

STANDING FIRM

FAITH AND HOPE
ANCHORED IN
CHRIST JESUS

RRP \$20
Issue 5
August 2026



We wish to thank and acknowledge the work of everyone who has contributed to this edition of Standing Firm –

Theological Editing

Pastor Joshua Muller

Pastor Carl Thiele

Peter Wittwer

Editing and Design

Renea Falkenberg

Karl Jericho

Article Contributors

Pastor Paul Calnan

Renea Falkenberg

Here She Stands Podcast Team

Dr Arthur A. Just Jr

Rev. Dr. Brian L. Kachelmeier

Rev. Peter Noble

Pastor Carl Richter

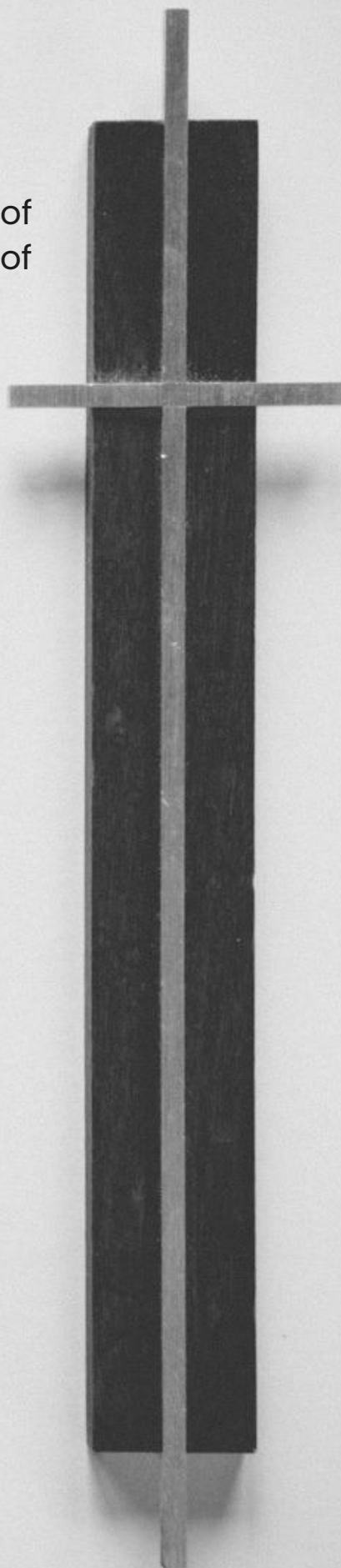
Crysten Sanchez

Corrie Steel

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller

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STANDING FIRM

FAITH AND HOPE ANCHORED IN CHRIST JESUS

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Letter from the Editor



***The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.***

***Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.***

***Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.***

Psalms 19:1-4 (referenced in Romans 10:18)

In this Internet Age, we have an almost endless supply and access to knowledge, and in every format possible – blogs, e-books, videos (including ‘shorts’), podcasts, newsletters and so on. Many of us have found our favourite online theologians – Bryan Wolfmüller, Will Weedon, President Matthew Harrison and podcasts – Kairos, Issues Etc., Here She Stands, Ready for Church. For me personally, I enjoy YourCalvinist Podcast with Keith Foskey (don’t read too much into that, please!), Lutheran Satire and On the Line among others...oh and Bryan Wolfmüller & Andrew Packer’s Q&A videos.

From time to time, we all post on our social media or share over messages the blog posts, shorts or stories that really spoke to us. Maybe it was challenging our sinful nature, maybe it showed us hope in a dark world event, or it gave you a cheeky laugh. Something where the Gospel is clearly, faithfully preached, and you grow and are comforted in the knowledge of Christ’s goodness and saving grace.

Now in our second year of Standing Firm, we are looking to the future and how we can continue to bring you a publication that speaks God’s truth to us and updates on what is happening in the Lutheran church here and around the world.

We submit to you the challenge and call to our readers: Are you, or someone you know a gifted theologian who likes to write? Is there a pastor locally or overseas you might like to read more from (provided we can gain permission to publish their content)? Are you a bit of bookworm and itching to share your thoughts on a recently published book in a review? Do you attend the events, camps, and conferences throughout the year and would like to share your experiences? Contact us with what you are passionate about and how you can contribute.

In the time-honoured cliché, we wonder where the past half of the year has gone. We continue to live in a world of uncertainty – cost of living, overseas conflict, and political polarisation. But God continues to gently remind us we can put our hope and trust in Him, standing firm with his Word. In this Issue, we continue to hope that you learn and grow in wisdom and knowledge. Sometimes deep theological works can be confusing, maybe even confronting, but pray that the meaning may be revealed in time and as the saying goes, “the penny dropped!”

Karl Jericho
Editor

Letter from the CWF Chairman



Welcome to Issue 5 of Standing Firm. If you have been with us from the beginning, thank you very much for the support, and we pray that this project has been a blessing for all who have read the magazine.

In the world of Lutheranism, and specifically relating to Australia, there has been one major development, which was the Lutheran Church – Canada's (LC-C) 13th convention on the 13th June, voting to formally recognise the loss of fellowship with the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ).

"In 2024, the LCANZ voted to approve the ordination of women, contrary to the teaching of Scripture. LC-C President Timothy Teuscher was present at their convention, at which time he expressed his sorrow, noting that they had effectively voted to break fellowship with LCC."

At the same convention of synod, the LC-C "unanimously voted in convention to recognise fellowship with the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP) and Lutheran Mission – Australia (LM-A)."

"We thank God that our church bodies stand together in confessing the Holy Scriptures" and "the Lutheran Confession in the Book of Concord," President Reyes continued. "We also give special thanks and grace to God for graciously leading our churches to a godly, Spirit-filled agreement to officially establish altar and pulpit fellowship."

This is a significant blessing from the Lord, and it is a joyful public recognition of the unity in doctrine and confession that He has granted upon us."

LM-A President Matt Anker thanked LC-C members for their long-standing partnership with Australian Lutherans. "We are incredibly grateful for the many years of solidarity in the Gospel and the encouragement that Lutheran Church – Canada has been to confessional people in Australia," he said. "We share your sadness that it became necessary to leave the LCA and start Lutheran Mission – Australia as the continuing confessional Lutheran church in the country. But we rejoice that our steadfast friends in LC-C have stood with us from the earliest days."



Photo taken by Dr. Thomas Winger, LCC are the copyright owners.

Meanwhile in Europe, Bishop Juhana Pohjola of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF) and Finnish Member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen were "narrowly convicted... of hate speech in a 3-2 decision" on March 26. "This court decision is a defeat not only for us and those who adhere to traditional Christian teaching, but also for those who think differently, because the issue of freedom of speech and religion is common to all," said Bishop Pohjola. "We continue to teach that every person is equal in the image of God but that, in light of the revelation of the Bible, practising homosexuality as a way of life deviates from God's order of creation. This teaching of the Bible must be allowed to be taught publicly in Finland without fear."

"Dr. Räsänen and Bishop Pohjola were charged with hate speech in 2021 over the publication of a 2004 booklet which presents a historic Christian understanding of human sexuality. Dr. Räsänen was charged as author of the work and Bishop Pohjola as publisher. The booklet, which was published long before the legalization of same-sex marriage in Finland, was one entry in a series of booklets published on various theological topics that were later published online. In its majority decision, the Supreme Court ruled that some statements in the booklet were insulting to homosexual people and that continuing to keep the publication online was therefore illegal."²

On May 7th, the International Lutheran Council reported that the accused "have announced they are appealing their conviction to the European Court of Human Rights."

"I know I am not alone in facing unjust persecution under 'hate speech' laws that



Photo supplied from Bishop Juhana Pohjola.

make sharing Christian beliefs a criminal offense," Dr. Räsänen said. "I make my appeal in the hope that the European Court of Human Rights will recognise that peacefully expressing one's beliefs is never a crime, and ensure that this basic freedom is protected for all."³

As Christians and as confessional Lutherans, we must place truth above all. I believe that the LC-C's decision to cut ties with the LCANZ over its decision to adopt women's ordination, and Bishop Juhana Pohjola and Finnish Member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen's resolve to fight their convictions, is an example of fighting for truth. We have the truth, God's Truth. And come what may, we should be willing to stand and proclaim that truth. I pray that we all might have that courage.

References:

- 1 <https://www.canadianlutheran.ca/lcc-recognizes-fellowship-with-lutherans-in-the-philippines-and-australia/>
- 2 <https://ilcouncil.org/2026/03/26/bishop-and-politician-convicted-in-finlands-bible-trial/>
- 3 <https://ilcouncil.org/2026/05/07/finnish-mp-and-bishop-to-appeal-bible-trial-conviction/>

Peter Wittwer

CWF Chairman

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By Pastor Bryan Wolfmuehler
4 March 2026

GOD IS NOT UNCERTAIN (LUTHER ON GENESIS 41:13)

Therefore one must learn that God is not uncertain, ambiguous, equivocal, and slippery like a wavering reed, but that He is unequivocal and certain. He says: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; I absolve you of your sins, etc.” Here the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit make no mistake; they are not tossed about by the wind but are rocks and Selah, as God is often named in the Psalms because He is absolutely firm. You may rely solidly on Him and say: “I am holy and saved; I am God’s son and heir, because I have been baptized.”

Teaching about the certainty that the Lord provided to Pharaoh through his double dreams (Genesis 41:13), Martin Luther gives his students a little meditation on certainty. He contrasts evangelical faith with the monster of uncertainty afflicted through the teaching of the Pope. It's wonderful. (Luther's Works 7:153-155)

"God will not leave you in doubt and uncertainty."

יָכֹן means "certain," "firm," "solid," as in Ps. 51:10: "Put a new and right spirit within me"; and Ps. 5:9: "There is no truth in their mouth"; that is, they do not have a sure doctrine but have opinions, doubts, superstitions, and unsettled meanings; they are stammerers, babblers, and teach nothing firm or definite on which the conscience could rely.

Accordingly, it is a right and sure Spirit who makes us sure concerning the will of God, who does not allow us to doubt but carries out what Paul admonishes: "Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). Likewise in 1 Thess. 1:5: "For our Gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." This certitude is necessary in every kind of teaching, especially in sacred teaching. For I must be certain what I am to think about God, or rather what He thinks about me. It was a horrible error of the papal doctrine which caused men to become doubtful of the forgiveness of sins and grace.

"You should acknowledge that you are a sinner," they said, "and a sinner of such a kind that you cannot be certain of your salvation." Thus the whole world was submerged in doubt and in erroneous opinions about God.

Therefore one must learn that God is not uncertain, ambiguous, equivocal, and slippery like a wavering reed, but that He is unequivocal and certain. He says: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; I absolve you of your sins, etc." Here the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit make no mistake; they are not tossed about by the wind but are rocks and Selah, as God is often named in the Psalms because He is absolutely firm. You may rely solidly on Him and say: "I am holy and saved; I am God's son and heir, because I have been baptized."

Monastic doubts must be moved far away, and one must not say: "Behold, I have done my duty; but whether it pleases God or not, I do not know." One must not rush into uncertainty or be like those who beat the air, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:26. Our steps should be firm and certain, in order that we may say with confidence: "I sleep in the name of the Lord, and I know that my sleep is pleasing to God. But if I am awake and discharge the usual duties of my calling by writing, reading, meditating, and praying, I do not doubt that they are acceptable to God. If I knew that they are displeasing to Him, I would rather abstain from them. But I am certain that I am pleasing God with all my actions, not because of myself, who am doing this, but because of God, who pities, pardons, loves, and leads me by the Holy Spirit."

This certainty and full conviction must be retained; for otherwise Baptism would be useless, and absolution and the use of the Lord's Supper would be in vain.

ON CERTAINTY

Thus under the papacy the same thing Paul mentions happened to us. He speaks of those who always learn and never arrive at a knowledge of the truth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:7). For it was a horrible blindness and an error which must be execrated by all means, even if there had been nothing else in the papal doctrine than the fact that they taught us to be unsure and to waver in indecision and doubt about our salvation. For this uncertainty removes from me my Baptism and grace. I am a Christian in vain; I labor and live in vain.

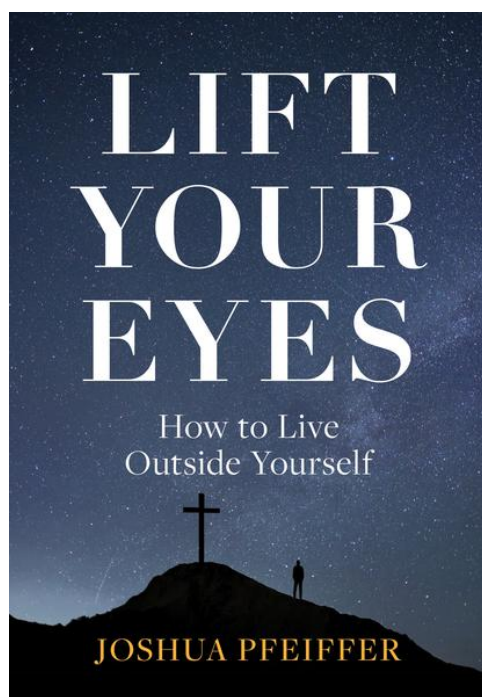
Accordingly, the prophet prays: "Renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10); that is, give me a sure and firm faith, which does not "limp with two different opinions" (1 Kings 18:21), as did the prophets of Baal, who were equivocal in their worship, toiled, sacrificed, tormented and crucified their flesh, and yet were uncertain whether they pleased God. Above all, then, learn the lesson and habituate your hearts in such a way that your whole life becomes certain and steadfast, according to the statement of Heb. 12:12: "Lift your drooping hands, and strengthen your weak knees."

And in 2 Peter 1:10 we read: "Confirm your call and election." Remain in your calling. And conclude as follows: "I have been baptized; I have received the body and blood of Christ; I have been absolved; God will not deceive me. Why, then, would I be mistaken or doubt, since I know that the works of God are good and sure? Whatever I do later, concerning this I can affirm that it is a good work and undoubtedly pleases God, because faith does not doubt." On the other hand, "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). If you doubt, you will sin without intermission, because you do not believe that you are pleasing God. It would be much better to cease from all works until you become certain than to rush and labor in vain. For we must become נִכּוֹנִים certain, solid, and firm.

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueeller

This article was originally published on 4 March 2026,

<https://wolfmueeller.co/genesis-as-a-handbook-of-prayer-excerpts-from-luthers-lectures/>, used with permission.



Drawing on Martin Luther's transformative insight that Christians live "in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love," author Joshua Pfeiffer offers a radical alternative to our age of expressive individualism. This isn't about self-improvement—it's about self-transcendence.

"Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer echoes Luther's insistence that Christian life is not self-enclosed; it is a life that is lived outside of the self through faith in Christ and through love in service to the neighbor. The Christian lives with feet firmly planted in creation but with eyes fixed on the hope that is ours because Jesus is the Lord over death."

— John T. Pless, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Mission, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Lift Your Eyes: How to Live Outside Yourself by Rev. Joshua Pfeiffer is available from the CWF bookshop, email at bookshop@cwfellowship.net to order.

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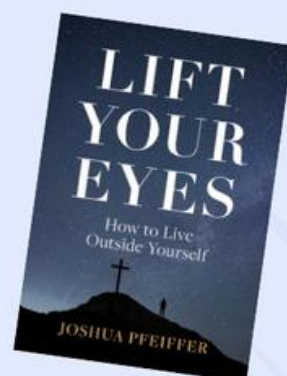
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By Renea Falkenberg
2026

Wisdom on her tongue - tips for getting back your weekends & holidays & learning to communicate effectively in marriage

Wisdom on her tongue, written by Lexy Sauv  is a short non-fiction book aimed at Christian women to help them with practical tips and ways to uplift their household in a God pleasing way through their marriage. Written in a short chapter format, this book allowed for quick reading without needing to dedicate hours at a time to reading. With sixteen chapters about communication within marriage, women are provided with a range of topics to encourage meaningful thinking about how they might be acting in their marriage and everyday lives.

The author, Lexy Sauv  is the wife of Brian Sauv , a senior Pastor at their church in Ogden, Utah. Lexy has seven children currently and is the co-host of Bright Hearth, a podcast devoted to the productive Christian household, a podcast which I regularly listen to and thoroughly enjoy.

Beginning with a foreword from her husband, Brian Sauv  introduces the idea behind the book, creating the link to Proverbs 31 and Titus 2, which the book is heavily connected to. Lexy then writes about topics such as anger and manipulation, respect, being low maintenance, and when a husband forgets to follow up. The book includes sixteen chapters on key things that women typically struggle with within a marriage, some of which they may not even be aware of. Consistently throughout the book, Lexy quotes Bible verses, helping remind readers that the contents of the book are grounded in and based on scripture, not just made up of her opinion.

Lexy writes in such a way that is direct and to the point. There isn't any "fluff" or "padding" with what she says; Lexy is clear in how she communicates the information and her key points within each chapter.

An example of this writing includes:

“In reality, she was being the disrespectful jerk to her husband, and he was correct to call her out. He was doing his duty, actually (Eph 5:26-27). In fact, she really owes him an apology”.

The book ends with closing encouragement from Brian, pushing women to take their role as a Godly Christian woman seriously, taking up their role to support their husband alongside growing further in their own role and vocation as a Christian wife.

There were many positives with this book. The ability to pick up the book and complete a chapter within 20 minutes was a huge bonus for me as a busy mother. When time is short, having the ability to read a full chapter in a single sitting is a huge bonus, particularly when reading non-fiction.

The straightforward nature of the text was something that appealed to me, as I didn't need to try to understand what it was trying to tell me; it directly told me. After a long day, reading something that directly tells me information is a much easier read than having to try and work out the key points, making the non-fiction read much simpler, lighter and easier to digest. Another example of this includes the following:

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, even for a difficult marriage, but a broken spirit dries up any life that was there”

Quotes like the above are common throughout the entire book, clearly articulating to women things they need to do, like being cheerful in the home with a joyful heart and spirit.

The broad range of topics was something that I didn't expect to like as much as I did. The ability to touch on so many communication subjects and not repeat the same thing over and over again was refreshing to read. It also meant that many different elements of communication in a marriage were able to be covered, therefore allowing me to reflect further on where I need to improve in my communication and shortcomings.

Finally, each of the topics wasn't just pointing out all the things women do wrong; they all came with practical tips and things that women can do to improve. This might include things like recognising when you are manipulating your husband through pouting when he says something you don't like, removing expectations of your husband taking over the household duties when he gets home from a long day at work, or changing your attitude about having to remind your husband to do something you have asked him to do 50 times already. These tips help make the book something that women can read and help learn where they are falling short in their communication in marriage.

The biggest disappointment that I found with this book is that I was left feeling like I needed more. The information was so helpful to point out flaws that I had, and that were impacting my marriage, that I felt that I needed more to continue to help grow into the Titus 2 and Proverbs 31 woman that I am called to be.

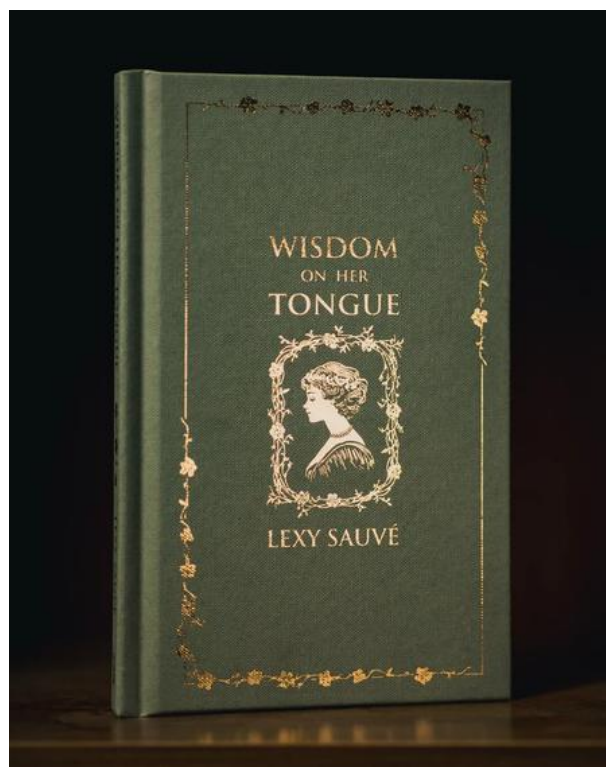
BOOK REVIEW

It has encouraged me to listen to their podcast more to help with this thirst for more knowledge, however I am hopeful of another book from Lexy covering more of the Godly female duties.

Overall, any wife or Godly woman wanting to improve how they act in their marriage or everyday life should read this book. The frankness of the information hits key things that women typically do, things that we as women should be striving to fix within our lives. Although Lexy is not a Lutheran, the messages she portrays throughout the book are things that any Christian woman should be striving to do - Lutheran or not. This is a book that will be well used, referred to and read often within our household, and one that I pray others also read to help grow in their marriage or personal attributes.

Renea Falkenberg

This book can be purchased from Reformers Bookshop for \$67.99.



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Ephesians 1:15-23



HIGHER THINGS RESTS ON JESUS



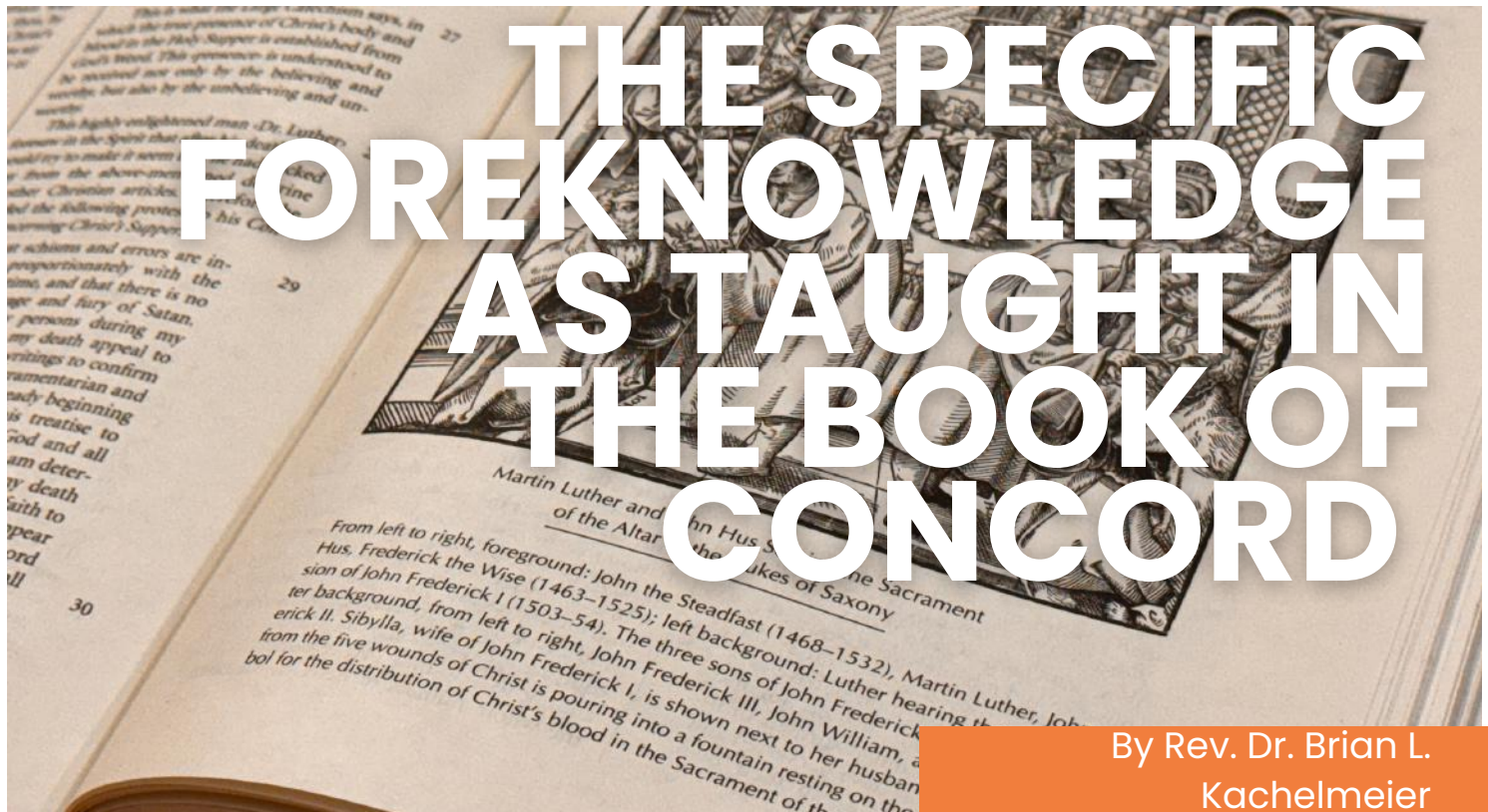
Photos in this article are all taken by Audrey Pearson, Higher Things.

By Crysten Sanchez
2026

Nineteen-nineties American Christianity. Directly following the 1980s and what ended up being coined the Satanic Panic, America found a level of comfort in Christianity, which was becoming more accessible and accepted by the general public. Christian culture was even more widely experienced in the country through Contemporary Christian Music artists who reached the secular radio charts and even MTV. Kids gathered around a flagpole once a year for “See You at the Pole,” an ecumenical event that encouraged young people to pray together for their school, their families, and their country. Remember POGs? If you do, you might want to take some Advil for the back pain. Surely unconnected to all of this (right?), I had a full set of Christian-themed pogs (a cardboard circle with a design on it – like a coaster at a pub) that I carried around like a badge in elementary school. See? Accessible and accepted.

There was also a significant mega church boom that began in the 90s. Casual worship began entering Christian churches, bringing about relaxed, informal services with upbeat, band-led worship. Hillsong and Vineyard movements brought worship music into people’s ears at home and on the go through Christian radio stations. Large megachurches like Willow Creek in Illinois and Saddleback Church in California were touting these “seeker-sensitive” services as the way to grow their membership numbers. And it seemed to be working. People were flooding those places, searching for a place of meaning and community. (There isn’t as much said about the number of people who left those churches through the back door once the initial shine wore off. Those numbers aren’t helpful to a megachurch’s assumed presence.)

It was everywhere, and very few church bodies were not affected.



By Rev. Dr. Brian L.
Kachelmeier
2026

After the death of Martin Luther in 1546, there arose a clear division between his students and followers over various doctrines. In order to bring unity of doctrine among the heirs of the 1530 Augsburg Confession, a Formula of Concord was drawn up, led by the efforts of Martin Chemnitz in 1577. Although there was no disagreement on the articles of predestination, the theologians of the Augsburg Confession wanted to clearly teach and confess what was believed by them in contrast to the followers of John Calvin. A clear distinction was made between predestination and foreknowledge. For the Lutherans, predestination was held as a comforting doctrine for those who believed in Christ. Thus, predestination had to do with the understanding that God predestined the believer to have the gift of salvation. The Gospel message reveals the will of God, namely, that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time" (1 Timothy 2:3-6). Thus, predestination is not a doctrine about the hidden will of God, as if he determined both who would be saved and who would be condemned before the foundation of the world. Rather, predestination is about the revealed will of God in the Bible. God desires all to be saved, and Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all. God did not choose who was going to hell. The key here is the doctrine of foreknowledge, which brings comfort to the individual Christian. The Creator knows what will happen in his creation before it happens, and he is directly involved in the life of his creation for good (general foreknowledge). Likewise, the Redeemer knows who will believe before the believer is even conceived in the womb, and he is directly involved in the change of the heart to faith (specific foreknowledge).

The believer has the assurance that God is the one who planned to save each one individually, before the world began, through the means of grace. Through these means, such as the preached Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, the individual can be certain and sure of God's will to save him or her personally from sin through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

When the Word is heard through preaching and reading, the individual is assured that Christ died for all, and the individual who believes has the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. In the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, the Creator of all has purchased reconciliation for all created humanity. Thus, this message is given to the individual who is included in all people. In baptism, the individual is assured that he or she is individually united in the death and resurrection of Christ through the promise in the Bible. This is to be received by faith. In preaching and absolution, the individual is assured that this promise is made directly to the one who believes. In the Lord's Supper, the individual takes the true body and blood of Christ, in, with, and under the bread and wine, to be consumed for the assurance that Christ gave his body for the one who eats, and he shed his blood for the one who drinks. The individual hears the words, "Take and eat. This is the body of Christ given for you. Take and drink. This is the blood of Christ shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." In other words, the individual believer does not look to his own worthiness and works to be confident of salvation and eternal life. The individual looks to the worthiness and works of Christ, who is salvation and eternal life. The one who believes is "worthy" to receive the salvation won by Christ on the cross and delivered to the individual through the means of grace.

With the doctrine of specific foreknowledge, the individual Christian can be assured that God not only foresees the future knowing that a person will come to faith, but rather, God is actively involved in bringing a person to faith and sustaining that faith through the means of grace. Just as the Creator is actively involved in his creation by sustaining the body, he is also actively involved as the Redeemer to restore and sustain the soul. In the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, the Lutheran reformers teach about general foreknowledge in this way,

Foreknowledge or prevision means that God sees and knows everything before it happens. This is called God's foreknowledge, which extends over all creatures, good and bad. In other words, He foresees and foreknows everything that is or will be, that is happening or will happen, whether it is good or bad. For all things, whether they are past or future, are clear and present before God... (SD XI, 4)

As we said earlier, God knows and sees all things before they happen. God is eternal and he eternally knows all things. He knows both the good and the bad. Yet, his foreknowledge is not the cause of the bad. General foreknowledge concerns itself with the physical well-being of humanity. In the Epitome of the Formula of Concord (a shorter, concise statement, like the difference between the Small and Large Catechisms), the Lutheran theologians teach about general foreknowledge in this way,

This foreknowledge extends over the godly and the wicked alike. But it is not the cause of evil or of sin. In other words, it is not what causes people to do wrong (which arises from the devil and mankind's wicked, perverse will).

Nor does it cause their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible. But foreknowledge only regulates this and fixes a limit on their ruin, how long it should last. All this happens to serve His elect for their salvation, even though such ruin is evil itself (Ep. XI, 4).

Again, God's foreknowledge does not cause people to sin. God's will is that we do not sin. It is the perverse will of man that is at the root of sinful actions. Notice that God's foreknowledge not only knows about the sins that will be committed, but it also includes God's action of regulating and limiting the extent of the sin. This interaction of God in creation serves the purpose of redemption in those who have been converted to faith through the work of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace. The Lutheran reformers go on to say in the Solid Declaration,

God's foreknowledge foresees and foreknows what is evil, yet not in the sense that it is God's gracious will that evil should happen. Everything that the perverse, wicked will of the devil and of people wants and desires to try and do, God sees and knows before it happens. His foreknowledge sees its order also in wicked acts or works, since a limit and measure is fixed by God for the evil that God does not will. He limits how far it should go, how long it should last, and when and how He will hinder and punish it. God the Lord rules over all (Psalm 103:19) of this so that it must flow to the glory of the divine name and to the salvation of His elect, and for that reason the godless must be astonished (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). (SD XI 6)

Again, God knows what evil thing will happen because man is evil in his heart. God is not the author of evil.

Evil brings an end to life. God is life. Thus, God does not desire evil and death. The author of evil is the Evil One, that is, the devil. Because of the sinful nature of humanity, the will of the individual is in line with the will of the devil, which is evil. Yet, the Creator continues to interact with his creation. He not only knows the evil that will flow out of the heart of humanity because of original sin, but he also puts a limit on it and punishes it. Sin will not go unpunished. He does this for the sake of his people, that is, those who believe in his promise of the forgiveness of sin. They are referred to as the elect. They did not choose God. In fact, by nature, they cannot choose God; rather, God chose them. He chose to be merciful to them by extending the forgiveness of sins found in Jesus alone. God is good and God does good. "The beginning and cause of evil is not God's foreknowledge. (For God does not create and do evil, neither does He help or promote it.) The cause of this evil is the wicked perverse will of the devil and of people..." (SD XI 7). To be clear here, the fact that God knows things before they happen, and he interacts in creation to make things happen, does not mean that he is the cause of evil. Evil is caused by the Evil One, that is, the devil, and the evil that is in the corrupted heart of man.

Again, foreknowledge includes more than just foresight about the things that would take place in the future. The living God is actively involved in his creation to bring about his will for his creation. The foreknowledge of God is eternal. The theologians of the Solid Declaration further state about specific foreknowledge,

Before the time of the world, before we existed, yes, even before the foundation of the world was laid—when, of course, we could do nothing good—we were chosen by grace in Christ to salvation, according to God's purpose (Romans 9:11; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Furthermore, all opinions and erroneous teachings about the powers of our natural will are overthrown by this. God in His counsel, before the time of the world, decided and ordained that He Himself would produce and work in us by His Holy Spirit's power. Through the Word, He would do everything that belongs to our conversion. (SD XI 43-44)

Conversion is an act of God. All acts of God are by His undeserved grace. In fact, God put into place two eternal acts or decrees before the foundation of the earth. Being eternal, they are decreed without time. They existed before the foundation of the earth before there was time. However, from the perspective of temporal humanity, we can only meditate upon these two truths within the limits of time. There is a sequence in order as events unfold. First, God creates all things. He makes man. The eternal decree regarding creation is made known to humanity in time. Moses writes, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Genesis 1:26). With the revealed knowledge of the will of God given to us in the Bible, we have access to the eternal conversation of the Holy Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit decreed together, saying, "Let us make man." From our perspective, the first eternal decree is made known after the Creator created his creation. This is when the decree is executed. Second, man falls into sin, which separates the creatures from the Creator. God is life. This separation brings death. The eternal decree regarding the restoration is made known to humanity when God declares to Eve, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he

shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). This decree is executed when Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus is the promised Seed, that is, the Offspring who would be planted in the ground to spring forth producing eternal life for humanity.

By God's grace, we know as Christians that we were both created and redeemed. We did not choose God to be our Creator just as we did not choose God to be our Redeemer. We did not do anything to merit life or eternal life. It is the work of God alone who gives life and eternal life. We were brought into this world by God's grace, and we have been redeemed from this fallen world by God's grace. Thus, we can say that before the foundation of the world God chose us "by grace in Christ to salvation." Faith is a gift worked by the Holy Spirit in our hearts through the message of the Gospel. The Spirit of God enlightens our hearts, opens our hearts, and changes our hearts. He grants the knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins, and the wisdom of God in the mystery of Christ crucified. The theologians of the Augsburg Confession go on to confess,

This doctrine also provides the excellent, glorious consolation that God was greatly concerned about the conversion, righteousness, and salvation of every Christian. He so faithfully provided for it that even before the foundation of the world was laid, He considered it, and in His purpose ordained how He would bring me to salvation and preserve me in salvation. He wanted to secure my salvation so well and so certainly, since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh salvation could easily be lost from our hands, or through the devil's and the world's craft and might it could be snatched and taken from us.

Therefore, He ordained in His eternal purpose what cannot fail or be overthrown. He placed salvation for safekeeping in the almighty hand of our Savior, Jesus Christ, from which no one can snatch us (John 10:28). Therefore, Paul asks in Romans, because we "are called according to His purpose" (8:28), who "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"? (8:39) (SD XI 45–47).

If an individual were to consider predestination in such a way that the hidden will of God is that some were chosen and destined to go to hell before the foundation of the world, then the individual would never know for sure if Christ died for that individual. Thanks be to God that the revealed will of God is found in the person and work of Christ who died for the sins of all humanity. Whereas the general foreknowledge of God extends to the foresight and interaction of God in the physical lives of humanity, the specific foreknowledge of God involves only the foresight and interaction of God in the spiritual lives of believers. Thus, the specific foreknowledge of God provides glorious consolation to every Christian. It assures the believer that before the foundation of the world God planned how he would bring the individual to salvation and preserve that individual in salvation. Such a salvation is not placed in the hand of the believer, but rather, in the pierced hand of Christ who died and rose again for that believer. If the gaining and maintaining of salvation were left to the individual hand of the individual believer, he would not be able to stand against the power of his own sinful flesh, the devil, or the world. Adding to this word of comfort and consolation for the believer, the theologians of the Formula of Concord go on to state,

Furthermore, this doctrine provides glorious consolation under the cross and amid temptations. In other words, God, in His counsel, before the time of the world, determined and decreed that He would assist us in all distresses. He determined to grant patience, give consolation, nourish and encourage hope, and produce an outcome for us that would contribute to our salvation. Also, Paul teaches this in a very consoling way. He explains that God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of His Son. His cross shall and must work together for good for everyone, because they are called according to God's purpose. Therefore, Paul has concluded that it is certain and beyond doubt that neither "tribulation, or distress," neither "death nor life," or other such things, "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (SD XI 48–49).

In baptism, the Old Adam in us has been crucified, so that, we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6). We have been crucified with Christ; he lives in us, and we live by faith in him (Galatians 2:20). We "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). Yet, the cross is the instrument of suffering. As baptised believers, we are called to take up our crosses and follow Jesus (See Matthew 10:38–39; 16:24–25). To live under the cross is to undergo suffering while living by faith. The temptation to fall into doubt and despair intensifies during such afflictions. Yet, we are not alone. Others suffer the same trials in our days as others have undergone similar tribulations in days past. You may think that you are the only one who understands your own troubles in this life right now, but realise that Jesus has an intimate awareness of your situation.

He suffered for you, and he suffers with you. He has done this and will do this in great joy. He is the founder and perfecter of your faith. The Holy Spirit teaches us,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).

We are not in a short-distance race. We are participating in a marathon, which lasts our whole lives long. The momentary trials and tribulations can seem like an eternity with no end. However, the teaching on specific foreknowledge gives the believer an eternal perspective from God's vantage point in three unique ways.

First, going back to the second eternal decree regarding the salvation of humanity, we know that he desires to save us individually by bringing us to faith and sustaining us in faith. Such sustaining takes place while we are being distressed, stressed, pressed, and oppressed. Thus, before the foundation of the world, God not only knew that such trials and tribulations would come, but he also decided to act for our benefit. Through such situations, he would work salvation in us. He has determined to grant us patience and peace. He resolved to bring hope when things are hopeless. He is the God of hope. Hope is the goal of suffering in the life of a believer. For this reason, we can rejoice in our sufferings as we rejoice in hope. Being justified by faith, we have peace in our consciences knowing that the Risen Redeemer speaks well of us before the Father. If we have Jesus on our side, we have everything.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit continues to work in our hearts with the Gospel Message, assuring us of the Father's love for us while we feel alienated from him in the time of trials (Romans 5:2–5). This eternal understanding during momentary affliction brings consolation. The goal of such testing is to strengthen souls and encourage us in the faith, knowing that we are entering the kingdom of God through many tribulations (See Acts 14:22).

Second, before the beginning of time, he knew which crosses we would take up and bear. In fact, each cross is by divine design for the purpose of conforming us to the image of Jesus, the Suffering Servant. What the world and the devil mean for evil, God intends it for good. Such crosses will appear ugly to us. They are not decorated with glitter and glitz. They are rough and rugged. We would prefer a dainty cross made of balsa wood—easy to carry. On the contrary, the crosses custom-built for each one of us are heavy and hefty. They are painful yet purposeful. Notice how the Formula of Concord sets this understanding in line with Romans chapter eight in the time of tribulation or distress. The indwelling Holy Spirit bears witness through the Gospel message that we are indeed sons of God and heirs of eternal life. He is the Spirit of adoption. He is the Spirit of prayer and supplication. He helps us in our weakness when we do not know what to say or pray. Yet we know that we suffer with Christ that we may be glorified with Christ.

Third, the understanding of God's specific foreknowledge grants us a confidence that God knows what he is doing. Therefore, we take these words to heart, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). We are learning to trust that God knows the situation, and he has set a limit to the situation.

During the time of trouble, it is difficult for us to make sense of the events that are taking place before our eyes. We want to know why and how long. Sometimes we just cannot make things make sense. We want to know the "hidden" foreknowledge of God. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit teaches us not to look for the secret will of God, as if it were different from the revealed will of God in the Bible. If we speculate and guess, we will never have confidence and consolation. Instead, our confidence is in Christ.

He did not come to condemn the world; he came to save us. He did not send out the apostles with the ministry of condemnation; he sent them with the ministry of salvation. Thus, we return to our baptismal identity. We are adopted sons of the living God (Romans 9:26). The more we suffer, the more we can say God must love me. Suffering is not placed on us to destroy us; rather, God uses it to reshape us into the image of his Son, the Suffering Servant. The Apostle Paul states, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). In Christ, we have not been abandoned; we have been adopted. Not only did God know about the specific suffering that would take place in our lives, he is also actively involved in it, setting a limit and a purpose for it. In this fallen world, we tend to forget that the Creator is continually interacting with his creation. It is as if we have been abandoned. Yet, there is great comfort in knowing that the living God is directly involved in each one of our lives. He acts according to his wisdom to accomplish his purpose. In the day of trouble, we tend to forget that the Redeemer is regularly restoring the corrupted creation. It is as if we have been left to act alone. Yet, there is great consolation in knowing that Jesus is living and forgiving.

Therefore, Paul can encourage us while we bear our cross, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18; see also 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). If we dwell on the present sufferings without an eternal perspective, we will fall into doubt and despair. If we look at our current situations without Jesus, we will not be able to have joy. He endured the cross for us.

Now he helps us to endure our crosses. In fact, the crosses that are placed upon our backs by God assure us that we are adopted sons of God be conformed into the image of the only-begotten Son. "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" (Hebrews 12:7). The more suffering, the more we are assured of God's love for us as our Heavenly Father. "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). We tend to set our eyes on the moment. Yet, the moment is only momentary. The Bible gives to us an eternal perspective. We set our eyes on the Eternal One, knowing that we are being disciplined for an eternal glory. We cannot make the suffering in our lives make sense. The Holy Spirit is at work in us through the mystery of the eternal Gospel. When we set our eyes on the specific foreknowledge of God regarding the custom-built crosses we are bearing, we are assured that God has not abandoned us. He is working to bring about restoration and salvation in us. In this life, we share in Christ's suffering through our crosses; yet we are comforted by God in all our afflictions (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). The Holy Spirit sets our eyes on the future hope of glory in the resurrection of the body. On the Last Day, there will be no more crosses, only empty tombs.

In the meantime, we live by faith, rejoicing in hope, enduring affliction, and persevering in prayer (Romans 12:12). The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Romans chapter eight,

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19–23).

Again, recall that the first eternal decree is that God would create man in his own image. And it was so. Adam is referred to as a created son of God (See Luke 3:38). However, man fell into sin, which placed creation itself into the bondage of corruption. Thus, recall the second eternal decree is that God would recreate man in the image of his only-begotten Son. Jesus, who is begotten and not made, took upon flesh in order to take upon our sin. Through his body, our bodies are redeemed from condemnation. In baptism, we have the promise of being filled with the Holy Spirit, absolved from all our sins, accounted righteous before God, and adopted as sons of God. Yet, this is not made fully manifest in our lives right now. We wait in anticipation with all creation. We wait eagerly together until that day. We do not know when that day will come, but we know that God does. We know that he is working together for good in our lives, even if we currently groan in the pains of childbirth. In chapter two of the book of Exodus, we learn how the sons of Israel groaned and cried out to God for help in during their suffering in Egypt.

They waited for Yahweh to deliver them. In our day, as the adopted sons of God, we join in the groaning of all creation in our oppression due to sin. We are waiting for Jesus to deliver us. We take comfort in the specific foreknowledge of the Lord. Paul writes,

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:28–31).

In Christ, we know that God is for us! If we are good with God, all else is good in our lives. In this life, we will experience many difficulties, pains, sufferings, afflictions, and hardships. We cannot understand why these things are happening to us. But we know that God promises to work together for the good in all these things. If the Lord is on our side, who can defeat his purpose? We live in this life by faith in the promises of God. He is all-knowing, and His wisdom is perfect. He knows what He is doing, and He is in complete control. It was not God's purpose that man should fall into sin. God is not the author of sin. God's eternal purpose was that man would live. Sin entered creation, which God foreknew. Thus, God's eternal purpose was to restore life to man through the person and work of Christ who died for our sin and rose for our justification. These are the two great works of God: creation and redemption. He is living and forgiving. He continues to be actively involved in the life of his creatures in general and in the life of his redeemed in particular. He is the Author of Life, and your story is still being written.



By Corrie Steel
2026

"The Two Strange Witnesses: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Apocalypse"

Text: The Two Witnesses. Revelation 11:3–14.

The book of Revelation has set imaginations on fire since it was first written, with descriptive depictions of great beasts, heavenly scenes, plagues, and great battles on Earth. Revelation 11, and the Two Witnesses, sits in the narrative as a bit of an interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpets, which pour out God's wrath on the Earth. The Two Witnesses contain dramatic imagery of two prophets, prophesying in sackcloth, with the power to shut up the heavens, to pour forth fire from their mouths, and to strike the earth with all sorts of plagues. They are killed by the beast after 3 ½ years, but are resurrected and then ascend into heaven.

Throughout history, and more prominently in Western Evangelical Christianity, especially with Dispensationalists, people look at some of these depictions pointing to specific people in time. A great example of this is the Antichrist. While the church has held that the Antichrist is an office that is held by many people, all who are against Christ and take worship away from him, in more modern times, this Evangelical, Dispensational trend has some scholars looking to this being one person, rather than an office to be filled. The Two Witnesses found in Revelation 11 fall into the same category, with some scholars, even many traditional scholars, looking for the return of two physical people to fulfil this role, in a specific time and place. The most popular being that of Moses and Elijah returning as the Two Witnesses. Over a hundred years ago, Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury, wrote that "no solution has ever been given to this portion of the prophecy".¹

GENESIS AS A HANDBOOK OF PRAYER

Martin Luther
ON PRAYER

By Pastor Bryan Wolfmuehler
18 Dec. 2024

In the [Worldwide Bible Class](#) we've been studying the life of Jacob with Martin Luther's Genesis Lectures. A few months back it occurred to me, "This is really a study on prayer." As Luther considers the life of Jacob and all his struggles, he sees an example of faith fighting despair, and holding on to the promises of God.

Here are some excerpts from the Genesis commentary (volumes 5 and 6 of Luther's Works, Genesis 26–37) selected under the theme "Genesis: A Handbook of Prayer."

Prayer Is Between Affliction and Deliverance

Hence in order that you may overcome those difficulties and annoyances, whether in marriage or in the government, take care first of all that you have meditated well on the Word of God, in which the government is richly established, as we see in Rom. 12:8 and 13:1–4.

Likewise in marriage, whether one is a manservant or a maidservant, whether a teacher or a pupil, they are sure of their station and the will of God.

Just take hold of the Word, and bring forth fruits worthy of the Word, and you will see that affliction and trials follow at once. But prayer follows these. Deliverance follows prayer. The sacrifice of praise follows deliverance. Thus at the same time you will be able to bear your cross and to offer a sacrifice of praise, which the monks neither want nor are able to do. They are interested only in peace, the belly, and pleasure.

This is how Moses describes the life of this saintly father in accordance with this one chief point, namely, that he spent his life in many tribulations. (LW 5:6)

Prayer Follows the Word

But here there is an outstanding example of faith that struggles and cries out to God; for where the Word is, there prayer follows. (LW 5:14)



Photo by Rev. Peter Noble, taken at the LC-C Synod.

By Rev. Peter Noble
2026

Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I write to you a few reflections on the Lutheran Church-Canada Synod, held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from June 11-15th, 2026.

If I could summarise the whole synod in one word. It would be “peaceful”. Peaceful in its business. Peaceful in worship. Peaceful in its fellowship. Peaceful in all aspects of discussion.

A few highlights for me. Besides being peaceful, it was pure joy meeting four other Australians at the LCC Synod. I was blessed to meet President Matt Harrison from LCMS. There were a number of motions that were passed that were dedicated to studying why presidents should be called “bishops”. And the same for the word “deacons/deaconesses”.

Both of these terms will be thoroughly researched by CTCR and brought back to the synod no less than two years before the next synodical convention. (LCC synod meets every four years, so this research must be brought back to all LCC members two years before the next LCC synod in 2030). We voted for a new president, Rev. David Haberstock, and gave thanks for the outgoing president of LCC, Rev. Timothy Teuscher.

Further highlights that are noteworthy. It was an out-of-body experience to hear Rev. Adrian Kramer on behalf of CTCR read the motion that we were to vote on the dissolution of altar and pulpit fellowship between LCC and LCA. And due to the women's ordination motion passing in the LCA synod in October 2024, the LCC did formally and prayerfully vote and pass the motion to dissolve that fellowship, respectively. Immediately after this vote was passed, there was a vote to formally recognise the altar and pulpit fellowship between LCC and LM-A. The motion was passed unanimously.



THE BEAUTY OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

By Here She Stands Podcast
1 April 2025

Season 4, Episode 4: The Beauty of Christian Hospitality – Interview with Meg Pearce

Meg Pearce is a pastor's wife from Adelaide and hospitality is one of her favourite things to talk about and practice! In this episode she digs into the spiritual side of hospitality and how it mirrors what Christ has done for us. She also leaves us with some practical tips on how to make our hospitality experience stress-free.

Lexy: Welcome to another episode of Here She Stands. My name is Lexy and today I am joined by my co-host, Sonja. In today's episode, Meg Pearce is back again. If you have been listening to our podcast for a while, she joined us in Season 1 to talk about caring for the dying and again in Season 2 to talk about natural family planning.

Welcome back again, Meg!

Meg: Thank you for having me. I'm a bit shy about it, but you know, you keep asking me, so I have to say yes.

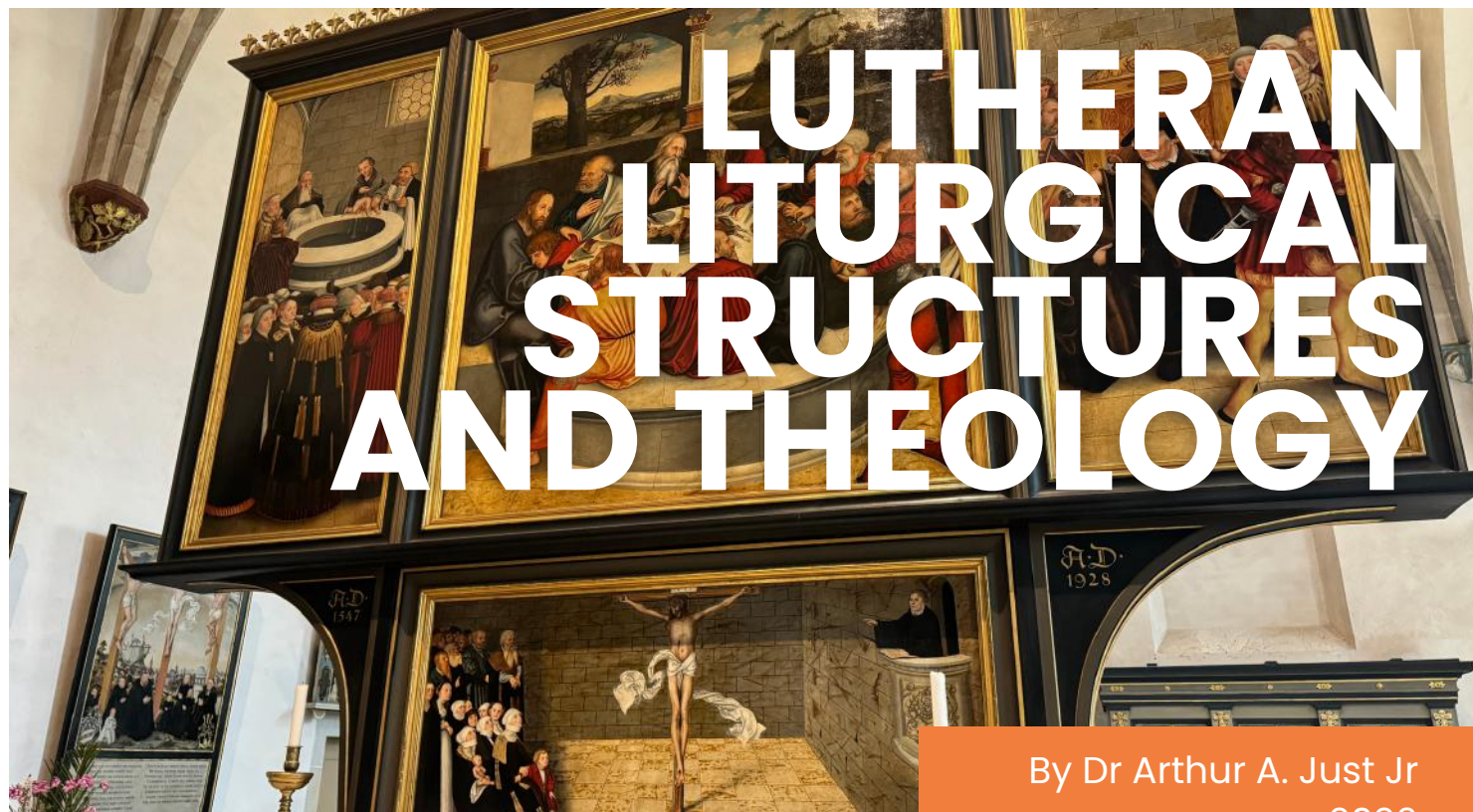
Lexy: We had a listener request to have you back on again, so that must make you feel a bit special.

Meg: I'm very touched. Thank you.

Lexy: So today's topic, from what I can understand, is one of your favourite things to talk about.

Meg: Absolutely! I have to say, when you suggested I come back on the podcast, hospitality came to mind as a topic I'd love to even hear one of your episodes about.

So when you turned it back on me, I was kind of like, "Well, how can I say no?" Hospitality, yes! I feel really excited to talk about this today.



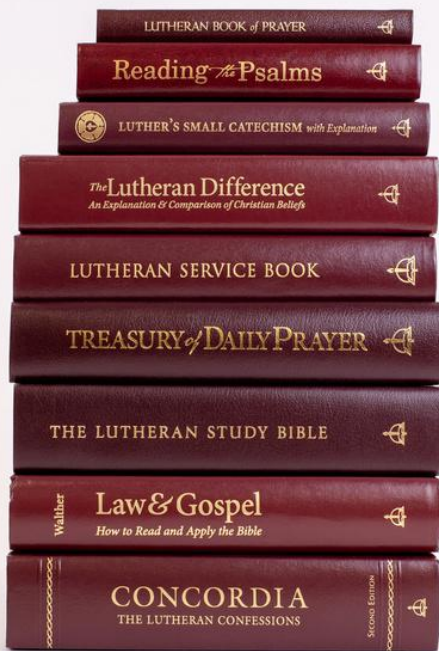
By Dr Arthur A. Just Jr
2026

Lutherans have a liturgical tradition with a cultural and historical context, a tradition that is both evangelical and catholic, a tradition our forefathers attempted to shape into a very distinct Lutheran identity that mediated between our catholic and Reformation roots. Luther was both catholic and evangelical. To resolve this tension, his followers decided to call themselves Lutheran. In the twenty-first century, we are at a watershed in our history as our forefathers were in the sixteenth century. A battle is taking place for the heart and soul of our church. At stake is the very ethos of our church with its Biblical and theological heritage.

The liturgy stands at the centre of the life of the church, for liturgy is nothing more and nothing less than God serving the world with his gifts by proclaiming the presence of the salvation of the world whenever the Christian assembly gathers together around the Word and the Sacrament.

The church is assembled *in the presence of God* to become *proclaimers of the Gospel*. Ever since the time of the apostles, liturgy has been the primary way the church has handed down the faith to future generations, and thus the maxim of Prosper of Aquitaine: “the law of worshipping founds the law of believing.” The liturgy and hymnody of a congregation shapes the faith of the people more than anything else. A church’s belief and confession may be observed from their liturgy, hymns, preaching, and catechesis, not the resolutions it passes in convention. For fifteen hundred years until the time of the Reformation, liturgy was not a text, and liturgical changes evolved imperceptibly over a long period of time from within the congregation. With the invention of the Gutenberg press, liturgy became a text that could be edited or rewritten or even frozen in time.

No one expects us to go back to textless liturgies, but it is important to see how liturgy develops and evolves in today’s church.



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Creative Word Fellowship stocks all of the essentials for Lutheran theological studies, from Luther's Small Catechism, Book of Concord, The Lutheran Study Bible, to Walther's Works and many more. We currently don't have an online store, but you can email to request a copy of our stock list or with an order at

bookshop@cwfellowship.net

<https://readyforchurchpodcast.podbean.com/>





By Pastor Carl Richter
2026

When people think about Life Ethics, they often first think about the issues surrounding the beginning and end of life, particularly abortion and euthanasia. But it's important to understand that Life Ethics also play an important role between the womb and the tomb. To be Pro-Life doesn't just mean to uphold the dignity of human life in its most vulnerable stages, but it also means to uphold the value of life and human flourishing at every stage. In John 10:10, Jesus says, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' Jesus wants us to live in his abundant grace and not be impeded by the conspiracies of the evil one who wants to 'steal, kill and destroy,' to sap the joy out of our existence and to impede our worship and thanksgiving. In this article, I hope to broaden the narrow scope that is often applied to Life Ethics.

I've found the book of Exodus lays a good foundation for a biblical understanding of Life Ethics.

In the opening chapter, we hear about a "New King" coming to power in Egypt. This New King, or New Pharaoh (the title that I'll use from this point onward), remains nameless and is difficult to identify with any particular Pharaoh who ruled Egypt. I believe this designation is quite intentional as it's not as important to understand who the New Pharaoh but rather to understand the character type that He represents. He is a Pharaoh who, when he sees the fruitful multiplication of the Israelites and how the land has become filled with their offspring, becomes filled with fear and decides to shrewdly plan their demise. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that we're not fighting against any particular person, that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms', or to put it another way – there is a New Pharaoh in every age that tries a new strategy to reduce and diminish life.

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By Pastor Paul Calnan
2026

The God Who Carries His People **A Pastoral Reflection on Romans 5,** **Exodus 19, and Matthew 9:35–10:20.**

The people of God have never had it easy. That is not a complaint. It is simply the truth Scripture gives us. Israel did not have it easy. The apostles did not have it easy. The Church has not had it easy. And, if we are honest, we should not be surprised when we do not have it easy either.

Many readers will know the grief of recent years: departures from Scripture, failures of discipline, the weakening of theological formation, and the cost borne by those who have tried to stand confessionally. These things are not small, and they should not be treated as small. When God's Word is set aside, sheep are hurt, families are unsettled, pastors are tested, and congregations are left wondering where to stand, what to do, and how much longer they can keep carrying the weight.

And that is the point: we cannot carry it, at least not in our own strength, and not without the mercy of God. We cannot carry the Church by synodical procedure. We cannot carry her by righteous indignation. We cannot carry her by nostalgia, as comforting as nostalgia can be when the present moment is anything but smooth sailing. And we certainly cannot carry her by pretending that we are made of tougher stuff than we really are.

The history of God's people is not a history of uninterrupted peace, tidy decisions, cheerful meetings, and everyone behaving themselves. That would be a much shorter Bible, though perhaps not a more believable one.

No, the history of God's people is the history of the Lord keeping His people by grace. He keeps them through sorrow and through conflict. He keeps them through confusion, and when the path ahead is unclear. And He keeps them, most wonderfully, when they are too weak to keep themselves.

So come back with me to Egypt for a moment.

Egypt was the place of bondage. God's people were not free to worship the Lord as He had commanded. They were held under the authority of a ruler who did not fear God. They also knew the heavy burden that comes when human authority puts itself above the Word of the Lord.

But when God delivered Israel from Egypt, He did not do it because Israel had earned rescue, and they were certainly not a mighty nation flexing its muscles. They were slaves who needed a Redeemer. They did not escape because they found some deep strength within themselves, but rather, were rescued because God remembered His covenant, heard their cries, and kept His promise.

The Lord Himself says in Exodus, **"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"** (Exod. 19:4).

That is the remarkable thing about our God. He does not shout instructions from a safe distance and leave His people to climb their own way out. He comes to them in mercy. He sees their suffering, hears their cries, and He acts to save.

And the same God who carried Israel on eagles' wings is the God who has carried us in Christ. He has not saved us because we were strong enough to rescue ourselves, or because we were wise enough to find the right path by our own understanding. He has saved us because He is merciful.

This is why St Paul's words in Romans are such good news for weary Christians, especially for Christians who are tempted to think that everything depends on their own strength. Paul does not begin with our courage, our clarity, or our ability to hold everything together. He begins with our weakness, and then he shows us Christ: **"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly"** (Rom. 5:6). St Paul could hardly say it more plainly, or more reassuringly. It is almost a perfect Law and Gospel sermon in fifteen words.

He does not say that Christ died for those who had finally pulled themselves together. He does not say that Christ waited until sinners had tidied themselves up, quit their worst habits, improved their public image, and become the sort of people everyone would be happy to have on a church council.

No, Christ died for the weak. Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for sinners.

And this is very good news, because weakness is not something we need to pretend away before God. It is the very thing Christ has come to meet. The reason we need Him is not that we have a few rough edges that need smoothing. The reason we need Christ is that sin has left us powerless to save ourselves.

Our weakness goes deeper than weariness. We are bound by sin, unable to free ourselves, and in need of a Redeemer.

Sin bends us in on ourselves. We defend ourselves. We excuse ourselves and try to justify ourselves. We cling to whatever we can, even when it cannot save us. And if our sin is not always obvious to the people around us, that is not the same thing as being righteous. It may only mean that we have learned to stand up straight in public.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

The Law of God tells the truth about us. It leaves us with no flags to wave before God, no spiritual muscles to flex, and no reason to boast. We come before Him with empty hands. And into those empty hands, God gives Christ Himself.

That is why the Gospel is such a comfort in hard times in the Church. When Christians are caught up in grief, conflict, and division (especially over faithfulness to God's Word), there is always a temptation to put our confidence in the wrong place. We may begin to think that we are safe because we saw the danger, made the right decision, joined the right group, left the wrong one, or managed to stand when others fell.

Now, decisions do matter. Doctrine and faithfulness matter too. To say otherwise would be both foolish and unloving. But none of these things is our Saviour.

We are not saved because we were wise enough to see clearly. We are not saved because we were brave enough to stand publicly. We are not saved because our ecclesiastical paperwork is in better order than someone else's, though one does sleep better when the paperwork is not actually on fire!

We are saved because Christ died for the ungodly.

The Israelites did not cross the Red Sea because they were better swimmers than the Egyptians. They crossed because God opened the way. They did not stand free because they had found the strength to break Pharaoh's power. They stood free because the Lord delivered them. And so do we.

And once the Lord has delivered His people, He does not leave them standing around wondering who they are. He brings Israel to Sinai, and there He tells them what He has made them: **"You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples"** (Exod. 19:5).

Note the order: God does not come to Israel in Egypt and say, "If you behave yourselves, if you organise yourselves properly, if you prove yourselves useful, then perhaps I will think about rescuing you." No, He rescues them first. He brings them out of bondage. He carries them on eagles' wings. Then He speaks to them as His people.

This is not Israel's way of earning God's love. It is the life of a people who have already been loved, rescued, and claimed by God. Obedience does not create their identity. Their identity is formed by God's mercy, His Word, and His promise. And the same is true for the Church.

The Church is not created by any human achievement, courage, office, paperwork, good coffee, or respectable appearance. These things may have their place, especially good coffee, though one does sometimes wonder how many meetings the fall into sin actually requires. But none of them creates the Church. Christ creates His Church. He calls her by His Word. He washes her in Holy Baptism. He feeds her with His body and blood. He forgives her sins. He gathers His sheep around His voice. And because the Church is His, she must always be brought back to Him.

This is why departures from God's Word are never small matters. They are not simply administrative differences, generational preferences, or unfortunate misunderstandings between otherwise well-meaning committees.

When the Word of Christ is set aside, the sheep are not being led more gently. They are being led away from the voice of their Shepherd.

At the same time, we must remember that the Church is not ours to control. We are called to confess. We are called to teach. We are called to warn. We are called to pray. We are called to suffer when faithfulness brings a cost. But we are not called to imagine that the survival of Christ's Church depends finally on us.

The Church belongs to Christ. And Christ knows how to keep what is His.

And this is where we need to be careful, because sinners can turn almost anything into pride, even the things that are true. It is possible to be right about serious matters and still be wrong in spirit. It is possible to stand for God's Word and still forget that we stand only by the mercy of God. It is possible to grieve real departures from Scripture and yet begin to look at others with contempt rather than compassion.

The fact is, being right about the issue does not make us righteous before God. It does not give us permission to despise those who are still struggling. It does not mean that we know the fears, pressures, loyalties, griefs, and questions of conscience that may be weighing upon them. And it certainly does not mean that we no longer need repentance ourselves.

We may even begin to speak, or at least think, as though those who remain are simply "still captive in Egypt," while we, apparently, have become seasoned desert travellers after five minutes in the wilderness. But the wilderness has a way of exposing things in us, too. Israel left Egypt by the power of God, but Egypt did not leave Israel's heart quite so quickly.

Let me be blunt: Contempt is not confession. Pride is not faithfulness. Bitterness is not discernment. And sneering at the wounded is not the same thing as standing for the truth.

There are still pastors, teachers, families, and faithful members who are wrestling with heavy questions. Some are afraid. Some are grieving. Some are trying to care for people who would be scattered by a sudden move. Some are waiting, perhaps too long. Some are clearer than they appear. Some are more confused than they realise. And some, no doubt, are simply exhausted.

We do not need to pretend these matters do not matter. They do. Seriously. Error does not become less dangerous just because it is wrapped in familiar names, old friendships, childhood memories, synodical letterhead, or a clerical collar. But neither should we speak as though we can see every heart from where we stand. We cannot. God has not given us that office. He has given us His Word. He has given us prayer, and He has given us the duty to confess the truth. He has given us the command to love our neighbour and has shown us that we have plenty of our own sin to repent of, lest we run out of things to do before morning tea.

This is why our speech must be clear and charitable. The same mercy that saved us is the mercy we pray God would extend to others. St Paul writes, **"If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life"** (Rom. 5:10).

The Apostle does not say that Christ loved us once we had become agreeable. He does not say that Christ reconciled us to God once we had become easy to deal with, pleasant at meetings, safe on social media, and generally less of a pastoral hazard.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

He says that while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. That is not flattering. But it is saving.

If Christ loved us when we were enemies, then we cannot look with contempt upon those for whom Christ also died. We may grieve. We may warn. We may speak clearly. We may say, without embarrassment, that error is error and truth is truth. But the Christian response to those who are struggling is not triumph. It is sorrow. It is prayer. It is patience. It is the longing that every sheep would hear the voice of the Shepherd clearly.

None of this makes doctrine less important. Doctrine matters because true doctrine gives us Christ. It gives us the Shepherd's voice, and it teaches us where Christ has promised to be found: in His Holy Word, in Holy Baptism, in Holy Absolution, and in the Holy Supper of His body and blood.

So, we stand where we must stand. We confess what we must confess. We refuse what must be refused. But we do so as sinners who have been carried by mercy, not as heroes who carried the Church out on our shoulders.

The Church has only one Saviour, and it is not us.

Matthew shows us the same mercy in the heart of Jesus. When Jesus sees the crowds, He does not see them as a nuisance, a voting bloc, a theological problem to be solved, or a crowd of people who should have known better by now. He sees them as **"harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"** (Matt. 9:36), and He has compassion on them.

Jesus does not look at confused sheep with contempt. He does not mock them for being harassed. He does not despise them for being helpless. He sees their need more clearly than they see it themselves, and His heart is moved toward them.

Does this mean that truth no longer matters? No. Quite the opposite. Sheep need shepherds precisely because there are wolves, thieves, hirelings, and no shortage of confident voices with a dodgy map. Compassion does not mean pretending that danger is not dangerous. Compassion means caring enough about the sheep to speak the truth, even when the truth costs us something.

Moved by compassion, Jesus sends His disciples into the harvest. He sends them not because they are impressive men. One only needs to read the Gospels for a few minutes to be cured of that idea. He sends them because the harvest is plentiful, the labourers are few, and the sheep need the voice of the Shepherd.

So, the Church is not sent into the world to spend her life arguing. She is not sent to win ecclesiastical disputes, draft better motions, or become a museum for the way things used to be. She is sent to proclaim Christ. She is sent to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins. She is sent to baptise, teach, absolve, feed, comfort, and warn. And by His Word and Sacraments, Christ gathers His sheep around His voice. The Lord who carries His people also sends His people. But He sends us as those who have first been carried.

So let us remember what the Lord says to His people: "I brought you to myself."

PASTORAL REFLECTION

That is the goal of His saving work. The Lord brings His people out of bondage in order to bring them to Himself. He gives us more than escape; He gives us belonging. He gives us more than survival; He gives us His promise. He gives us more than the relief of leaving what is harmful; He gives us the joy of being held by the One who is faithful.

And He has done this for us in Christ.

He has carried us through the waters of Holy Baptism. He has spoken His absolution over sinners who could not free themselves. He has fed His weary people with the body and blood of His Son. He has kept His Church by His Word and promise.

So, we do not stand because we are stronger than others.

We stand because Christ has held us. We do not hope because we have preserved ourselves. We hope because Christ preserves His Church. We do not go forward because the path is easy, clear, or free from grief. We go forward because the Shepherd knows His sheep, and His sheep know His voice.

The God who carried Israel through the wilderness is the God who carries His Church today. He carries us through uncertainty and through conflict. He carries us through weakness and through repentance. He carries us by His mercy, by His Word, and by His promise.

And He will carry us all the way home.

Pastor Paul Calnan

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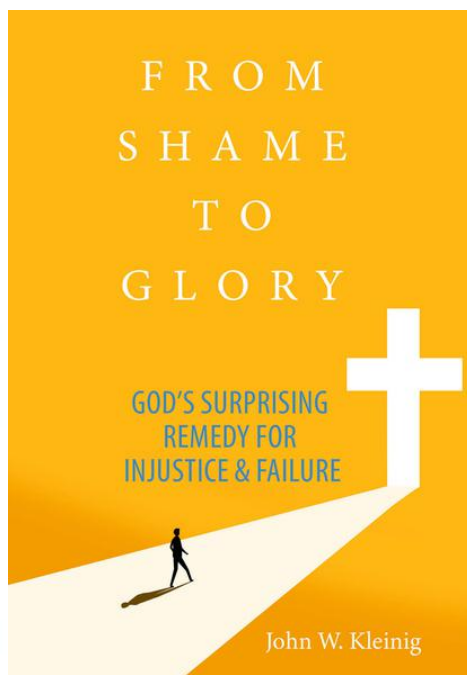
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1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

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