly tents. God’s real presence incarnated in us makes us holy. We are portable sanctuaries—worship spaces, carrying the Savior and His salvation into the world. We meet Jesus in the flesh of our neighbors and we embody Jesus in our interaction with our neighbors. This is the Heart of Christmas—the non-negotiable bedrock belief of our faith: “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save God’s people from their sins.” “Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel!” This is most certainly true!

Near to the Heart of God,

PASTOR DAVE