

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

July 2018

Exhortation

W. A. Karvonen

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Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. (2 Timothy 1:1-14)

THIS EPISTLE, CONTAINING THE LAST WORDS of Paul to young Timothy, was written in a Roman prison while Paul was awaiting his execution. The words *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand* (2 Timothy 4:6) suggest this.

Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. An apostle is a messenger or one charged with a high mission. The mission of the apostles was to preach the Gospel of Christ. 2 Cor 5:20 says: *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus God, who was in Christ Jesus, entreats men and women through His servants.

Paul was an apostle by the will of God. In great zeal and armed with letters from the high priest, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, he set out to Damascus to capture and bring bound to Jerusalem any he found on his way who were disciples of the Lord. Paul did this in his zeal according to his own will. But the power of God overcame him and struck him with natural blindness as he had persecuted the church in his spiritual blindness. To Ananias, to whom the inquiring Saul of Tarsus was directed to learn what he must do, the Lord spoke in a vision saying, *Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.* (Acts 9:15)

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

1 John 2:28
King James Version (KJV)

Now we come to the passage upon which we wish to dwell: *according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.* As we already learned, Paul wrote this epistle in prison, waiting for his execution. One would expect a prisoner awaiting execution to be dejected and thinking of death. Not so with Paul. Not so with those who are hid in Christ. Paul speaks of *the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.* This is the Christian's hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we have Christ, we have life and happiness. Christ is our life. In Christ the believing soul has found all that it has longed for. It has found forgiveness of sins. It has found righteousness—the righteousness of faith—that is acceptable before God. It has found joy—a joy the world cannot give. It has found peace with God—the peace of a good conscience. It has found an

inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven. It has found safety from the floods of the waters of temporal and eternal death. It has found a hiding place (Psalm 119:114). Christ is the Christian's happiness and hope in life. It is the Christian's joy to live unto Christ, to live for Christ, to confess Christ, that Christ's name and word and will and kingdom may be magnified. And when the time of departure comes, the Christian receives the end of his faith, even the salvation of the soul. Death opens up to him the full enjoyment of life eternal.

It was in anticipation of this eternal life that the apostle could speak of life in the face of bodily death. This undaunted courage and confidence of the apostle can be understood only by those who have the same hope, by those who have the love of God *shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* (Romans 5:5)

My friend, do you have this hope of eternal life? Are you looking with faith upon Him who said, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live* (John 11:25)?

There is no other way to eternal life and happiness. Jesus has said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* (John 14:6) *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.* (Psalm 146:5)

The aged apostle would comfort Timothy, whom he loved as a son. Timothy was a young Christian for whom Paul prayed unceasingly day and night and longed for him greatly. His heart was comforted also in seeing Timothy's unfeigned faith. Timothy had had a Christian mother and grandmother. Paul had met him on one of his missionary journeys and, observing the gift of God in him, had asked him to partake in the great apostle's work. So Timothy who had been called to salvation was also called to preach the Gospel. Of this calling the apostle writes: *Who (God) hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Let us pause to consider what was necessary for Timothy in his great calling so that we might also be mindful of what we need in our Christian walk today. The first thing we observe is unfeigned faith. By unfeigned faith is meant a

sincere faith. To be a follower of Christ one must walk in earnest. Christianity is not a mere practice. Christianity is something that we live. The apostle expresses it in these words, *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20) When one sincerely seeks to find the way, God in His grace will lead that soul to the kingdom of God's children where the true Gospel is preached. Paul sincerely desired to know the truth that should make him free. He received sincere faith as a gift from God.

The second thing that is necessary is courage. Those who would be followers of the Lord find themselves pilgrims with no continuing city, but seek one to come by faith in Jesus. Their conversation is in heaven, from where also they look for the Savior. They declare that, *if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* (1 John 1:7) The Christians do not seek after that city as uncertain adventurers but as exiles. Their hope is in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to take them home. They are not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord but are willing partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God. The secret of their courage is that *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

Finally we note that Timothy was exhorted to *Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.* Likewise may we be exhorted to be steadfast and unmovable. May we be strong and courageous in the profession of Christ until He comes again. Timothy was charged to *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.* (2 Timothy 4:2)

In conclusion, therefore, may I repeat the exhortation of the writer to the Hebrews: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Hebrews 12:1-2) Amen!



Christ in the House of Martha and Mary
Johannes Vermeer, Wikimedia Commons

Behold, Christ would here present to us such liberty, so that we as Christians according to our faith may tolerate no other master, but only hold that we are baptized and called unto Christ, and through Him have become justified and sanctified, and say: *This is my righteousness, my treasure, my work and everything against sin and wrong, which the law can do and bring against me. If you want another righteousness, work, law, sin, then take them where you may, you will not find them in me. In this way a man may defend himself and withstand the suggestions and temptations of the devil, either referring to past or present sins; so that these two may be kept wide apart, Moses and Christ, works and faith, conscience and the outward life; so that when the law attacks me and would terrify my heart, then it is time to give the good law a furlough, and if it will not go, bravely drive it away, and say: Gladly would I do and promote good works where I can at the proper time, when among the people; but here where my conscience must stand before God, I will know nothing of them, in this only let me alone, and do not speak to me of what I do or fail to do. Here I will not listen either to Moses or the Pharisees, but my baptism and Christ only shall reign here in full sway, and I will like Mary sit at His feet and hear His Word. But Martha must stay out and go about in the kitchen and do her housework, and in short, leave the conscience alone.*

Martin Luther

What Advantage?

Pastor Ron Holmgren
Hockinson, Washington

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Acts 3:18-21

THE SCRIPTURES WILL ALWAYS HOLD the attention of those who desire truth. It is easy to talk about the Scriptures, in a sense. It is easy to use philosophies and human reasoning to try to work your way through some of the Scriptures. But for those who seek after the truth, when the Scriptures are used the attention will be fixed on it, and there is hope.

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. (Acts 3:18) And like those people in that day, and especially Apostle Paul, I sometimes wonder what it was like, after having the Scriptures in their possession, what advantage did these people have over us? What advantage did the Jew have over a Norwegian, in that time especially? A huge advantage! You remember, if you've read any kind of history about that time, that era, the Roman Empire was reaching way out. They'd gone into Gaul, they'd gone into the British Isles, they were reaching out as far as Scandinavia. And what did they find when they got there? What kind of a people did they find... your ancestors? Absolute pagan heathens. Morally bankrupt. Lost. With no hope. No light. Horrifically corrupted. Not just to the core like every human being is, but even in their lifestyle, and how they lived in their society.

So what advantage do these people have, like Paul and these Jews that Peter is speaking to? Oh, they have a huge advantage, Paul says, for unto them was given the oracles, the writings of God, the sayings of God. And I would dare to say that now, today, in our day, that includes you. What advantage do you have? A huge advantage. Some of us are sheltered from even the society close by us. I am. I am helplessly sheltered. If I walk into a room of strangers, and they happen to ask who I am and what I do, immediately people move away. "He's a pastor... careful what you say, how you act. There's a man of the cloth around here." We have, in a sense, been blessed. Don't take this the wrong way. I'm not complaining at all, but we lose sight, sometimes, of those who are around us who don't have the slightest clue. These people did. And so do we. So let us never forget, never, what the Scriptures say, and may they hold our attention as we desire the truth as well.

And so the proclamation of the commission that Christ had given to them at that time holds true today: there's a call to repentance. That's the church's obligation according to her Master, as Jesus said that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in His name, right there, beginning at Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world, including way up north in Scandinavia, and Finland, and Clark County, Washington. Repent. Be

converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19)

It is no different today. We believe in daily repentance. It isn't a one-time event, though often we mark it that way, and I'm not saying that's wrong. I could give you a date, or at least pretty close—July 1978—when God gave me the grace, the strength, to repent, to cry out for the forgiveness of all of my sins, and to have heard it and to be refreshed with the Gospel message of Christ Jesus crucified for me. But today I need to repent for being who I am, and to look to words like this and to hear words like this, of the refreshing that will come from the very presence of the Lord in His church, as we proclaim the mutual consolation of the Gospel to one another, that we have in Christ Jesus, whom we crucified.



And God's promise is that He will send Jesus Christ, which was before preached unto you. *And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:20-21)* Again, he's drawing their attention to the Scriptures. I have nothing else myself to draw your attention to, to confirm the things I believe, teach, and preach. It is the only thing, and will always be the only source that I can absolutely stand on. It is a Rock, and if we build our house upon this Rock, no matter what storm may come, no matter how much the wind may blow, and the rain may descend, it will stand. And thank God for that. ~

The Holy Spirit Lives in Us

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to each of you. I do hope you are having a good day. Some of you in other lands have lots of sunny days, but where I live we are just starting to get some very nice days and we sure like them. It is spring here and we witness God making the earth all new again in leaf and flower, and even baby animals.

Today I would like to share about the Holy Spirit coming after Jesus went back to heaven. Let's go into the Bible book of Acts 2:1-4.

ONE OF THE LAST TIMES Jesus was with His disciples, before He was taken up to heaven, was in Jerusalem, where He told them to stay until His Father sent His promise of a special power from heaven. The disciples did not know what this power was, but they were in Jerusalem when it came to them.

The disciples were all gathered together, in a home perhaps, and they heard something that sounded like a great rushing wind, and it was all around in the house. There appeared over each of their heads a flame of fire (not burning fire). Acts 2:4: *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues (other languages), as the Spirit gave them utterance (words to speak).*

I imagine this to have been an amazing thing to experience. Just think a moment about this. This had never happened before. The disciples were going to learn what Jesus had meant when He said, "I send the promise of the Father upon you ; but stay in the city of Jerusalem, until you are given power from on high (St Luke 24:49)."



Pouring of the Holy Ghost
Anthony van Dyck, Wikimedia Commons

At this time in Jerusalem, there were many godly Jewish men from every country around, and these men spoke in different languages. They, along with all the people, were amazed because they each heard these disciples speaking in their own language.

Others said that these men were talking strangely because they had had too much new wine to drink. Peter said that this was not so, but this was a prophecy spoken of by the prophet Joel, who said, *It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh (people): and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)* So this was the way that God sent His Spirit to His disciples. We are now partakers of that same Spirit when we believe in God and His Son Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity; and God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are ONE. They cannot be taken apart. When you children tell someone that you believe in God and Jesus, you can be free to say that because of the Holy Spirit living in

your heart. God put the Holy Spirit there and no one can put Him there themselves. **The Holy Spirit is a precious gift.**

I pray that you will keep Jesus in your heart and always keep your heart for Him only. We as Christians are very blessed to have the Holy Spirit living in our hearts and He will lead and guide you on your walk. We are SO blessed also to have Jesus as our best friend. He LOVES each of you so much. Don't ever forget that. God bless your day today, and each day that you serve the Lord. ~

Have you ever snuggled under a blanket or comforter when you were cold? It's very warm and soft and comfortable. Jesus called the Holy Spirit a "Comforter" who will be with us forever.

The Holy Spirit Comforter

After Jesus rose again from the dead, He knew that He would be going back to heaven to be with His Father. He promised the disciples that He would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things, and to remind them of everything that Jesus had said to them.

Ten days after Jesus had gone back to heaven, the disciples were together on a special day called Pentecost. Suddenly the house was filled with the sound of a mighty wind from heaven. Little flickering tongues like fire appeared and rested on each of them. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, languages that they didn't even know how to speak! All the people who heard them were so surprised.

The Apostle Peter told the people about Jesus being crucified and how God had raised Him from the dead. He said that Jesus was now lifted up at the right hand of the Father, and had received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. Peter said the people were seeing and hearing this Holy Spirit being poured out by God. **Three thousand** people received Peter's words and were baptized that day!

The Holy Spirit came to be with us and to comfort us. The Spirit teaches us and reminds us of the promises of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter, who will be with us forever and warm our hearts when they are cold.



From CM for Children Summer 2017

God's Righteousness!

Mark Sunnarborg
Rhinelander, Wisconsin

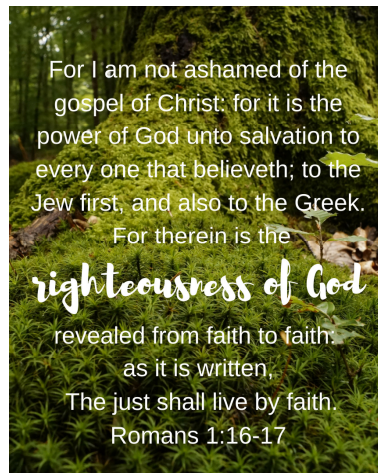
I BELIEVE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS STANDS above all others and is perfect, unspotted, pure, and holy. I believe I cannot obtain or live up to God's standard of what righteousness is; it is too perfect and too holy. I am not, for I am sold under sin, unable to live up to or conform to God's righteous standard. This could not be me, or could it be? We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21 *For he (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* Believers become God's righteousness in and through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ: His suffering and death upon the cross, and His glorious resurrection and victory over death, hell, and the grave. He conquered all that we may have life that is more abundant, full of grace and truth.

Jesus paid the penalty for my sins and the sins of the whole world. He is the spotless Lamb of God. People may believe they are able to reach or are able to possess righteousness as something to hold on to. But if one only believes this, one denies the perfect work God did in reconciling man back to Himself. God has done far beyond what you or I can even imagine by bringing perfect redemption in our Lord and Savior. It is hard to comprehend that as believers we are in God's hand as His possession and righteousness, thus showing us that God through Christ alone won the complete victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave. We are God's possession, His righteousness. God through Jesus has reconciled us, as Jesus shed His blood on the cross of Calvary for the remission of our sins. We have not obtained to righteousness where we may think God is pleased with us. The verse in 2 Corinthians 5:21 speaks to me of the complete and perfect work God has in redeeming me and a lost world.

In this perfect and complete work, Jesus willingly went to the cross to reconcile all who will believe, for this redemption is an individual and personal work of God in every heart and life of those who heed God's call. *Hebrews 12:2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* This salvation that we come to understand is on an individual basis. Jesus found great joy in doing the will of God who sent Him, laying down His life for the sins of the whole world, taking upon Himself what we deserve: nothing but death.

After Jesus completed all that God had commanded of Him, He said, "It is finished." Redemption is now complete. Jesus set this forth and told His disciples that "repentance and the remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations." (Luke 24:47). This message of the Gospel is something we ought not be ashamed to preach for this is needful that man may come to faith and for the saving of his soul. Mankind needs to be saved from their sin and unbelief which is of this world. Righteousness is of God. Believers are God's righteousness in Christ alone! This is you and I. It may be hard to comprehend or believe

because we have this flesh to deal with. Let us be reminded that we are not our own but belong to Him who has loved us with an everlasting love. May all that we say and do this day be pleasing in His sight. We are only able to walk in and by faith because we have experienced God's perfect love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!



Thy Strong Word

Thy strong word did cleave the darkness;
At Thy speaking it was done.
For created light we thank Thee
While Thine ordered seasons run.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end!

Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness,
Dark as night and deep as death,
Broke the light of Thy salvation,
Breathed Thine own life-giving breath.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end!

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous;
Bright with Thine own holiness,
Glorious now, we press toward glory,
And our lives our hope confess.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end!

From the cross Thy wisdom shining
Breaketh forth in conqu'ring might;
From the cross forever beameth
All Thy bright redeeming light.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end!

Give us lips to sing Thy glory,
Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim,
Throats to shout the hope that fills us,
Mouths to speak Thy holy name.
Alleluia! Alleluia! May the light which Thou dost send
Fill our songs with alleluias, Alleluias without end!

God the Father, light-creator,
To Thee laud and honor be.
To Thee, Light from Light begotten,
Praise be sung eternally.
Holy Spirit, light-revealer, Glory, glory be to Thee.
Mortals, angels, now and ever Praise the holy Trinity!

Martin H. Franzmann, © 1969 Concordia Publishing House

The Lost Sheep

Martin Luther

And [Jesus] spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Luke 15:3-7

NOW THIS IS THE FIRST DESCRIPTION of the lovely Christ, set forth by Himself in this Gospel, that He pours out all His heart and is so anxious for the sheep, that He goes after it alone, leaving the ninety and nine; not to frighten or strike it, but to help it and bring it home again, and to rejoice the wretched and sorrowful heart and conscience by His sweet and friendly voice, so that on both sides there is nothing but hearty love and joy for each other, that you can see what great love and pleasure you thereby afford Him, when you cleave to Him with the whole heart and look to Him for every good thing.

You see in the second place how He pours out His joy and unspeakable goodness by external signs and gestures of every kind, and how, when He has found the sheep, He shows Himself so friendly, for He does not deal with it at all according to His own law or force, to which indeed He has a right, to drive it before Him like the other sheep, and leave it go alone. On the contrary He lays hold and puts it on his shoulders and carries it Himself the whole way through the wilderness, takes all the labor and trouble upon Himself only in order that the sheep may have rest and a home, and He does it gladly and heartily, for He is full of pure joy, only because He once more has it in His care. And observe also how well it is with the sheep, how it lies in all peace and safety upon the shoulders of its Shepherd, and how well pleased it is that it lies so softly and does not need to travel, is safe and without care, both from dogs and wolves, that is, from all error and lies, danger and destruction. This is indeed a friendly painting, excellent, lovely and refreshing to behold. For just so Christ our Lord does when He delivers us, which He once

did bodily by His sufferings and death, but now He continually does in power and spirit by His Word. In this way He lays us on His shoulders, carries and defends us, that we may be safe from all danger of sin, of death and the devil; although they even terrify us, and act as if they would tear us away and devour us. For being thus carried is our salvation, and we remain safe from every peril and need fear nothing; just like the precious lamb that lays on the shoulders of the Shepherd will not let itself be disturbed, although the dogs already like fiends bark, and the wolf lurks abrupt, while it hangs its head without any care and sweetly sleeps.

So we do also, if we stand and abide in this article of faith: I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who suffered, died and rose again for us, etc., then we need not worry about being lost, or that the devil can devour us, though he even opens his jaws ever so wide. For we are not then on our own way, nor do we walk with our own feet, but hang about the neck of our dear Shepherd and lay upon His back, where we are entirely safe. For although sin, death and hell appear ever so wicked and terrible, they cannot devour Him; otherwise we poor sheep would too soon be lost and destroyed.

For even as the sheep cannot protect or provide for itself that it go not astray, unless the shepherd continually directs and leads it in the way; and when it has strayed and is lost, it cannot of itself find the right way or come to its shepherd, but the shepherd himself must go after it, and seek it until he find it, and when he has found it, he holds and bears it upon his back, that it may no more be frightened away from him, hunted or seized by the wolf. So we too cannot either help or advise ourselves, that we may obtain rest and peace of conscience, and escape the devil, death and hell, unless Christ Himself brings us again and calls us to Himself by His Word. And when we come to Him and are in a state of faith, even then we are not able to keep ourselves in faith or be steadfast, unless He Himself by His Word and power holds and carries us, because the devil every way and without ceasing watches for us, and lurks about us like a roaring lion, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 5:8 says, to devour us. So that here it avails nothing whatever to boast of our free will and strength, either to begin or continue our return to the Shepherd, and to abide with

Him, but Christ alone, our Shepherd, must do everything. ~



The Good Shepherd James Tissot
Wikimedia Commons

LUTHERANISM CLINGS TO GOD'S WRITTEN WORD. Her motto is the Word of God, the whole Word of God, and nothing but the Word of God, not as a prescriptive letter, but as the power of God unto salvation. In the law and the prophets, in the gospels and epistles, we find one mighty principle, the man who can stand before God and live, the man who is counted just in His sight, so to say the good man, is so by faith only. He is saved by his confidence in that which he finds in the written Word of God, by his trust in the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth us from all sin.

Theodore Schmauk

Forever Love

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Ruth 1:16-17

Many of us are familiar with the Old Testament story of Ruth. Because of a famine, Naomi and her family left Israel and moved to the foreign country of Moab. Naomi's sons married Moabite woman, Orpah and Ruth. When Naomi's husband and sons died, she and her daughters-in-law were left alone.

When Naomi hears the famine is over, she plans to go back to the land of her birth. Naomi and her daughters-in-law set out on the journey, but Naomi encourages them to go back to Moab and find husbands. They cry together, and Naomi reminds them that she's too old to have another husband and more sons. They weep again, and then Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and returns to Moab.

But Ruth won't leave Naomi, and she says something pretty interesting: "Don't beg me to leave you, or to turn back from following you! For where you go, I will go; where you stay, I will stay; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. The Lord do all this to me, and more also, if anything but death separates you and me."

Ruth was promising to stay with Naomi. She wasn't ever coming back to Moab. She was going to be with Naomi until she died, and she would be buried nearby. She was leaving her people behind, her country behind, and her false gods behind FOREVER. Naomi would have to lead them, because Ruth was following Naomi to a people and a country and a God that Ruth didn't know.

June was wedding month and the speech that Ruth gave is often used at weddings. "Whither thou goest I will go..." in this setting means that a wife will follow her husband to wherever he wants to live. I don't say differently, but in many instances the decision of where a couple will reside is made together,

with mutual consent. God made the husband the head of the wife, though, as Christ is the head of the Church. This means that the husband also bears ALL of the responsibility for the wellbeing and protection of his wife and family. The husband is the leader and provider of his home in all senses: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her, and a husband ought to love his wife in the same way.

The wedding vows hold another idea in common with the promise that Ruth made to Naomi. In a marriage, the couple promises to love, honor and cherish each other "...til death us do part." Marriage is meant to last as long as the man and woman live. In this day of throw-away marriages and instant gratification, it can be difficult to stick with a spouse when times get hard, when there are disagreements, when it seems that love has faded away. Remember that God has joined you together and He will sustain your marriage if you both will submit and be obedient to His Word.

But then, after all the promises of faithfulness to Naomi, Ruth ran off and got married? Well, not exactly. Ruth did marry Boaz, but only with Naomi's arrangement and

approval. Ruth continued to care for her mother-in-law, even as her family began to grow. *So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son.* (The Scripture clarifies that the LORD gave Ruth conception!) Ruth gave birth to Obed, and Naomi became his nurse. Obed brought great joy to Naomi. After the birth of Obed, the women of the village told Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord who has not left you without a kinsman. May his name be famous in Israel! Obed will make your life worth living, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."

And Naomi's grandson was famous in Israel. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David. Naomi became the great-great-grandmother of the king of Israel! ~



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Christian Community

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Life Together

INNUMERABLE TIMES A WHOLE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY has broken down because it has sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and to try to realize it. Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves.

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own laws, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, and His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily. And is not what has been given us enough: brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of His grace? Is the divine gift of Christian fellowship anything less than this, any day, even the most difficult and distressing day? Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Christ Jesus? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by the one Word and Deed which really binds us together--the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship...

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it. ~

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.