



LENT
Devotions
2010

By the people of Faith Lutheran

Thursday, February 18

Babs Benson

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” Romans 8:5

The first thing that came to mind when I read this passage was the saying “we are what we eat.” A teacher trying to impart some wisdom long ago told our class, “if you hang around losers long enough, you’ll become a loser.” Both examples remind us that what and who we choose to surround our self with can eventually wear off on us.

In this Romans text Paul makes the distinction between those that live according to the flesh (sin) and those that live according to the Spirit (God). Unfortunately although we may strive to live according to the Spirit, we all fall short. We are human. But thankfully Christ offers us a way to find peace and true life.

By being diligent in reading the word, attending worship and becoming actively involved in service and mission we are more likely to stay on the track of Christian living. By deepening our relationship with Christ, it becomes easier to know what God wants for us and how He hopes we live our life.

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Friday, February 19

Linda Shuman

“But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” Romans 8:9

Temptation seems everywhere. Know this, though, **God IS everywhere!!** When the Spirit of God is living within you and is a part of all your thoughts and all your actions, the love of our amazing and powerful God will overpower our sinful nature. It’s just that simple. The hard part is letting go—letting go of control, letting go of ego, letting go and letting God. During this time of Lenten denial of self, let us try harder to let go and let God control our loving nature!!

Dear loving Father,

We pray today that we are ever mindful of how tempting it is to cave into our sinful nature. Please give us strength and remind our hearts, especially in this time of Lent, how powerful you are. Please guide our hearts and hands with Your love so we show the world that You live and work in and through us. Amen

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Saturday, February 20

Richard Winfree

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” Romans 8:1-2*

Christ’s message is one of love and acceptance. In him we are set free. In turn, we should strive to pass his love to others with the understanding that, as with Christ, there should be no condemnation coming from us to others.

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Sunday February 21

Worship

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Monday, February 22

Suzanne Stierwalt

“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Philippians 3: 12

Perfection. Some of us strive for it. How do we get better at our golf game? How do we get better cooking? How do we get better at parenting? We practice and strive for what we see as perfection. How do we become better Christians? We pray, we immerse ourselves in the word, we surround ourselves with a community of believers, we actively participate in Worship, we make Christ the center of our lives. None of us will ever be “perfect”, for we are not God’s son, we are not without sin, but because we belong to HIM, our sins have been washed away, we are imbued with the Holy Spirit and we have possession of life eternal. Because of HIM, we should strive to be the best Christians we can be, less than perfect but good enough for God.

Father in Heaven,

We come to you today to ask for direction and guidance. Help us Father to be more like your son, Jesus Christ; that we may walk in the footsteps of the Servant King as we open our hearts to the opportunities for ministry that you present to us daily. Help us to know that we are enough and indeed worthy of your love and blessings. Amen.

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Tuesday, February 23

Pr. Scott Benson

“Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” Philippians 3:17

If you are coaching a sport; if you are teaching a new process, you it likely you will use words like: *“Do it like this”*. If showing simple addition, you might show how to line up the numbers in the right columns: hundreds, tens, & single numbers. If showing soccer you would show how to use the inside of your foot or how to trap the ball with the bottom of your foot. If showing how to play American football you would show how to get low on the line so your center of gravity is favorable. You would show how to hold onto and protect the ball; or on defense try to peel off the ball.

Some things we learn best by example, watching someone act out HOW to do it. And, you want to learn good habits from someone who set a good example. If you were working with electricity in a building you would NOT want to learn how to test a wire by simply grabbing on to it...you want the test light to glow, not YOU!

So Paul says if you want to live in Christ, live as I do. WOW, quite a claim, but I don’t believe this is arrogance. In reality, much of our learning happens by following an example. I tell our older kids that the younger ones are watching them, they are setting the example in faith for them. And, of course, the questions arises: who is watching you? What example are you setting? What are you teaching about Christ?

May it be that we would make good use of the opportunities to share faith that matters.

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Wednesday, February 24

Babs Benson

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 3: 20

The commentary footnote at the bottom of the page in my Bible reads, “Citizens of Philippi had the same rights and privileges as the citizens of Rome, because Philippi was a Roman colony. Likewise, we Christians will one day experience all the special privileges of our heavenly citizenship, because we belong to Christ.”

I don’t think about it often but sometimes I wonder about heaven. I wonder if we’ll be reunited with our deceased relatives. I wonder if we’ll even be in a conscious state in which that matters. Obviously it will be some kind of life with Christ that our human brains can’t ever fully realize or conceive of.

One thing I’m fairly confident of however it that all people who have a relationship with Christ will be in heaven regardless of race, education, gender, sexual orientation, financial means or how many good works they have or have not done. The privilege of having citizenship in heaven comes to those who have a relationship with Christ. It saddens me to know that on this earth, Christians often exclude one another for various issues having to do more with morality, ideology, traditions and/or philosophical differences than on whether they know Jesus as their Lord and savior. I think it would be pretty pompous of me to judge who is and who is not going to be in heaven sharing the rights of heavenly citizenship. We are all made in God’s image. That means even people who don’t look like me, dress like me, speak like me, think like me or act like me have the same rights and opportunity to become heavenly citizens. As it says in verse 21, “God will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.”

I pray God continually transforms me to be open to his loving spirit and follow the example of Christ embracing all who long to know him.

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Thursday, February 25

Linda Shuman

“Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” Philippians 4: 3

Women have come a long way!! At the time Paul was writing this letter to the faithful followers in Phillippi, he was probably in prison. This is a plea for his “loyal yoke fellow” or “companions” –fellow workers for Christ to support some of the local women who were leaders in the early Christian Church. Women were often only considered possessions of men at that time, someone to bear sons, cook, clean and sew for them. Women of Faith—I challenge you now, when women are seen as equal partners of men, how much more can we accomplish in the name of Christ who gives us strength!!!! We ask all companions in Christ to continue to support women who love and serve the Lord, for our names, too, are in the book of life. It is our duty and our joy to serve God and his people.

We pray: Our empowering Father in Heaven, please watch over these women who have worked for You and Your Word in the world. Please bless all women leaders in the church, all ministries led by women, and all women who do and do not yet know they are worthy and needed in your service in little and large ways. Amen

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Friday, February 26

Pr. Scott Benson

“For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” Philippians 1: 21

Boy, could This be misused! Someone who is not too happy with life at the moment might take this as a religious endorsement to suicide. After all, if you are not enjoying life, what good is it? Being ‘Happy’ is ‘Owed’ to me...right? And if I can serve God by dying just as well as living, let’s get it over with!

WRONG, just the opposite. Paul is speaking of a solid faith that makes him free to LIVE ! If your faith makes you so strong that death holds not fear, that in fact death becomes the entry into a renewed relationship with God & the Church, That makes me Free to Live NOW. If I am not constrained with such mortal limitations, then I am That much freer to throw one’s entire self into the Mission & Call of God.

Let us then live out our Baptismal call and identity, letting Christ live through us.

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Saturday, February 27

Richard Winfree

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” Philippians 2: 1-2

A relationship with Christ brings many comforts to our lives: encouragement, fellowship, and compassion to name a few. Are we being generous with our encouragement, fellowship, and compassion with and towards others? What about the people that we see everyday whom we do not know well?

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Sunday, February 28

Worship

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Monday, March 1

Lynne Whitlock

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord.” I Corinthians 12: 4-5

The point of these verses is that we all have spiritual gifts. That we have all been given at least one spiritual gift and we need to explore what that gift is. If you do not know what your gift is, pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal it to you. Remember that the glory of the gift, when used, belongs to God. It is Him who gives us the gift. It is our gift to share with others but never to forget where the gift came from.

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Tuesday, March 2

Pr. Scott Benson

“And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” I Corinthians 11: 24

There is a power in words. There was a symbol used in the Roman coliseum and a thumb up or down can indicate life or death. Words are not always so immediate nor obvious, but can be just as powerful. You can think of such with our military. Words also carry weight in the business and political world. A few words can cause the stock market to raise or drop a hundred points...or cause someone to keep or lose a home.

Words can also build or tear down a relationship. Our emotional and psychological well being can be sustained and renewed on words of love and grace.

For a Christian there are few words more powerful than “and when he had given thanks (Eucharist) he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

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Wednesday, March 3

Pr. Scott Benson

“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” I Corinthians 10: 17

There is certainly a variety within the Church of Christ. First, the Church spans across time. The “Church” includes monks in the year 400, and towns people in 800, and soldiers of the crusades in 1100, and Martin Luther of the early 1500’s. It includes brothers & sisters some of us met in Tanzania, a tiny minority in Iraq, Lutherans among the Palestinians, house churches in China, Russian Orthodox, the Vatican in Rome, evangelicals in Virginia Beach, and yes, a variety of us in Chesapeake, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Smithfield, and Suffolk.

And, though many do not agree as to its nature, we all gather around bread and wine / or juice and are called into unison in the ancient rite as we recite scripture: *“This is my Body broken for you...This is my Blood shed for you.”* At the center there is Christ. “Blessed be the tie that binds.”

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Thursday, March 4

Pr. Scott Benson

“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” I Corinthians 10: 13

There are phrases here that perhaps millions of Christians have clung to...through difficult times. I think of Elijah in the cave crying out ‘Only ME, I’m the only faithful one left!!’. And God said: ‘not so’. There is a certain comfort to know that others have gone through such difficulties as well. Others have done this before and others will follow through later.

Then there is reassurance in hearing “God is faithful”. No matter what we are dealing with, where we are, who is or is not there with us...the Lord is most definitely there. Then to hear that God “will not let us be tested beyond our own strength...but will also provide a way...to endure such”. One of the most disabling things is not knowing if you can make it; this text says we can. The text holds up hope that we can endure far more than we think we can. There is no promise here that things will be fair, nor that life will be easy, but it does say that the Lord will be there upholding us each step of the way. That is nice to hear.

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Friday, March 5

Brian Jones

“So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.” I Corinthians 10: 12

Sometimes it is called "Murphy's Law". Sometimes it is called "bad luck". And still other times it is called a "tough break". No matter what you call it, life has a way of keeping you humble. Wouldn't it be great if everything just went our way everyday and there was never any adversity to overcome or hardship to encounter? Wouldn't it be great if we never had to feel pain or never had to suffer a loss? I say the answer is no. Those that know me are probably saying to themselves right about now, "There goes Mr. Pessimism again with his doom and gloom!", but this is not true. I'm not happy when I suffer or when I encounter loss, however, I strongly believe that we learn more from suffering than from success. This passage is telling us to remain true to the word of God and to not easily forget what we have learned. It is warning us not to forget the mistakes of the past lest we want to repeat them. But I think it is also telling us to be humble and to remember that even things are going great and our lives are chugging along on all cylinders, a bit of hardship or old "Mr. Murphy" can show up and bring with it some perspective. If we stay centered in our faith and focus on what is important, however, we will be standing firm again before we know it.

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Saturday, March 6

Hattie Gunter

“All things are lawful’, but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful’, but not all things build up.” I Corinthians 10: 23

“Everything is permissible” – but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible” – but not everything is constructive. How many times have you wanted to do something that you knew wasn’t exactly right, but that you could do anyway? This verse addresses that desire and shows us something invaluable. Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you should do it. Whatever it is, whatever it is you want to attempt, it should be beneficial and constructive not only to yourself but also to others.

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Sunday, March 7

Worship

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Monday, March 8

Babs Benson

“You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” II Corinthians 3: 2-3

In biblical times just as today there were false teachers of the word. These teachers sometimes carried forged letters of recommendation to give them increased authority. In this scripture passage Paul is telling his followers that they themselves are a living, breathing letter of Christ. By our words and actions we show the world who Jesus is and what he has done to transform our life.

It is my prayer that when others see me they see that Christ has touched my heart giving me his peace, confidence and sense of well being to share with others. No need for written letters of recommendation.

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Tuesday, March 9

Christine Moore

“Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.” II Corinthians 4: 1

Have you ever felt discouraged? Ever considered your life and thought that you or your work was not very important? Are you discouraged? This passage is speaking to you. In this passage Paul is telling us we have a reason to keep our courage (i.e. not lose heart). The reason is the ministry that God, through His mercy, has given us. What is this ministry? This passage does not make it clear, but I think it is the ministry to spread the hope we have in Christ. To reflect the glory of Christ to the world and in the process we begin to be more like Him. If you cooperate with the Spirit to reflect God in your life you will have courage. There is no greater work, accomplishment or prize than being a part of God's ministry.

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Wednesday, March 10

Pr. Scott Benson

“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.” II Corinthians 4: 5

You may have noticed that the pastor wears a robe in our church. It is called an ‘alb’, reminding us of our forbearers from the middle ages. The acolyte and crucifer (1 who carries the cross) may also wear a robe, and in the more formal settings the “assisting minister” or “liturgist”. The robe is not there to say “I’m special”, but quite the opposite. The robe is worn to depersonalize, to remind us that this woman or man is serving in a role to augment the worship of our Lord.

This verse is a good one to remind us of our person. So when we are serving in worship as greeter, musician, liturgist, preacher, usher, acolyte, let it be Christ that shines through and not me. When we are inviting people to worship or another event of our church, as we do youth work and teach, when we are sharing who Christ is to us...let it be Christ that shines through. It may be helpful to check ourselves occasionally with a simple question: Is this (what I present) about “Me” or Christ?

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Thursday, March 11

Pr. Scott Benson

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” II Corinthians 5: 17

This is such a clear example of our Lutheran understanding of the ‘both / and’ reality of life. It speaks from the Lord’s perspective of US, and what Will be, and even time and reality itself. In baptism we speak of dying to self and rising anew in Christ. Paul speaks of putting on the new identity called forth in Christ like putting on a new shirt or set of clothes. Yet...we still mess up! In fact we confess Every Week, at the beginning of worship that we have sinned, been involved in brokenness, have strayed from that which is the perfect will of God. And...that is expected; in fact to say we have Not sinned is a sin (I John 1:8-10).

The “new creation” comes as we are formed around the Holy Spirit that is baptized into us. As we allow such (getting ourselves out of the way) the Spirit touches our spirit and mind and grows us into that “new creation”.

So, we are on the way, not yet arrived, but certainly on a journey of faith, ever being transformed by the Spirit that renews and redefines life by the source of all life, made known to us in “Faith, Hope, and Love” (I Cor. 13:13).

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Friday, March 12

Mary Ann Karnuth

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” II Corinthians 5: 7

As a child we are told there is a God; but we are also told there that there are a Santa & a Tooth Fairy. As we get older, Santa & tooth fairy go by the wayside. God stays with us. We keep believing in something we can not see. Why is that?

Probably most people believe just because. Then there are some that have something happen in their life which makes their belief more vivid. This is something I know about as a result of a loss in my life. I now rely on my faith in God and His love and grace to help me through everyday. Walking in faith is living in faith, being guided by faith. We don't have to see God in this life. We have to live God.

What we can see are the wonders of this world which He has given us. There is also the intangible: “things like life and love and how the world began. Hear the doctor say he can't explain it, but the cancer is gone.”

So the idea of believing, of walking in faith, is how we live this life and how we take care of the things which God has given us. We don't have to see God...that will come when He calls us to be with Him.

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Saturday, March 13

Brian Jones

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” II Corinthians 5: 20

My dictionary offered up two definitions of the word "ambassador":
- a diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative
- an authorized messenger or representative

So now I am sitting here trying to think which one of these definitions applies to me as an "ambassador" for Christ. Am I a "diplomatic official of the highest rank" in the legions of Christians? Certainly more learned biblical scholars have to rank higher than me. Some would argue that I am not even that diplomatic. A diplomat knows when to keep his mouth shut, doesn't he? Ok so this definition is not going to work for me.

Am I an "authorized messenger or representative" of Christ? I never received my official papers of authorization or my "secret Jesus decoder ring" but I have no doubt that I am to be a representative of Christ in the world. It is a huge task to be sure. It is not like being a representative for an insurance company or a charitable organization. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ. The big guy. This is not to be taken lightly. We are called to conduct our lives in accordance with the teachings of Jesus and God's word at all times and in all places. We are similarly called to spread the Word throughout the world and to help bring God's peace to those in need.

This is a big job and we all fail in it from time to time. If you are anything like me, perhaps you confess the same sin each Sunday only to repeat it again during the week. I am still a sailor at heart and despite my best efforts, my sailor's tongue has a tendency to take over from time to time and add a bit of color to my language. But I don't let this failure get in the way of the larger mission at hand. I am still an ambassador for Christ and I keep trying to bring His message to my family and the people I meet each day through my actions and my deeds. Will you answer the call and fulfill your commission as an ambassador for Christ?

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Sunday, March 14

Worship

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Monday, March 15

Pr. Scott Benson

“They only heard it said, ‘The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.’” Galatians 1: 23

If you are familiar with the story of the Apostle Paul’s conversion, this may seem very obvious to you. (formerly) Saul knew the Roman world but was also trained as a loyal Jewish leader. He knew the scriptures (Old Testament), and especially the Law. He developed a zealot’s passion to rid the faith of this upstart cult called “The Way”. (The later being the Church, the followers of Jesus. Many of which still were connected with, if not worshiped in the synagogues.)

In fact, it was on his way to arrest (if not kill) Christians, that God encountered him in a direct way: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”. His reputation was known among the faith community, especially Christians. Would you have trusted him?

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Tuesday, March 16

Pr. Scott Benson

“And when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” Galatians 2: 9

They had a Church Council – Mission Strategy Meeting...in the early church. James (likely a younger brother to Jesus (can you imagine!), Cephas (likely Peter), and John (quite possibly the apostle) are from ‘the church central office’ / Jerusalem. They have given their lives sharing the words and Spirit of the risen Christ, with the people from which Jesus came, the Jews.

But, now it was time to change. Now it was time to reach out to a segment of the population that was ‘not their own’. Paul was stretching the boundaries. Yes, Jesus had told a couple stories and parables including Gentiles. Yes, he even held them up at times. But, the church was used to reaching out to ‘their own kind’....But Paul went further.

And, maybe, at first, they could have disregarded this ministry; but now God had clearly blessed it: “recognized the grace that had been given to me”...and who were they to get in the way of the work of the Holy Spirit. For they knew that we can preach and teach but it is the Spirit that transforms hearts...even of those different from us.

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Wednesday, March 17

Pr. Scott Benson

“They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.” Galatians 2: 9

The Church was expanding at this time. Galatia was North West of Israel, what is now modern day Turkey. At first all Christians were originally Jews, who became converts; who we would now call “messianic Jews” / Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah / Christ.

But, there were issues as those who were not previously Jews became Christians. Did they need to essentially act as Jews to become Christians? Would they need to be circumcised? What about food and its preparation? There was a conference in Jerusalem.

What they ended up calling for was the centrality of Christ. And what they would do is fulfill the call to care and share and spread the invitation to that which gives life. Right from the start there is a focus on those in need.

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Thursday, March 18

Pr. Scott Benson

“Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.” Galatians 2: 16

I don't think it can be said much clearer. The brokenness in our understanding is when we wish to define our acceptance, value, and even identity on OUR terms – yes, even our membership in Christ and His Church.

At first this seems simple and of no consequence, but in reality we tend to fall back on ourselves – what I did, think, believe, pray, or give. Or maybe it is the role I fill, or who I know. ...And actually it IS the later: ‘who I know’. But I do not refer to pastors, bishops, church presidents, nor denominational authorities. It is all about relationship with God through Christ. Any justification on anything less than “faith in Christ” is deception.

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Friday, March 19

Pr. Scott Benson

“Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?” Galatians 3: 5

Wouldn't that be nice? If I could define & establish my relationship with God by “doing”, then I could decide. I could decide what is “enough”. I could choose to do just what feels good to ME. Yes, I could set up the job description, goals, and measurement...and change the rules along the way skewing it continually to my advantage; playing the ‘game’ by MY rules. But that Has been done, both in our religion and that of others.

No, “doing” does not establish nor keep you in Christ; the sacraments, Word, and living in relationship with Christ does. The “doing” is a result, a natural outgrowth and call from being transformed from the inside out.

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Saturday, March 20

Babs Benson

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3: 28

Did you know that in Biblical times, Jewish men often began the day with a prayer of thanks that they were not “a Gentile, a slave or a woman?” Kind of insulting to those of us who might fit into one of these categories. It implies that we are somehow less than the person praying.

Verse 26 just before the above text states “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” Although we are united in our belief that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, it is interesting to me that Christians everywhere can be so different in how they perceive life and the people around them. Christians have so many different denominations, different worship styles, different interpretations of the scripture yet all claim to have a relationship with Christ. Our baptism unites us. The original covenant with Abraham was designed for everyone. Thus we are spiritually related. Of course like any family, you may have some relatives you don't see eye to eye with all the time. It's clearly easier to surround ourselves with people that think and act like us. But by doing so we may be missing out on an opportunity to grow in faith and learn from one another. Verse 3:28 of Galatians makes it clear that there is no room for discrimination against fellow believers even when we have disagreements. It calls us to be united in our love for Christ and in our desire to serve him in our own unique God given way.

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Sunday, March 21

Worship

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Monday, March 22

Ann Coon

“Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Ephesians 1: 4-5

In this writing of the holy scripture, Paul tells the people of Ephesus of God's great love for His children. Since before the beginning of creation, our Heavenly Father has covered us with a kind of love that is humanly impossible to understand. We can multiply our love for our children and grandchildren a thousandfold and still not touch the love He has for you and me. It is totally beyond our comprehension. He created us in His image, completely free of sin. He knew however, that we would become sinners, and at times, turn away from Him and His love. Even though we could not remain faithful, he did not turn away from us. Therefore, He sent His beloved son to absolve us of those sins. This, according to Paul, was in His plan. How could He have sacrificed the son He loved so dearly if He hadn't loved us unconditionally? He did this because He wanted to, not because He had to. We are a part of His family here on earth and no matter what our sins may be, we know that His undying love will allow forgiveness if we only turn to Him through His son, Jesus Christ.

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Tuesday, March 23

Linda Shuman

“In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.” Ephesians 1: 11

This is most certainly true--but--I am having the most difficult time with this passage as I ever have as a student of Christ. I know in my mind and heart that God has predestined my life according to His plan. I trust that completely. The part I have difficulty with is what about the innocent? Our cousin's 2 1/2 year old little girl was just diagnosed with leukemia. I can't believe that is God's "plan"! or His "will"! That's where faith comes in. We selfishly pray for what we want or think we need. I have a little sign in our kitchen that reminds me of "God's 3 answers to our prayers," they are 1) Yes. 2) Not yet. Or 3) I have something better planned for you. We'll never know why beautiful, little innocent babies get cancer, or why some couples can't have children or why one person is saved from death when another is not. We have a loving, caring God who is always with us, no matter what we're going through, good or bad. God does have a predestined plan for us and know that He makes everything conform to the purpose of His will. I have Faith in that. Sometimes it hurts to be a Christian. Just know this, dear friends—God assures us it will be worth it. We have Faith in that.

Loving Father,

Please fill our hearts with faith and trust that you know the plans you have made for the world and will work out everything to conform with the purpose of Your will. Give us patience as we wait. Give us faith as we wait . Give us the knowledge that if You didn't love us so much, You wouldn't have given Your Son's life for ours. We thank You and humbly await Your Plan.

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Wednesday, March 24

Pr. Scott Benson

“In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.” Ephesians 1: 13

As I thought of the “promise Holy Spirit” I thought of marks of various cultures and forms of identity. Gangs use certain hand signs and a bandanna. Tattoos, necklaces, and perhaps other jewelry or clothes may show such. Some things show rank or accomplishments; I remember a mark like a tear beside the eye, I think it was a Latino gang.

These are all certainly part of someone, almost always rather significant. But I could think of nothing parallels “the seal of the promised Holy Spirit”. In our baptismal rite we take a touch of olive oil and mark the sign of the cross on one’s forehead. Eph. 1:14 says “this is the pledge of our inheritance”. What makes this different is that this is an active presence connecting us to what was, is, and is yet to come. The Spirit of God has been baptized into you, actively transforming you into life that is intended to be. Life touched by Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Life that is active now, and is the promise of life to come beyond this bodily biological presence.

This seal is not limited to any ethnic, cultural, nor political identity. This seal is not even limited to time itself. This ‘seal’ is divinely inspired life within you, AND is the “pledge of our inheritance.”

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Thursday, March 25

Pr. Scott Benson

“I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason.” Ephesians 1: 15

“I have heard of your faith ... & love”; what a Wonderful thing to say of someone. Of all the things that we could be known for...Wow! And may it be that as we link with other Lutherans, with other Christians of other denominations, with Christians of other lands, may it be that we would look for wonderful stories of faith, hope, and love.

You have heard some of that from our stories from our sisters and brothers in northern Tanzania. Lynne, Hattie, Babs, & I can share with you a witness as to their faith. While it is true that we have supported ministry there, supported a young adult through college...it is we that learned the most.

We found it so incredibly ironic that, while we were there some people came from a 1st world nation to teach them about prayer. Yes, we can send pastors and professors to augment their staff to train lay catechist and pastors, perhaps Greek, Hebrew, and means of biblical interpretation and theology...but prayer...I don’t think so. We, here, have to pray past the many ‘things’ that we have. Our affluence can get in the way. I suspect that I carried more in my suitcase than some of them own. Though they may lack in things, if we could measure such, I suspect many of our Tanzanian sisters and brothers would far exceed my faith and actions. So...this is a scripture that will continue to live on. We will continue to hear of others of the Church and of their faith & love.

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Friday, March 26

Suzanne Stierwalt

“So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.” Ephesians 1: 18

Yes, our heart has eyes. Our heart sees things that our head does not. It is the very center of our being and if you have been blessed with the Holy Spirit, your heart is brimming with the love of Christ Jesus. To enlighten our hearts is to know the truth; to know of God’s eternal love and the promises of life everlasting. Through prayer, contemplation and the daily reading of scripture, the Holy Spirit comes alive within us. God’s hope for his children is to know the hope of his calling, to become witness to the Gospel and to live our lives filled with the grace and glory of the very one who made us.

Father of goodness and mercy,
Bless us all with a sense of discernment. Allow us Father to hear you when you whisper to us the very plans that you have laid out for us. Help us to devote more time to spiritual disciplines; that we may come to know you better and that we may live our lives the way you meant for us to live them, in abundant joy. Amen.

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Saturday, March 27

Babs Benson

“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved” Ephesians 2: 4-5

Do you ever read a part of scripture and think to yourself, “I couldn’t make this stuff up!” It’s all so bizarre; like reading a science fiction novel about some other planet and its out in space aliens. I mean the whole concept that God made himself into a man, died on a cross, was resurrected and then destroyed the penalty of sin and its power over us seems a little hard to wrap one’s human brain around don’t you think? I mean really??? I certainly can see why non Christians find this hard to swallow. On some level it could be argued that Christians believe this because we want to believe in a higher power who loves us no matter how many times we mess up. I guess this is where faith comes in. We can’t scientifically prove this all happened. But as we study the scripture and it becomes more familiar to us and strengthens our relationship with Christ, we don’t need scientific proof. Our minds and hearts are transformed and we just know it’s true.

God made it possible for us to not be a slave to sin. This doesn’t mean we never sin. We live in a fallen world where sin is all around us. We need to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. The difference between Christians and those that are not however is that through Christ’s death and resurrection he made it possible for us to break free of our sinful nature upon our earthly death and rise to our heavenly home with Christ eternally. God’s great love is so powerful, even when we are dead through our trespasses; he rescues us with his saving arms. Now that is a story worth telling.

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Sunday, March 28

Worship

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Monday, March 29

Pr. Scott Benson

“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” Hebrews 9: 14

This is certainly a text grounded in the Hebrew and Jewish culture that Jesus came from. And, it may sound antiquated to us, even irrelevant. The whole idea of giving a sacrifice to make things right may seem cultic and outdated. Yet, the image of blood has just as much power today as it did then.

To understand some things it is best to look at where they came from. We are given the Passover story from thirteen hundred years before Jesus. An animal was killed and butchered in a certain way and the blood was placed on the door frame. Then, the death angel passes over homes that show such blood. The sacrifice of this animal saves that household. This story is included in our First Communion training. How could we understand the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, without understanding the ‘blood of the lamb’. He is given “without blemish”, which means that this offering, this sacrifice would be acceptable in the temple.

But this sacrifice is not an annual thing. This ‘Christ’ died once and for all. He “offered himself without blemish to God” to clear the way for us to “worship the living God.”

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Tuesday, March 30

Babs Benson

“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” I Corinthians 1: 18

Do you ever scratch your head after reading or hearing a particular Bible passage and think “what on earth does that mean? I’m really not smart enough to understand it.” Well I dare say if you have ever had this feeling, you are not alone. Sometimes I really wonder how much God expects us to get. How can he possibly think someone of average human intelligence can figure out what the meaning behind his word is?

This text might seem sort of straight forward. Christianity is about the cross Jesus was crucified on. People who don’t believe in Christ think it’s all a bunch of foolishness. But I believe there is more to it than that. The apostle Paul is trying to emphasize that there are plenty of people who are really smart and can use impressive words to articulate the message of Christ. But Christ can and does use all of us who are in relationship with him to share the message.

At a recent adult Sunday school class, in the course of the conversation, someone pointed out that God only has sinners to work with. Wow, that’s right. We are all human thus all sinners. That means God can and does use us regardless of our literary speaking ability. He can’t just use people who are sinless to spread the word. There aren’t any sinless humans. It’s not about us being the intellectual messenger but rather the message itself. The message is that God offers eternal life to those who have a relationship with him. No matter how many years we study to accumulate human wisdom, the world cannot give us eternal life. Even if we don’t think we are smart enough or the best public speaker, God uses us to convey his truth to others. We all know people who are perishing and thirsting for the word of God. Many are not able to identify that this is what they are missing in their life. We are saved by the power of God and I pray God continues to use us sinners to bring the word of hope to those who think the cross is foolishness. I believe God wants a relationship with all his human sinners.

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Wednesday, March 31

Christine Moore

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12: 1

This scripture is comparing our growth in Christ to a race. It is us actively living out our faith. This race is a marathon, not a sprint. It will last your whole life. It is a race filled with obstacles. Everything from people who don't want you to be in the race, a cultural value-system that says to live for self instead of for Christ, and your own greed, bitterness, hatred, and.... and..... and..... the list goes on and on. There may be false stars and breaks in momentum along with wonderful intermediate victories. It is the victories that allows us to persevere. Luckily it is not the effort, but the attitude of your heart and quality of your relationship with God that matters. So remember when you stumble, that you need to persevere, pick yourself up, and continue the race. Because every time you get back in the race you grow in Christ. What circumstances in your life have, in retrospect, brought you spiritual growth?

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