

The Lutheran WITNESS

APRIL 2004

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Easter: Faith, Funerals and the Future

Also:

Luther and the Jews

A Look at 'The Purpose Driven Life'





The Lutheran WITNESS

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'The Passion of the Christ'

For once, we have a movie that speaks clearly and without regret the Word of God.

*Mark Einspahr
Salt Lake City, Utah*

DR. JAMES BACHMAN ("THERE'S MORE TO the Story," Feb. '04) fails to realize how much we who live out here in the real world of anti-Christian sentiment need this movie, "The Passion of the Christ." If one is surrounded by like-minded believers, it is easy to forget how different we Christians are from the rest of the world.

Let me tell you why we need this movie. For once, we have a movie that speaks clearly and without regret the Word of God. For once, we have someone in Mel Gibson who is not afraid of Hollywood and its Christian-hating liberals. Although we failed with the movie "Luther," we have another chance to show Hollywood that God can sell.

*Mark Einspahr
Salt Lake City, Utah*

I WAS MOVED BY THE MOVIE. FIRST, AS A Christian man who has known the Scriptures and tries to live by them. Second, as a theologian and pastor who is privileged, honored and blessed to be able to speak every day with others about this gift of love. And finally as a Palestinian, who knows the language spoken on the screen in the original languages used in the first century. When some of these words were spoken, my heart ached and tears flowed.

Tears flowed easily. The reason is that I was right next to Him on the cross. That is, because of my sins, Jesus was nailed to that wooden beam. Because of my sins, He took all of the torture, humiliation, hatred, spitting and eventually death.

In one riveting scene, the thief on the cross said, "Lord, remember me in Your kingdom." Jesus, bleeding

and near death, assured Him, "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise." This assurance wasn't only for the thief, but it is also for us who in faith are repentant sinners.

*Rev. Nabil Nour
Armour, S.D.*

IN THE FILM, MORE ATTENTION IS DRAWN to the violent screen images than to the words. For the sake of dramatic impact, Greek, Aramaic and Latin are used in the dialogue. In a *New Yorker* article, Mel Gibson describes that impact: "So that's what the language thing did for me. It took something away from you—you had to depend upon the image." "The language thing" is reduced to a supporting role.

Images of the Passion have often been used for devotional purposes. Seeing the risen Christ certainly strengthened the disciples, but Jesus asked Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Then He continued for those who would believe through the Word proclaimed, without seeing the Word made flesh, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Images of the crucified and risen Christ inspire devotion. But only God's Word explains why He was crucified and raised. After the images are dark, it is "the language thing" that will proclaim the Good News.

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, Mo.*

TAKING THE REALITY OF THE HORROR out of the story serves only to reduce the cost of the sacrifice that Jesus made. I for one never want to

stop hearing the account in its horrific, bloody detail. To understand what my sin did to put Jesus through this kind of suffering and death helps me understand the price He paid that I won't have to pay, and my heart goes out to Him in love and thanksgiving.

*Ron VonBehren
Round Rock, Texas*

The blind see

I WAS THRILLED TO SEE "WELCOMING Those Who Are Blind" (Jan. '04). I have been legally blind since 1992 and am director for the outreach mission to the blind at Our Savior Church, Baraboo, Wis. Since April 2003, we have raised awareness about the blind functioning in the area, and have seen an increase from five to eight in the number of visually impaired and blind participants. Even though our congregation numbers about 80, the support of our pastor (Rev. Tim Anderson), committee members and those who help behind the scenes have allowed God's Word to do God's work.

Having a Christian refuge for the blind and visually impaired changes attitudes. I know it has mine. Not only is the world a nicer place, but it allows each individual to explore his or her own capabilities rather than being stuck in the uncertainty of a disability. With the help of God, the LCMS, my church family and surrounding support system, the sky is the limit.

*Albert D. Schmiede
Baraboo, Wis.*

A chapter from Acts

READING THE FEBRUARY "LIFELINE" article, "Blessings on the Battlefield" by Chaplain Lt. Michael P. Moreno, seemed to me less like reading an article on the Iraqi War and more like an excerpt from the Book of Acts. This is a story of the spiritual war that is being fought. And with Baptism after Baptism after Baptism, the

enemy is being defeated. And we all praise God that “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47b).

*Rev. Martin J. Schultheis
Williston Park, N.Y.*

Reading about home



I RECENTLY HAD THE PRIVILEGE AND JOY of visiting Sudan for the 10th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sudan. What a

delightful surprise I had when I noticed what one of the African men in southern Sudan was reading—*The Lutheran Witness*! He seemed fascinated by the article previewed on the cover: “Stand with Africa” (Nov. ’03). I’m not sure how he got this copy of the *Witness*, but I thought you would be interested in knowing that the issue encouraging us to “Stand with Africa” was read with great interest by people in the very heart of Africa itself.

*Rev. Daniel Preus
St. Louis, Mo.*

Rev. Daniel Preus is first vice president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.—Ed.

Three more questions

I THINK QUESTIONS 4, 5 AND 6 WERE omitted from Rev. John Kayser’s

letter through which he wanted to be sure he has his mind right regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

(4) Which country has been expanding its borders for decades by military action into neighboring countries and killing thousands, using fighter planes, tanks and bulldozers made in the USA? A. Israel. B. Palestinian Territory.

(5) Which country invades its neighbors, destroying homes and agricultural crops, including hundreds-of-years-old olive groves and then erects a wall to protect captured territory? A. Israel. B. Palestinian Territory.

(6) Which country asked President Bush last year for more foreign aid? A. Israel. B. Palestinian Territory.

*David Furholmen
Roselle, Ill.*

by Jeffrey Gibbs

“You Christians are pathetic—your faith is worthless, and you are still covered with your filthy sins!”

Those are words you might expect from an enemy of the church. But they came from the apostle Paul. They were his way of declaring just how crucial the first Easter was. His exact words were: “If Christ is not risen your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

The first Easter was essential; the Resurrection of our Lord is the foundation on which our whole religion stands or falls.

This Easter-time we again have the chance to learn to rejoice in truths that we believe. I’d like to focus on three aspects of the marvelous Easter message: Our Faith, Our Funerals, and Our Future.

Easter for Our Faith

The first Easter, like the first Good Friday, was a real event that really happened at a certain time and place. It wasn’t an idea—it was an event. How shall we describe what took place? A two-word phrase can capture it: *bodily resurrection*. The first Easter was the first and only time in history—so far!—that a person experienced such a bodily resurrection.

Jesus’ Easter event was *bodily*. The same body that was nailed to the cross, died and was buried in a tomb cut out of rock—that same human body—experienced resurrection. By late Friday afternoon, the tomb was full of a corpse. Jesus was dead, and Joseph and Nicodemus bravely buried Him while grieving women watched. Then, by early Sunday morning, the tomb was empty. That same body was no longer there. Jesus’ resurrection was *bodily*.

Let me emphasize this point in order to turn aside what you sometimes hear from skeptical writers with regard to something that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, his great chapter that deals with *our* resurrection. Yes, that’s right, 1 Corinthians 15 is not really about *Jesus’* resurrection as much as it is about *ours*. But I’ll return to that in a minute.

In 1 Cor. 15:35, Paul anticipates a natural question: “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? With what sort of body do they come?’” As he is answering that question, Paul makes this statement about our resurrection body that is also true of Jesus’ resurrected body: “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a *spiritual* body” (1 Cor. 15:44). Some try to twist Paul’s words so as to make him say that Jesus’ resurrection wasn’t bodily, but “only spiritual”! As if Christ’s body were still in the tomb!

The obvious mistake in this has to do with the meaning of the Greek term that is translated “spiritual.” It

Our Faith, Our Funerals, Our Future

The first Easter and the bodily resurrection of Christ is full of meaning for our future.

doesn’t mean “non-physical.” It means “filled with the Holy Spirit” or “empowered with the Holy Spirit.” This is clear from 1 Cor. 2:15, where Paul uses the same term to describe Christians as “spiritual” people. The apostle is not saying that Christians don’t have bodies; he is saying that they are under the direction of the Spirit of God. Similarly, Christ’s resurrection took place (as will ours!) *in the power of the Holy Spirit*. We believe that His was a *bodily* resurrection.

We also believe that His was a *bodily resurrection*. Jesus of Nazareth was not brought back to the manner of life that He had known before His death. This had happened for the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7), Lazarus (John 11) and others. They were all revived by the miraculous power of God. But they came back to the same *mortal* existence that they had before, and then at some later time they died again.

Not so on the first Easter! We believe that Jesus was *bodily resurrected*. The Son of God had voluntarily emptied Himself of the full exercise of His powers and privileges. We often speak of this as Christ’s condition of humility or “humiliation.” He came to be our savior in our place, and He was subject to death. Jesus was “killable,” mortal.

But on the first Easter He was *bodily resurrected*, that is, He was set free from death and all of its effects. Paul states this directly in Rom. 6:9: “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, no longer dies. Death no longer lords it over him.”

Here is one more thing to believe about that first Easter. Bodily resurrection was definitely a part of the

faith of Old Testament believers. But it was supposed to happen *on the Last Day* (Dan. 12:1–3; Job 19:25–27). True resurrection means that death has been undone; the effects of Adam’s sins have been completely reversed. God promised to do that on the Last Day. But it already has happened on the first Easter; Jesus our Lord experienced *bodily resurrection*.

The next question is, “What does that mean?”

We often say that Easter *proves* or *validates* who Jesus claimed to be and what He claimed to do. This is surely correct! Easter is “the sign of Jonah” that Jesus promised to those who were questioning His authority and His ministry (Matt. 12:38–40). Easter

proves that God the Father is pleased with the sacrifice of His Son for us.

But it is this all? Is the first Easter merely an underscoring of Good Friday? What else does it mean that this Man, the Son of God, our Representative and Substitute, rose in a bodily resurrection?

Think first about the meaning of death. Why do people die today? There is only one ultimate reason; people die because they are sinners. Before they fell into sin, Adam and Eve were immortal. Death only entered in on the day that they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. Every time you read an obituary, every time you attend a funeral, there is only one thing that you know for certain about that person: he or she was a sinner. That’s why he or she died.

Now, hold on to your hats. *Jesus died!* Why? He died, not because He was a sinner but because He came to be in our place, to take our place, to receive the punish-



ment from God that we deserved and so to save us. That means that He also had to die. He died in our place.

But if Jesus came to be our substitute and to save us from all the effects of sin, then that also means that He had to rise in a bodily resurrection. Victory over sin and all of its effects must also mean victory over death—the *undoing of death*. Since Jesus was our substitute, He had to rise in a bodily resurrection. For through Him, God planned to undo sin and all of its effects—even the mortality and death of our bodies.

So, Easter means that in Jesus, God has now overcome even the death of our bodies. He has a plan and a certain hope for us and for all the creation. This cre-

ation is the only one we’ve ever known, and, in so many ways, it is a wondrous, beautiful creation. But the apostle Paul reminds us that this creation is still subject to futility, still groaning like a woman in labor, still waiting for God’s final redemption and salvation to appear on the Last Day (Romans 8). God has a plan to restore the creation and make it again a place upon which He can look down and say, “It is very good.”

Easter means that we have a part in that plan for creation—all of us—bodies and souls. 1 Peter 1:3–5 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a *living hope*

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, *to an inheritance* that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith *for a salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time” (English Standard Version).

Notice the three phrases that I have placed in italics.

Christ’s resurrection took place (as will ours!) in the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe that His was a bodily resurrection.

Through Jesus' resurrection, all Christians have a living hope, an inheritance, a final salvation that will be revealed when Jesus comes again in glory. On the first Easter, Jesus rose in a *bodily resurrection*. Because we are baptized into Him and believe His promise, we will receive a bodily resurrection as well. His resurrection and our resurrection cannot be separated. We might even say that they are actually the same event. In fact, that is what Paul says in his famous chapter about our resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15.

Among the many problems in Corinth, there were apparently some people saying, "There is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:12). It is not the case that they were saying that Jesus hadn't risen; in fact, Paul can mention Christ's resurrection as part of the good news that he preached

At funerals, let us comfort one another in the face of death with words of Easter hope and the promise of bodily resurrection.

and that they had received (verses 3–11). The problem was that some in Corinth were saying that there would be no future resurrection of the dead.

This creates a terrible and monstrous problem that Paul must overthrow—because our resurrection and Jesus' resurrection are the same event, the same harvest.

Watch how Paul proceeds after mentioning in verse 12 the false teaching held by some. He says in the next verse, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised."

Ponder that sentence for a moment. Why would that be true? Couldn't it be true that Jesus was raised, but that we will not? No! Paul's answer comes clear in verse 20 when he writes, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

The concept of "firstfruits" comes from the Old Testament and refers to the very first part of a harvest that is offered in thanksgiving to God. But there is only one harvest. And there is only one resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of ours. His complete victory over death and sin is our promised complete victory over death and sin.

Because we believers in Christ Jesus are connected to Him by our Baptism, we will come forth as the full and final harvest of which Jesus Himself is the first portion. Just as Christ died for us and in our place, He also rose for us and in our place, to guarantee that great and final victory for us on the Day when He comes again in glory. That is what Easter means, most gloriously and most especially!

Easter for our Funerals

If we take seriously the meaning of the first Easter, then there should be no better place to hear this resurrection good news than at a Christian's funeral—right? Let me speak of personal experiences.

In the course of my 12 years in St. Louis, I have attended a number of funerals for "regular" Christians and for "more well-known" synodical leaders. Yet I rarely have heard a single mention of this good news of bodily resurrection in the funeral sermons. I can assure you that this is the case because I listen specifically for it.

Gratefully, the liturgy always offers this comfort of full new life on the last day. But why, when a Christian has died and the body is right there in the middle of the congregation, do I hear only that the soul of the believer has gone to be with Christ?



T rue resurrection means that death has been undone; the effects of Adam's sins have been completely reversed.



Please do not misunderstand me. When a Christian dies, his soul does go to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). Scripture is very clear about that. There is true comfort in this for those who mourn the death of a Christian loved one.

But the death of a loved one is still his death. Death can not separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ. But it is the last enemy to be overcome (1 Cor. 15:26). Our bodies matter to God; with them, we do good and we do evil. The creation matters to God; on the Last Day, through Christ Jesus, God the Father will restore and renew the creation.

A funeral brings us face to face with God's timing that we must accept by faith—the last enemy, whose sting has been taken away, has *not yet* been fully overcome! Could it be that the reason why one might not hear Easter and Last Day Good News at a funeral is because that Easter and Last Day Good News has not been at center stage the rest of the time?

Dr. Francis Pieper wrote these words in his *Christian Dogmatics* when he discussed the condition of the soul between death and the return of Christ: “Holy Writ reveals

but little of the state of the soul between death and the resurrection. In speaking of the last things, it directs our gaze *primarily* to Judgment Day and the events clustering around it” (emphasis added). Dr. Pieper is right. When the Christians in Thessalonica were distressed over the fact that some of their number had died before the Lord's return, Paul did not say to them, “Don't worry: their souls are in heaven with Christ.” No. He wrote, “The dead in Christ will rise first. ... Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16, 18).

At funerals, let us comfort one another in the face of death with words of Easter hope and the promise of *bodily resurrection*.

Easter for Our Future

I teach a Bible class at my home congregation. Last Easter season we did a short study together on the meaning of Christ's resurrection from the dead. I tried to summarize much of what we were studying with this short, to the point statement: “Easter is your future!”

That's just right, isn't it? Christ, the firstfruits, is risen from the dead. In God's timing and in His plan, the remainder of the harvest

will come forth from the earth—all who have died in the Lord and even the last generation of those who are living when Christ returns. Already, by faith in God's great Good Friday and Easter Gospel, we have begun our new life in Christ. We can honor God with the choices we make with our bodies, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (1 Cor. 6:13b–15a).

Most important, we can rejoice in hope, in a certain hope that Easter reveals to us our future in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we can speak with joy the familiar words of the Nicene Creed: “I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And I *look for* the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

Amen!



Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs is associate professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

Here are some points worth keeping in mind when reading Rick Warren's best-selling book.

by Paul R. Naumann

A LOOK AT THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

The *New York Times* number-one bestseller in the “hard-back advice” category is again an evangelical Christian book: Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Many Lutherans are among those eagerly reading the book. And many Lutheran congregations are among those in more than 60 church bodies that are engaged in a spiritual-growth campaign called “Forty Days of Purpose” that requires reading the book.

Many Christians are finding their devotional reading of the book to be very helpful for their spiritual life and for the health of their congregation. Warren has a fresh way of addressing familiar concepts and challenging people with some new ideas, making the book worthwhile reading. Yet the perceptive Lutheran reader will be well aware that Rick Warren is not a Lutheran and that his theology clearly reflects a Reformed or Baptist tradition.

This means that much of what he has to say may be true, but only as far as it goes. In other words, some

of what he writes is not consistent with Scripture and some important points that need to be made are neglected. What follows are some necessary qualifiers that I hope will serve to make one’s reading of the book more edifying.

1. *Creation alone is not enough.* Because Warren is a Reformed pastor, the foundation for his theology is the sovereignty of God. He predicates our worship of God, our service of God, etc., upon the fact that God has created us (First Article of the Creed).

It is true that God has created us to praise and glorify Him. God has indeed shaped us for serving Him. He has created us to become like Christ. But none of this will ever happen

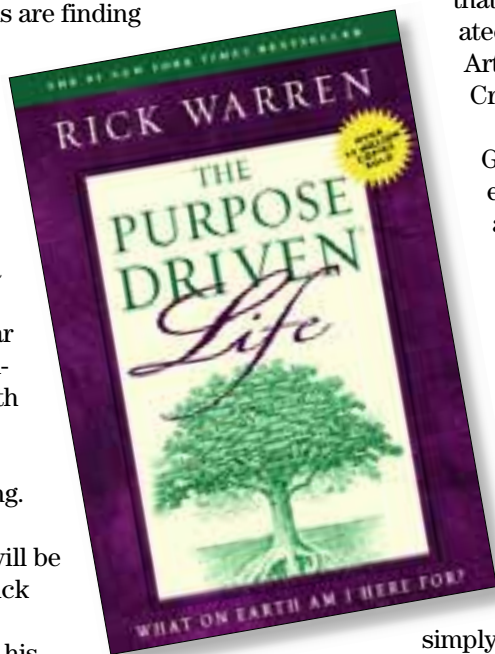
simply because God designed us for these purposes. The reason is that we are also by nature sinful fallen creatures who are spiritually dead and unable to do what God designed us to do (see

Ephesians 2). The only way we can do anything pleasing to God is to be recreated by the Holy Spirit and to be converted into new creations in Christ Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 5).

2. *Faith in Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit.* Many Lutherans have come to expect that popular Christianity will often fail to give full credit to the Holy Spirit for one’s conversion and saving faith. Rick Warren joins many other popular preachers in giving the impression that people must make a decision for Christ by the power of their own free will.

Martin Luther, on the other hand, reminds us (as does St. Paul in 2 Thess. 2:14), that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has to call us by the Gospel and enlighten us with His gifts. As Jesus knocks at the door of our heart (cf. Rev. 3:20), we can open the door to Him only after we hear His voice (see Rom. 10:17). Jesus would remind us, as He did His disciples, that we did not choose Him but He chose us and appointed us to go and bear fruit (John 15:16).

3. *Worship is not only sacrificial.* Warren does well to expand our definition of worship beyond the sanctuary into every aspect of our lives. Yet he leaves out the most important aspect of worship—the sacramental. Before we can respond to God with our praises



and give Him pleasure, we first need to give God the pleasure of coming to us with His grace and forgiveness.

God has eternal glory without us (cf., John 1:14), but He is further glorified by giving His Son Jesus Christ into death for our forgiveness, life and salvation. God dispenses these gifts to us only through the means of grace: Word and Sacrament. Worship is first and foremost gathering around Word and Sacrament to receive God's gifts, and only having received these gifts can we then respond to God with our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, either in church or outside of it (see John 12:23–33).

4. *Baptism is more than a confession of faith.* When Rick Warren speaks of Baptism, he has some creative ways of saying what Baptists usually say about it, namely, that it is an outward sign of an inward reality. In other words, Warren believes that Baptism is only a public declaration of faith on the part of someone who has already become a believer (and for this reason, infant Baptism is excluded).

While Baptism does make a public statement to others that the one being baptized is entering into the Christian community, it is much more than this. As already noted, Baptism is a means of grace. That is to say that Baptism is *God's* action and not ours. The Bible clearly states that in Baptism God gives us the gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

5. *"Ministry" also has a narrow definition.* What *The Purpose Driven Life* has to say about ministry is excellent, but we should note that Warren speaks of it in its broad sense of "service," not in its narrow sense of "pastoral ministry" (i.e., the dispensing of Word and Sacraments).

The Bible uses the word "ministry" (*diaconia*) in both a broad and narrow sense (see 2 Corinthians 4–5 for the narrow sense). Because the Lutheran Confessions have much more to say about "ministry" in the narrow sense—that is, giving the Gospel and Sacraments to people—than in the broad sense, some Lutherans prefer to speak of "ministry" as primarily the activity of ordained clergy and others who participate in the pastoral office. Be aware that when Warren encourages all Christians to do "ministry," he means Christian "service" to people in need—the job of the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), which includes not only clergy, but the whole Church.

These are some things that a Lutheran might bear in mind when reading *The Purpose Driven Life*. Even so, we can be grateful for the book's exhortation about our sanctification and our proper response to what God has so freely and wonderfully done for us in Christ Jesus.



Dr. Paul R. Naumann is senior pastor of St. Michael Lutheran Church, Portage, Mich.

AN ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTION

In *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren sees God's smile as the result of the Christian's obedience. In fact, God's smile in Christ is the *reason* Christians seek to do God's will in the first place.

God's grace and favor are the cause—not the goal—of the Christian life.

Allow me to make a suggestion. Rather than try to work around the problems presented by Warren's book, take instead another look at the Small Catechism as a handbook for the Christian life. There we find resources in our own tradition for understanding God's purposes for us.

The Lutheran teaching of the doctrine of vocation is embodied in the Small Catechism and it gives a completely different focus to the Christian life than does *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Simply put, the Small Catechism sees the Christian life as having a dual focus. It is the life that is lived in faith toward Christ and love for our neighbor.

Faith, not love, is the foundation for the Christian life. The First Commandment is fulfilled by faith alone. But, as Martin Luther said, faith is never alone. Faith bears fruit in love that seeks to aid and assist our neighbor in his or her need.

We "thank, praise, serve and obey" God not in order to gain His approval but because He created us "without any merit or worthiness of mine."

Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed leads to the "Daily Prayers" and "Table of Duties" that follow "the six chief parts" in the little blue Catechism widely used among confirmation students. God is thanked and praised in the prayers that punctuate the daily life (morning, evening, mealtime), and He is served and obeyed as Christians live out their various callings in congregation, family and community (table of duties).

Perhaps the popularity of *The Purpose Driven Life* and its related programs in our churches is a signal that we have forgotten the "extraordinary ordinariness" of the Lutheran understanding of life (to borrow a phrase from historian Mark Noll) that lies behind the Lutheran doctrine of vocation.

Permit me to suggest two books that are fine alternatives to *The Purpose Driven Life: God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* by Gene Edward Veith (Crossway Books) and *The Christian's Calling in the World* by Marc Kolden (Centered Life Series—Luther Seminary).

—Rev. John T. Pless

Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions
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Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Missions to share 'learnings' from 'Pentecost 2000'

LCMS World Mission is putting into book form answers to the question, "What have we learned from 'Pentecost 2000'?" "P2K" is the effort that has identified more than 900 new cross-cultural ministries throughout the Synod.

Information about those ministries is already

available at the P2K Web site, www.pentecost2000.com.

Dr. Allan Buckman, coordinator of the "learnings" project, says it is intended to take those insights to a wider audience.

The P2K goal of starting 1,000 cross-cultural ministries nationwide is

expected to be reached in time for a celebration before the Synod's national convention in July, said P2K Director Marie Biesenthal.

At that time the first of two P2K books, *One People—Many Faces*, will be released to give an overview of the ministries and those involved in

the ministries.

The second book, produced under the auspices of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, is designed to carry more detailed information for starting cross-cultural ministries, and likely won't be available until the end of the year, according to Buckman.

Gathering will include youth from 23 lands

Young people and their adult leaders from 23 Missouri Synod partner churches around the world are expected to attend the 2004 National LCMS Youth Gathering July 24–28 in Orlando.

Gretchen Jameson, communications manager for the Gathering and its sponsor, LCMS Youth Ministry, said that is one more than the number of partner churches and countries represented at the 2001 Gathering.

New interest can reissue 'Luther'

With the movie "Luther" reissued for almost 100 locations as this issue of *The Lutheran Witness* went to press, it will continue "in theaters as long as there is a demand," said Dennis A. Clauss.

Clauss, executive producer of "Luther," said the response has been "very positive" to the offer to reissue the movie for one

week where ticket sales of \$2,500 (for about 500 tickets) are guaranteed.

Clauss said the deadline for booking the movie has been extended for as long as the guarantees are received or until the film is offered in DVD and VHS formats, "which are unlikely to be available before mid-to-late 2004."

For more information, contact Rhonda English at (800) 847-4836, Ext. 85552; rhonda.english@thrivent.com.

Tietjen dies; led seminary in controversy

Dr. John H. Tietjen, president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, through the early 1970s and prominent in the doctrinal controversy in the Synod at that time, died Feb. 15 at his home in Fort Worth, Texas, of complications from cancer.

Tietjen, 75, was pastor emeritus of Trinity Lutheran Church, an Evangelical Lutheran

Church in America congregation in Fort Worth, where his funeral was held Feb. 19.

He was the seminary's president from 1969 to 1974, when its board of control suspended him on what was reported as "charges of malfeasance in performing the duties of his office and advocacy of false doctrine."

That led to a "walkout" involving most seminary students and faculty on Feb. 19, 1974, and their forming Concordia Seminary in Exile (Christ Seminary-Seminex).

Tietjen was a 1953 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

'Gus' Bernthal dies; former district head

Dr. August "Gus" Bernthal, a former Florida-Georgia District president and Synod vice president, died Jan. 27 at his home in Winter Haven, Fla., of complications from Alzheimer's disease.

The funeral service was Feb. 2 at Grace Lutheran

Church, Winter Haven, where Bernthal was pastor from 1950 to 2000.

Bernthal, 81, was president of the LCMS Florida-Georgia District from 1963 to 1974, served as the Synod's fifth vice president from 1974 to 1977, and was a member of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service Board of Directors for more than 25 years.

While he was its pastor, Grace Lutheran's membership grew from fewer than 20 members to more than 2,800. He also guided the congregation in co-sponsoring resettlement of more than 350 immigrants and refugees.

For more news...

For more news—and more timely news—visit <http://reporter.lcms.org> on the Web. That's the Web site for *Reporter*, the official newspaper of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

CTCR recommends fellowship with Kenyan Lutherans

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) is recommending that this summer's Synod convention declare the Synod to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya (ELCK).

The resolution of support for fellowship with the East African church body was adopted unanimously by the commission at its Feb. 16–18 meeting in St. Louis.

A report from discussions between the two church bodies says that doctrinal agreement exists between them.

The ELCK has some 70,000 members in 440 congregations, which are served by 110 pastors and

185 trained evangelists under the pastors' supervision.

"The ELCK and the LCMS, while vastly different from one another, are remarkably alike in our understanding of the life-transforming activity

of the Triune God through Word and Sacrament," Synod President Gerald Kieschnick said after representatives of the two churches met Jan. 27–28 for doctrinal discussions.

"By God's grace," said ELCK Presiding Bishop

Walter Obare, "we expect that together we will strengthen and stand one with the other on the faith we are called to witness to within our respective church bodies and hence also within world Christendom."

Task force looks at teacher certification

The 20-member Next Generation Task Force has found that only one-third of the 18,000 teachers in the schools of Synod congregations are certified.

Kieschnick said that one of the "chief ... challenges is the lack of religious education for many who teach in the schools of our Synod."

Dr. D. Ray Halm, task

force chairman, said that the task force is making five recommendations:

- Increase the number of synodically certified teachers by five percent per year for the next decade.

- Change Synod bylaws "to ease restrictions for enrollment in the Synod's teacher-colloquy program," which leads to certification.

- Offer professional workshops for uncertified teachers.

- Adjust the salaries of certified teachers and provide financial support for those who are taking courses that lead to certification.

- Urge congregations with schools to recruit more teachers who would enroll at one of the Synod's colleges or universities.

Pastor does double duty as fire guts Illinois church

Rev. Don Phelps did double duty during the Feb. 9 fire that gutted St. John Lutheran Church, Sycamore, Ill., as the congregation's pastor and as chaplain for the fire department battling the flames there.

"It was difficult" ministering to firefighters and members, Phelps said.

Local media reported that the fire drew more than 100 onlookers—mostly members of St. John—and fire-fighting units from 11 communities after it began about 5 p.m.

Phelps said that everything inside the building is

thought to be lost except for the church records, kept safe in metal file cabinets.

Neither the cause of

the fire nor an estimate of damage costs was determined by the time *The Lutheran Witness* went to press.



Firefighters spray the surrounding area and battle flames from a Feb. 9 fire that gutted the building of St. John Lutheran Church, Sycamore, Ill.

During a Feb. 15 service in the Sycamore High School auditorium, Phelps assured members that they would rebuild.

"I wouldn't be exaggerating to say that every single church in Sycamore, probably 15 in all, has offered to help us," Phelps said.

Members of St. John "were initially shocked, especially if they watched the fire," he said. "But now, they're pitching in to do what they can."

Sycamore is located just north of DeKalb and about 60 miles west of Chicago.

Public debate over “The Passion of The Christ” has again raised the issue of how Christians have treated Jews over the last 2,000 years—and of Martin Luther’s role in that history.

LUTHER AND THE JEWS

by Uwe Siemon-Netto

What do Mel Gibson, Johann Sebastian Bach and Martin Luther have in common? They all have been accused of anti-Semitism—Gibson and Bach because of their passion film and oratorios, respectively, and Luther because of what he said and wrote in his declining years.

During Lent this year, millions around the world have doubtless concluded from watching Gibson’s movie “The Passion of The Christ” that—contrary to assertions in slick glossy magazines—it can hardly be construed as an anti-Jewish diatribe, simply because it is based on the Gospel narratives.

And even though occasionally the charge pops up on the Internet that Bach, too, was a bigot, audiences will easily discern who in Bach’s mind should feel guilty about Christ’s suffering and death. In Paul Gerhardt’s emotive words, which Bach used for the key chorale in the Saint Matthew Passion:

*’Tis I who should be smitten
My doom should here be written:
Bound hand and foot in hell.
The fetters and the scourging,
The floods around Thee surging,
’Tis I who have deserved them well.*

“I”—all of us sinners—and not just Jews are to blame. This clearly lets Bach off the hook.

But what about Luther, whose

theology inspired Bach so much? Was Luther indeed the progenitor of Germany’s Nazi era and thus the author of the slaughter of 6 million Jews, as visitors of the National Holocaust Museum have been told ever since it opened its doors? This is what we have been led to believe by William L. Shirer, author of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Thomas Mann and many others.

Why, a reader asked, does last year’s film “Luther” not even mention this troubling question that has prompted Lutheran churches around the world to distance themselves from their founder’s sayings on this topic? (Actually, fervent Lutherans such as Justus Jonas had done so already in his lifetime.)

As far as the film is concerned, the answer is easy. The movie only covers a period in Luther’s life when he was among the most outspoken pro-Jewish theologians in the history of the Christian church. In his 1520 exegesis of Ps. 14:7 he wrote, “Damnable is the rage of some Christians (if indeed one can call them Christians) who believe they are doing God a favor by persecuting Jews in the most hateful manner, entertain wicked thoughts about them, and mock their misfortune with pride and contempt.”

These words were all the more



In “The Passion of The Christ,” the depiction of the high priest Caiaphas and his followers taking delight at Christ’s suffering has brought trepidation and anger from some American Jewish leaders.

remarkable as they followed a fierce tug-of-war between Johannes Pfefferkorn, a convert from Judaism who had turned against his own people, and humanist philosopher Johannes Reuchlin, who defended them. Having offered his services to the Dominican order in Cologne, Pfefferkorn schemed to have 2,000 Jewish books confiscated in the Rhineland by these monks, while Reuchlin saw to it that the books were not destroyed but restored to the Jewish community.

Josel von Rosheim, then Judaism's chief spokesman, with whom Luther conducted an extensive correspondence, wrote: "Our enemies, and the oppressors from among our own people [i.e., Pfefferkorn], arose to abolish the written Torah. Then God performed a double miracle, for the Torah was restored to its former glory by a sage among the nations [Reuchlin]."

Luther supported Reuchlin. He wished him Godspeed in opposition to Pfefferkorn's attempt to have all Jewish books destroyed. This was the Luther who, in 1523, reminded his fellow Christians "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," as the title of one of his most famous treatises reads. "If the apostles, who were also Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among them," Luther wrote. "Since they dealt with us Christians in such brotherly fashion, we in turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them. ... We should remember that we are but Gentiles, while Jews are in the lineage of Christ."

He went on, "If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian."

Ah, if only Luther had let the matter rest there. Alas, we can't get away from the bitter truth that toward the end of his life—well after the adoption of the Augsburg Confession in 1530, which is where the film "Luther" ends—the reformer changed his tune radically. In 1543, three years before his death, he penned his venomous book, *Of the Jews and Their Lies*, whose contents Lutherans ignored for centuries but came to haunt them in the aftermath of World War II and to this very day.

He demanded, much like Pfefferkorn, that all synagogues be destroyed "with fire and sulfur"; that the Jews' private homes be razed; that all their liturgical books and Bibles be confiscated; that Jews not be permitted to attend divine service and any religious instruc-

tion by their rabbis, lest they risk execution; that they must not utter God's name; that they are forbidden to work as merchants and move freely in public; that usury be outlawed and Jews be deprived of money and valuables; that young Jews, male or female, be compelled to do hard labor.

So he was an anti-Semite after all, wasn't he? He was not. Anti-Semites are racists, and racists appeared on the scene much later in history—after the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Luther did not think of Jews in ethnic terms; his bias was religious. Just before his death he admonished the princes to treat converts from Judaism as brethren.

Earlier, he had ridiculed the Catholic prohibition against a Christian marrying a Jew. He made clear that he was not bothered with what later would be called "miscegenation" (interbreeding of persons of different racial backgrounds) in the American South: "As I am allowed to eat, drink, sleep, go out, ride, speak and do business with a heathen, Jew, Turk or heretic, so I may also marry and remain in that state, and do not worry about the stupid laws that forbid such things."



Because of his passion oratorios, Johann Sebastian Bach, himself a Lutheran, has occasionally been accused of anti-Semitism. In fact, his oratorios make clear whom he blames for Christ's death: all sinners, himself included.

THE SYNOD'S RESPONSE

The Lutheran Witness, in the "Q&A" column for October 1994, addressed the matter of "Luther and the Jews." Here's what the column said. — Ed.

Late in life, Luther became quite frustrated in his hope that large numbers of Jews would be converted by an honest presentation of the Gospel. That frustration—even bitterness—shows in some of his writings.

That's not to say that we should excuse Luther's invective. And the Missouri Synod hasn't excused it. The 1983 Synod convention resolved that we "deplore and disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people."

Rather, we are encouraged to adopt the attitude toward Jewish people taken by Luther in his last sermon:

"We want to treat them with Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord."

The convention noted that "it is widely but falsely assumed that Luther's personal writings and opinions have some official

status among us (thus, sometimes implying the responsibility of contemporary Lutheranism for those statements . . .)." At the same time, it said, the Scriptural mandate to proclaim the Gospel "to all people—that is, to Jews also, no more and no less than to others (Matt. 28:18–20) . . . is sometimes confused with anti-Semitism."



The convention resolved that:

- ⊕ "we condemn any and all discrimination against others on account of race or religion or any coercion on that account and pledge ourselves to work and witness against such sins";
- ⊕ "while, on the one hand, we are deeply indebted to Luther for his rediscovery and enunciation of the Gospel, on the other hand, we deplore and disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people, and, by the same token, we deplore the use today of such sentiments by Luther to incite anti-Christian and/or anti-Lutheran sentiment";
- ⊕ "we reaffirm that the bases of our doctrine are the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and not Luther, as such";
- ⊕ "in our teaching and preaching we take care not to confuse the religion of the Old Testament . . . with the subsequent Judaism, nor misleadingly speak about "Jews" in the Old Testament ("Israelites" or "Hebrews" being much more accurate terms), lest we obscure the basic claim of the New Testament and of the Gospel to being in substantial continuity with the Old Testament and that the fulfillment of the ancient promises came in Jesus Christ";
- ⊕ "we avoid the recurring pitfall of recrimination (as illustrated by the remarks of Luther and many of the early church fathers) against those who do not respond positively to our evangelistic efforts"; and
- ⊕ "in that light, we personally and individually adopt Luther's final attitude toward the Jewish people, as evidenced in his last sermon: 'We want to treat them with Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord.'"

We are encouraged to adopt the attitude toward Jewish people taken by Luther in his last sermon: "We want to treat them with Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord."



A Jewish man visits the Historical Museum, in Jerusalem, operated by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. Some historians have blamed Martin Luther for the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. Author Uwe Siemon-Netto first demonstrated in his book *The Fabricated Luther* (CPH, 1995) that this charge is not substantiated by the facts.

All this does not allay his harsh words against the Jews, though. What made him turn against the very people to whom Jesus belonged? Historians attribute this primarily to two factors: First, Luther was, at the end of his life, immensely frustrated because the Jews would not accept the Gospel even after he had cleaned it up; second, he was very ill, in permanent pain and generally disenfranchised.

Consider, too, that Luther lived 300 years before Britain's Queen Victoria, the mother of political correctness. In his day and beyond, people did not mince words. Read the foul language his contemporaries and their successors used from the pulpit anywhere—even in Puritan New England; they would make us prim post-Victorians blush.

In fact, Luther reserved some of his choice invectives for his own people. He called Germans "brutal, furious savages," compared them with monkeys aping everybody else. Germans, he said, were gluttons and boozers who should consider their frequent bouts of fever a medicine preventing them from drinking and eating themselves to death. He vilified Germans just as much as the Jews for rejecting the Gospel, pre-

dicting that God would punish them, too. "Deaf, blind and obdurate of heart," these shameful German despisers of the Gospel might as well give up all hope.

Of course, it was the Jews, not the Germans, who suffered the kind of fate Luther predicted for them—and worse. But does this make him the Nazis' progenitor, as his detractors assert? Clearly not. Most of Luther's anti-Jewish diatribes were forgotten until anti-Semites dug them up in the 20th century.

To suggest that Lutheran theology turned Germans into Nazis is a false charge that simply cannot be substantiated by the facts. Nazism did not spring up in solidly Lutheran countries—such as Norway or Denmark—where under German occupation Christians, including the king, pinned the Star of David on their own chests, out of solidarity with the Jews, and explicitly appealed to Luther in their resistance against Hitler.

Nazism was born in Germany, a denominationally mixed country. Its founders were mainly lapsed Catholics (not that I wish to blame Catholicism for this gruesome ideology cooked up by godless minds). And three-fourths of all

concentration camp commandants were Austrians—which means that they were raised as Catholics—according to Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal.

Tragically, the ramblings of the sick father of the Reformation have caused many Protestants today to dismiss his greatest legacy—his theological realism. Of course we must reject what Luther said about the Jews, but this still leaves us with the liberating message of who we are as Christians: *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time justified (by Christ) and sinners.

Gordon Rupp, a British Methodist theologian, had it right when he wrote about Luther: "I confess I am ashamed as I am ashamed of some letters of St. Jerome [and] some paragraphs in Sir Thomas More ..., and must say that their authors had not so learned Christ, and that, thank God, this is not the major part of what they had to say."



Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto is religion editor for United Press International and a member of Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C.

CHRIST ALONE?

by Loraine M. Rathman

Will those who do not believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the only God, share eternity with those who do?

Reading an article recently that seemed to imply the answer is “Yes,” my mind flashed back to my friendship with “Charlie” some 36 years ago. Charlie is a Jew, both by faith and culture. Due to our friendship—one of mutual respect and trust—I searched the Scriptures for any indication that Charlie might receive “the grace necessary to salvation” even though he rejected Jesus Christ as his Savior. While no human can grasp God’s infinite wisdom, I do not believe God would leave such an important matter hidden from our clear understanding. Eternal lives are at stake.

Read the following passages and write out what they say on this matter.

Matt. 11:27 _____

John 14:6–7 _____

Acts 4:12 _____

1 Cor. 8:4–6 _____

2 Tim. 3:15 _____

1 John 2:22–23 _____

The Old Testament writers witness to the God of Israel who yearned for Israel’s faithfulness to Him alone. Beginning with Genesis, Scripture speaks of one true God. Read Ex. 20:3; Deut. 4:35, 39 and Joshua 24:14–27.

How do the inspired writers of Scripture connect the one true God revealed in the Old Testament with Jesus? Look again at the New

Testament readings above, then write your answer.

According to Col. 1:15–17, who created all things, heaven and earth, visible and invisible?

How does God refer to Himself in Gen. 1:26?

Why is the pronoun plural?

John 1:1 and 14 state: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning ... and the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

What is the significance of Jesus’ statement to the Pharisees in John 8:58, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!”? (See Ex. 3:13–14.)

In John 10:30, Jesus declares, “I and the Father are one.” Just prior to His arrest in John 17:1–5, Jesus prays, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

Now read Luke 10:16. If someone rejects Jesus as the Christ, who else is rejected?

In John 8:42–47, Jesus informs the Pharisees who claim the God of Abraham as their God and Father: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God. ... You belong to your father, the devil. ... The God is infinitely wise and full of compassion. Even in His dying moments on the cross, Jesus asks His Father to forgive His execution-



ers, “for they know not what they do.” Throughout Scripture, God’s chosen leaders prayed for His people when He wanted to punish them for their unfaithfulness, and God responded in mercy.

Read 1 Tim. 2:3–6. How is God’s compassion shown here?

According to this passage, what way has God in His compassion provided for the salvation of all people?

Scripture makes clear that it is a mistaken “hope” to think that apart from Christ we will share eternity with God. We need only look at Christ “stricken, smitten and afflicted,” dying on the cross and forsaken by His Father to view rightly sin’s immeasurable cost. We all need His saving grace.

By sharing with others, including the Charlies in our lives, the Good News that God has provided the Way, in Christ, to eternal life, we can be part of His compassionate plan of salvation for His world.



Dr. Loraine M. Rathman is a deaconess candidate and a member of Faith Lutheran Church, East Wenatchee, Wash.

APRIL ...

A BLESSED MONTH!

With the exception of three sisters and August-born granddaughter Kayla, the birthdays of the ladies in my life are in April. That includes wife Terry, daughter Angie, mother Elda and mother-in-law Dorothy. Needless to say, April birthday dinners are a large part of our family tradition!

April 15 is income-tax day, a reminder of both the bane and blessing of U.S. citizenship. We are privileged to pay a price for living in a country whose freedoms and opportunities are beyond the wildest imagination of most of the world's inhabitants.

What makes Resurrection so powerful is that it rewrites the script, it defies natural processes, it accomplishes the physically impossible!

April is also the month in which Easter Sunday most often occurs. This year the date is April 11. Next year it will be March 27.

Regardless of its date, the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord is a very important festival in the Christian church. The apostle Paul says it all: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. ..."

(1 Corinthians 15, selected verses).

Death is a very real part of life. The writer of Ecclesiastes says it succinctly: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die. ..." (Eccl. 3:1-2).

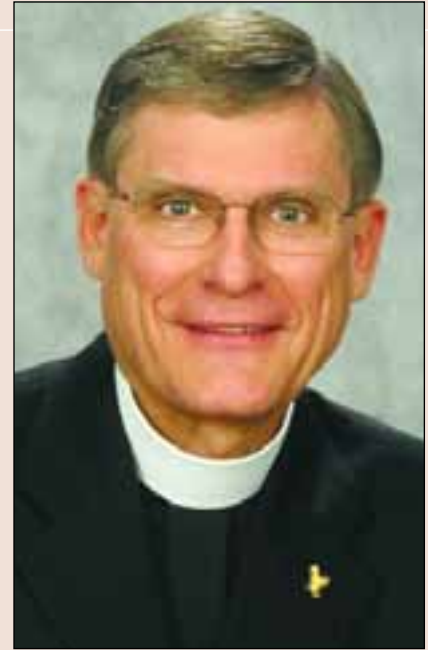
From personal experience, we are aware of the reality of death. Yet, for most of us, the very thought of the undeniable eventuality of its knocking at the door of our lives drives us directly into deep denial, the natural feeling that while death will surely pay its visit to everyone else, somehow it will pass over our own personal portal.

What makes the Resurrection so powerful is that it rewrites the script, it defies natural processes, it accomplishes the physically impossible!

Resurrection separates Christianity from every other religion of the world!

All other religions focus on a person, a leader, a martyr. But no other such figure did what Jesus of Nazareth did three days after His death on a cross, so vividly portrayed in "The Passion of the Christ." Jesus stands alone as the One who died and later lived to tell about it!

What's more, His death and resurrection assure us of our own resurrection and life eternal with Him. Jesus said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, who Jesus raised back to life three days after His death, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will



never die" (John 11:25-26).

May that assurance fill your hearts and enrich your lives, my dear friends in Christ, as you live each day in the month of April, and every month, week, day and year of your life, in the everlasting arms and the all-powerful embrace of our gracious God. His love for the world moved Him to sacrifice His only Son to death on a cross, only to raise Him back to life again, in victory over death.

Again, St. Paul says it all: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Cor. 15:54-56).

A blessed month of April and a blessed Easter Festival of the Resurrection to you all!

Jerry Kieschnick

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

John 3:16-17

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