

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.

June 2022

For the Fathers

Martin Luther

NOW THE ONES WHO RECOGNIZE the estate of marriage are those who firmly believe that God Himself instituted it, brought husband and wife together, and ordained that they should beget children and care for them. For this they have God's Word, Genesis 1:28, and they can be certain that He does not lie. They can therefore also be certain that the estate of marriage and everything that goes with it in the way of conduct, works, and suffering is pleasing to God. Now tell me, how can the heart have greater good, joy, and delight than in God, when one is certain that his estate, conduct, and work is pleasing to God?

Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason (which the pagans followed in trying to be most clever), takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."

What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and

jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that Thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with Thy perfect pleasure. I confess to Thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers. or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving Thy creature and Thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in Thy sight."

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all His angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all His creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools. ~

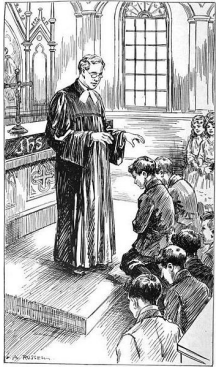


**May the Lord Bless and Keep
You, Dads!**

Restore to Us Our First Love

Oh, Lord, you alone have every heart in your hand. Have mercy on us. Give us grace and restore to us our first love of the truth. As you once performed great deeds solely through your holy Word among our fathers, so grant that same victory now. Bring it out again from under the bushel and place it high upon a lamp stand, and say again, "Let there be light!" so that we and our children may walk under the rays of that light and be saved. May you be praised and honored by countless tongues of saved souls even in these last days, here in time, and there in blessed eternity. Amen.

C. F. W. Walther



A woodcut depicting the confirmation of Lutheran youth

Praying for Our Confirmands

Pastor Ray Stenersen
Kennewick, Washington

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

THESE ARE THE WORDS OF the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ to the church gathered in the Roman city of Smyrna. They were facing hostility, some of which would result even in martyrdom. But Jesus promised them a reward of unmatched value on the other side of death — the crown of life! Victory in His presence,

and being counted among those who have overcome in the greatest way imaginable.

The month of May at Riverside begins with our annual celebration of God's work in the life of our confirmands — this year, four young women will confess their faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ and promise to remain faithful. Please keep Lilly, Victoria, Vanaysa and Lashay in your prayers! As I think back to my own Confirmation Day several years ago, I am always reminded of one of the questions my fellow confirmands and I affirmed, a question that echoes the words of Jesus in Revelation 2:10. We were asked... "Is it your intention, by the grace of God, to be a follower of Jesus Christ and obey the word of God; by shunning sin and walking in the fear of the Lord, even to death?"

We responded, "I do so intend by the grace of God."

That is a very heavy promise! And if you were confirmed at some point in your past, you likely made that promise, too. So, how's it going as you seek to keep that promise? Have you forgotten that you said those words at some point? Do you wonder if you have what it takes to remain faithful to Jesus, right up to the end?

On one hand, you don't have what it takes, and neither do I. In and of ourselves, we'd never be strong enough or wise enough or faithful enough to stay close to Jesus and to follow Him even through death. Peter thought he had what it takes, and so did the rest of the disciples, but they were proved wrong as the events of Maundy Thursday unfolded.

This promise is not one that we can keep by our own ability! But that's why we answer with, "I do so intend by the grace of God." By His grace, we do have what it takes — His life-giving Word, our Savior's finished work declared to us and given to us personally in the Sacraments, and His mighty Holy Spirit to live in us. Not only that, but He gives us the gift of the Church, so that we might never walk the journey alone. Our God is faithful! Our Savior was faithful, even to death! And because our God is faithful to us, we can trust that He will give us the strength to live by faith each day.

May God bless our confirmands, and may God bless us to stick close to Jesus, this month and always!

God's peace!



The Ascension of Our Lord

Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

John 20:17

ON THE 26TH OF MAY we commemorate the ascension of our Lord. Sadly, we barely acknowledge the day, but Jesus took it to be quite significant. He told Mary Magdalene that she couldn't hold on to Him after His resurrection for to complete His mission He needed to return to His Father. Upon His return to heaven, He accomplished amazing things for us. He cleansed the heavenly sanctuary with His blood.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (Hebrews 9:11-12)

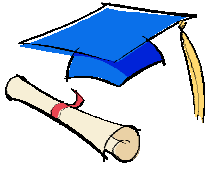
In this way, He fulfilled the promise that He had previously given to His disciples. *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:1-2)*

Once Jesus had fulfilled His earthly work and returned to the Father, there was no place for Satan, our accuser, to remain there and make accusation against us.

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (Revelation 12:5-10)

This is the fullness of what Jesus revealed to Mary in His appearance to her on Easter morning. May we remember the Ascension this year and see the completed work of our Lord Jesus, accomplished for us.

God's peace.



Praying for Our Graduates

Pastor Dennis Hannu
Wolf Lake, Minnesota

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Ephesians 1:15-23

IT IS AGAIN THAT TIME of year when our young people are graduating from high school and/or college. As always we are proud of their achievements and want to encourage them as they make the transition from the classroom to the working world or perhaps from high school to college. Their stamina and commitment to their schooling will serve them well as they move into their careers and jobs. There is always excitement and anticipation that seems to shine from the faces of the graduates as they look forward to the future, perhaps just glad to be done with school or just excited to see what life holds in store for them.

Sometimes for us parents this time of the year may actually be kind of tough as we find ourselves worrying over our children: What will they do for further schooling? What will they do for work? Are they going to make enough money to survive? Should I kick them out of my house? The worrying can become overwhelming if we are not careful.

Paul when he writes to the Ephesians gives us a wonderful reminder as he prays for the people he is writing to. So rather than worry, we pray. We pray for our children, as Paul did for the Ephesians. We thank God for the faith that He has instilled in their hearts and for the down payment He has given them in His Holy Spirit. We pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, and that their understanding would be enlightened so that they would know what the hope of His calling is, and what the glorious inheritance of the saints is. We pray that they would know the exceeding greatness of His power to all who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. We pray that they would see this power through the power of the resurrection. We pray that they would constantly be drawn to the risen Lord Jesus who God raised from the dead and set at His own right hand in the heavenly places. We pray that they would understand clearly what they possess in Christ Jesus and how they are part of His body. We pray that they would live constantly with the understanding of who they are and who they belong to. They are the loved children of the most High God and are part of the body of Christ. He has saved them by His grace.

So, we continue to pray for our graduates. We pray that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, and that they would be rooted and grounded in love, comprehending with all the saints the breadth, length, depth, height, and to know the love of Christ that surpassed knowledge, so that they would be filled with the fullness of God. Amen and Amen.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Congratulations to our graduates this year and God bless you as you move into the next chapter of life. We will be praying for you. ~

Prayer for Our Loved Ones

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19

THIS IS THE PRAYER THAT Apostle Paul had for those in Ephesus, and it should be our prayer for all our loved ones, yea, for our hearts also, and every heart and soul. Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. We see it is an inner working that the Spirit of the Lord does: awakening, convicting, slaying, lifting up, regenerating, giving life, comfort, peace, joy, hope, and blessed assurance. Because Christ comes to dwell in our hearts by faith. This is the reason for the hope. Then love grounds us firmly upon the solid Rock. We begin to comprehend the fullness of God's love and salvation. Breadth, length, depth, and height. And to know the love of Christ.

O Beloved, do we know the love of our Saviour? A love that is so full and rich, a love that is so unconditional, a love that was poured out in eternal abundance to the whole world, a love that was willing to die for the whole world's sake to redeem and save us to Himself, a love that still encompasses us though we are still so poor, weak, and sinful, a love that will preserve us to the end. Yes, it surely passeth knowledge, for we cannot know the depth and richness of it here on earth. But in the measure that He shows us, it fills us with all the fulness of God. Beautiful! O so glorious and precious! So rich in grace! Thank You, O thank You, dear Jesus!

Paul Coponen; Chassell, Michigan. Submitted by Ralph and Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire

The Last of Jesus' Post-Resurrection Appearances

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to you all. It is a new day and God's mercies are new every morning. I don't ponder that as much I should, but it really is so comforting. I pray this finds you well, and that your day is going well. I know when I take time for Jesus before I start my day, that the day does go better.

Today I will pick up where I left off in the last article with Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. I was looking at some other time lines and I may have some of these appearances in the wrong order but I will continue and I think the exact order is not as important as the knowledge of things. Oh, I know Jesus' life was one of order and I certainly don't want to excuse that.

WE LEFT OFF WITH JESUS appearing to the disciples minus Thomas. I failed to tell about the fact that when the disciples told Thomas they had seen the Lord, he did not believe them and said he "would not believe unless he saw His hands and touch His pierced side."

#6 John 20:26-29 Eight days after Jesus appeared to the disciples when Thomas was not with them, he suddenly appeared in the room where the disciples were all still behind closed doors staying out of sight. Thomas was there. Jesus first words were those He'd spoken before to calm their fear: "Peace be unto you." Knowing Thomas' unbelieving heart, Jesus speaks directly to him. **Vs 27:** *Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.* Thomas was humbled and all he could say was "My Lord and my God."

What Jesus says to Thomas next encourages not only him but the other disciples and definitely all who believe in Him, and us today. **Vs 29** *Thomas, because thou has seen me, thou has believed: blessed are they who have not seen, and yet believed.* That surely encourages me, how about you?

#7 John 21 This was the third time after His resurrection Jesus appeared to just His disciples. The disciples Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the two sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were getting back to their work as fishermen and were out all night on the sea of Tiberius and as morning was breaking, they still had not caught anything. Jesus appears on the shore; the men see Him but do not know it is Jesus. Jesus calls out to ask them whether they have caught anything. They of course say, "No!" Jesus tells them to cast the net to the right side of the boat and you know what happens right? Yes, they catch so many fish they could not pull the heavy net into the boat!

One of the men was the disciple John, and he knew by this miracle of the fish that it was Jesus on the shore. He told Peter, "It is the Lord!" Peter was so excited, he dove into the water and couldn't get to Jesus fast enough.

When they all finally get to shore, they see Jesus has a fire going and fish cooking and bread there also. Jesus can see their pleased but maybe somewhat nervous looks, but in His gentle way He tells them to come and dine. I'm sure that was a very special meal together.

#8 Matthew 28 and Mark 16 Jesus had prearranged

with His disciples to meet Him. They met on a given day at an appointed time on a mountain in Galilee. This is called the Great Commission as Jesus reassures His disciples that all power is given to Him in heaven and earth, and He would always help them. He instructs them to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He wants all people to be taught His commandments that the disciples have learned and He promises to be with them to the end of the world. I can picture the disciples listening intently and feeling the weight of their task at hand and the fact that their Lord will not physically be with them as they know He is to go away.

#9 1 Corinthians 15:6 Apostle Paul records that Jesus appeared to 500 brethren at once. This was most likely after His meeting with the disciples on the mountain. Not much is said about the big gathering.

#10 1 Corinthians 15:7 Again Paul records that Jesus appeared to his brother James. No information is given on this visit.

#11 Acts 1 and Luke 24 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and ate a meal with them and commanded them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father. (This was the Holy Spirit.)

#12 Acts 1, Mark 16, Luke 24 These three books of the Bible record the pinnacle event of Jesus' completed work on this earth. Just prior to this the disciples had asked Jesus if He would at this time restore the kingdom of Israel. **Acts 1:7-11:** *And he said unto them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld (looked), he was taken up: and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly (standing still and just staring) toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel: which said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."*

I can just imagine what it would have been like to be one of those disciples staring at this major event of this best friend and your Lord rising up into the clouds. Wow!

The disciples then returned to Jerusalem. They gathered together along with some of the women and were in close fellowship praying and earnestly seeking God through Jesus.

Jesus came and did all His Father had for Him to do and now it was time to return to His holy place seated next to His Father. There He waits to be told by His Father God when He should return to take His children home to Him in heaven. We

await that day. We must pray to be kept from Satan and his many attempts to draw us away from faith in Christ.

Hold steady to your faith. Pray to Jesus for strength as He has promised to be with us, and He never breaks a promise. We have the best Father! I want to wish all dads a blessed, happy Father's Day. ~



Psalm 103—Hymn to the Mercy of God

Paul Kretzmann

A PSALM OF DAVID, voicing his thankful acknowledgment of God's gifts and blessings upon himself, the conclusion calling upon all creatures to join in his song of praise.

V. 1. Bless the Lord, O my soul, a most emphatic invitation and admonition, a joyful self-encouragement; **and all that is within me bless His holy name**, all the organs of the body being called upon to give thanks for the rich blessings of the Lord, to make known the revelation of His essence and all His attributes before men everywhere.

V. 2. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, all the deeds of His mercy and kindness for which He deserves well from all men; **v. 3. who forgiveth all thine iniquities**, the remission of sins being the fundamental blessing in the life of every Christian, and here not only one, but all sins being included in line for forgiveness; **who healeth all thy diseases**, those coming upon men as the consequence and punishment of sin, all internal and external sufferings; **v. 4. who redeemeth thy life from destruction**, delivering, even at a cost to Himself, that of giving His only-begotten Son, from misery and death itself; **who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies**, the full wealth of His grace and mercy being given to the believer like a precious diadem on his head; **v. 5. who satisfieth thy mouth with good things**, giving His blessings in rich measure, **so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's**, whose annual period of molt was used as a picture of rejuvenation through grace, Isaiah 40:31. After this opening admonition there follows a description of God's gracious rule.

V. 6. The Lord executeth, performing with loving care, **righteousness**, literally, "deeds of righteousness," **and judgment for all that are oppressed**, giving proof of His justice in favor of His people, over against all expressions of enmity on the part of the many adversaries of the believers.

V. 7. He made known His ways unto Moses, by revealing and proclaiming Himself as the Lord of mercy in His march through the history of the world, Exodus 33:13, 34:6-8, **His acts unto the children of Israel**, in accordance with the promise given to Moses upon that occasion.

V. 8. The Lord is merciful and gracious, the two attributes here represented being the outstanding features of His conduct toward His children at all times, **slow to anger**, waiting long and patiently for a sign of repentance before pouring out His wrath, **and plenteous in mercy**, His greatness in this respect being revealed to the believers throughout their lives.

V. 9. He will not always chide, making man's behavior a cause for continual legal action, **neither will He keep His anger forever**, as though bearing a grudge against men.

V. 10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, for which we should have been punished with everlasting destruction, **nor rewarded us according to our iniquities**, with the penalty which we had really deserved.

V. 11. For as the heaven is high above the earth, with

its almost limitless reaches, **so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him**.

V. 12. As far as the east is from the west, separated from it by an almost incomprehensibly great expanse, **so far hath He removed our transgressions from us**, and therefore also their penalty. The pictures illustrate the endless power and the utter unreservedness of God's grace.

V. 13. Like as a father pitieth his children, showing them his fatherly mercy, **so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him**, His children through faith in Christ. **V. 14. For He knoweth our frame**, just how we are put together, our weakness and frailty; **He remembereth that we are dust**, for out of it was man originally formed, Genesis 2:7.

V. 15. As for man, his days are as grass, emblem of perishableness, 1 Peter 1:24; **as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth**, Job 14:1-2, its beauty of the very briefest duration. **V. 16. For the wind passeth over it**, the scorching wind coming up from the desert, **and it is gone**, withered and perished; **and the place thereof**, the spot of ground where it spent its brief existence, **shall know it no more**. Cp. Isaiah 40:7-8, Job 7:10. In wonderful contrast to this evanescent frailty of man stands the grace of Jehovah as revealed in the Gospel-message.

V. 17. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, with an eternal power outlasting the frailty of all creatures, **upon them that fear Him**, trusting in Him by faith in the Messiah's redemption, **and His righteousness unto children's children**, shown and given to those who follow in the footsteps of their believing parents, Exodus 20:6, 34:7, Deuteronomy 7:9; **v. 18. to such as keep His covenant**, that of His grace, offered to all men in the Messiah, **and to those that remember His commandments to do them**, making their entire life conform to the rule of God's holy will.

V. 19. The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens, established it firmly as the ever-blessed and all-powerful God, 1 Timothy 6:15-16, **and His kingdom ruleth over all**, since He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Sovereign in His kingdom of power.

V. 20. Bless the Lord, ye His angels, leaders of His invisible creatures, **that excel in strength**, they are heroes of strength, having been equipped by God with unusual might, **that do His commandments**, in acts of prompt obedience, **hearkening unto the voice of His word**, for to hear the Lord's command means, in their case, to execute it at once.

V. 21. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts, the great armies of the heavenly spirits; **ye ministers of His that do His pleasure**, that being the work of the angels, individually and collectively.

V. 22. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion, the entire inanimate creation joining in His praise and thanksgiving; **bless the Lord, O my soul**, the last admonition of the psalmist repeating the thought with which he opened his powerful hymn. Truly, the believers of all times have every reason to praise and exalt the immeasurable mercy of the Lord as revealed to them in Jesus Christ, the Savior. ~



Let Him Deny Himself

St Augustine



And when [Jesus] had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save

his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

Mark 8:34-35

THE FIRST DESTRUCTION OF MAN, was the love of himself. For if he had not loved himself, if he had preferred God to himself, he would have been willing to be ever subject unto God; and would not have been turned to the neglect of His will, and the doing his own will. For this is to love one's self, to wish to do one's own will. Prefer to this God's will; learn to love yourself by not loving yourself.

For that you may know that it is a vice to love one's self, the Apostle speaks thus, *For men shall be lovers of their own selves*. And can he who loves himself have any sure trust in himself? No; for he begins to love himself by forsaking God, and is driven away from himself to love those things which are beyond himself; to such a degree that when the aforesaid Apostle had said, *Men shall be lovers of their own selves*, he subjoined immediately, *lovers of money*. Already you see that you are without. You have begun to love yourself: stand in yourself if you can. Why do you go without? Have you, as being rich in money, become a lover of money? You have begun to love what is without you, you have lost yourself.

When a man's love then goes even away from himself to those things which are without, he begins to share the vanity of his vain desires, and prodigal as it were to spend his strength. He is dissipated, exhausted, without resource or strength, he feeds swine; and wearied with this office of feeding swine, he at last remembers what he was, and says, *How many hired servants of my Father's are eating bread, and I here perish with hunger!* But when the son in the parable says this, what is said of him, who had squandered all he had on harlots, who wished to have in his own power what was being well kept for him with his father; he wished to have it at his own disposal, he squandered all, he was reduced to indigence: what is said of him? *And when he returned to himself*. If he returned to himself, he had gone away from himself. Because he had fallen from himself, had gone away from himself, he returns first to himself, that he may return to that state from which he had fallen away by falling from himself. For as by falling away from himself, he remained in himself; so by returning to himself, he ought not to remain in himself, lest he again go away from himself.

Returning then to himself, that he might not remain in himself, what did he say? *I will arise and go to my Father*. See, whence he had fallen away from himself, he had fallen away from his Father; he had fallen away from himself, he had gone away from himself to those things which are without. He returns to himself, and goes to his Father, where he may keep himself in all security. If then he had gone away from himself, let him also in returning to himself, from whom he had gone away, that he may go to his Father, deny himself. What is deny himself? Let him not trust in himself, let him

feel that he is a man, and have respect to the words of the prophet, *Cursed is every one that puts his hope in man*. Let him withdraw himself from himself, but not towards things below. Let him withdraw himself from himself, that he may cleave unto God. Whatever of good he has, let him commit to Him by whom he was made; whatever of evil he has, he has made it for himself. The evil that is in him God made not; let him destroy what himself has done, who has been thereby undone. Let him deny himself, He says, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

And whither must the Lord be followed? Whither He is gone, we know; but a very few days since we celebrated the solemn memorial of it. For He has risen again, and ascended into heaven; there must He be followed. Undoubtedly we must not despair of it, because He has Himself promised us, not because man can do anything. Heaven was far away from us, before that our Head had gone into heaven. But now why should we despair, if we are members of that Head? Thither then must He be followed.

And who would be unwilling to follow Him to such an abode? Especially seeing that we are in so great travail on earth with fears and pains. Who would be unwilling to follow Christ there, where is supreme felicity, supreme peace, perpetual security? Good is it to follow Him there: but we must see by what way we are to follow. For the Lord Jesus did not say the words we are engaged in, when He had now risen from the dead. He had not yet suffered, He had still to come to the Cross, had to come to His dishonouring, to the outrages, the scourging, the thorns, the wounds, the mockeries, the insults, Death.

Rough as it were is the way; it makes you to be slow; you have no mind to follow. But follow on. Rough is the way which man has made for himself, but what Christ has trodden in His passage is worn smooth. For who would not wish to go to exaltation? Elevation is pleasing to all; but humility is the step to it. Why do you put out your foot beyond you? You have a mind to fall, not to ascend. Begin by the step, and so you have ascended.

This step of humility those two disciples were loth to have an eye to, who said, *Lord, bid that one of us may sit at Your right hand, and the other at the left in Your kingdom*. They sought for exaltation, they did not see the step. But the Lord showed them the step. For what did He answer them? You who seek the hill of exaltation, can you drink the cup of humiliation? And therefore He does not say simply, *Let him deny himself, and follow Me* howsoever: but He said more, *Let him take up his cross, and follow Me*.

What is, Let him take up his cross? Let him bear whatever trouble he has; so let him follow Me. For when he shall begin to follow Me in conformity to My life and precepts, he will have many to contradict him, he will have many to hinder him, he will have many to dissuade him, and that from among those who are even as it were Christ's companions. They who hindered the blind men from crying out were walking with Christ. Whether therefore they be threats or caresses, or whatsoever hindrances there be, if you wish to follow, turn them into your cross, bear it, carry it, do not give way beneath it. ~

East to West

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

IF YOU'VE TRAVELED ACROSS THE United States by car, you know that it's a long drive from the east coast to the west coast. Sometimes, especially if you have several small children along, it seems that you will never arrive at your destination. East and west seem so very far apart, and they are.

There are a few phrases in Psalm 103 that speak of vast distances.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

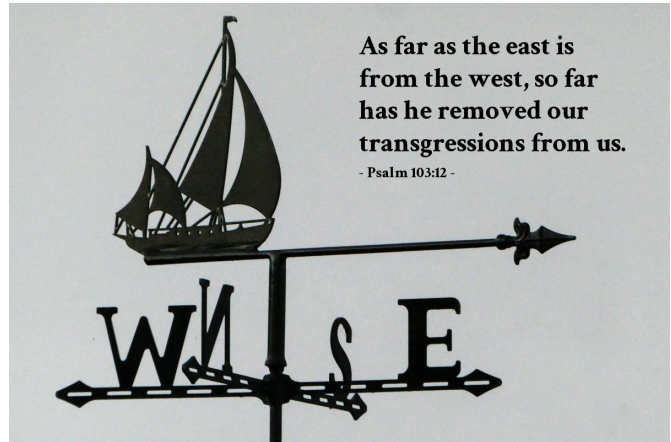
*The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. **For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.***

*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. **But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.***

The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul. (Psalm 103)

How far is "the east" from "the west"? So far that we can't measure it! Much, much farther than the east coast is from the west coast. If we stand on the equator and travel east, we can continue to travel east forever. There is always more "east" in front of us. The same is true if we travel west. We can continue in a westward direction, and there will always more "west" before us.

This is how far our good God has removed our transgressions from us! By the perfect sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, our sins are sent in one direction, and we are sent in another, never to meet again.



How high are "the heavens" above the earth? And how vast is the distance from "everlasting" to "everlasting"? These distances also are immeasurable! Yet these vast and immeasurable distances show how very great the mercy of the Lord is toward those who fear Him.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. **For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.** For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:6-11)*

The ways of the Lord are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. The Lord continues to send His Word forth through the mouths of humans, accomplishing salvation in the hearts of people, bringing them to repentance and faith.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! ~

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Faith Distilled

Pastor Jason Salmi
Vancouver, Washington

HERE'S A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT: Imagine that you were visiting a prison just as one of the inmates was about to be led to the place of his execution. He's suddenly overcome with emotion and begins to cry out that he's not ready to die. The warden, knowing that you are a Christian, grabs you by the arm and quickly pulls you into

a room. He then takes the condemned man in his shackles and brings him into the room. Looking at his watch, the warden says to you, "I have to take him away in five minutes. You're a Christian...and this man's about to meet God. Get him ready."

Granted, this is a highly unlikely scenario. Yet thinking about something like this can be very helpful in thinking through what it is to be a Christian. After all, the only way to "get someone ready" to leave this life and stand before God is to make them a Christian.

Besides, even if this particular set of circumstances isn't likely to happen to you anytime soon, nevertheless we have a Scriptural mandate as believers to figure out how we could, at the drop of a hat, share at least the fundamentals of the Christian faith: *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you... (1 Peter 3:15)* In the thought experiment above, you'd have a man sitting before you who would be in desperate need of hearing, "a reason for the hope that is in you."

So where would you start? Would you ask him how often he'd been to church in the last few years? Find out what his family's faith had been like? Most of us would quickly write those off as irrelevant. Perhaps you could ask what he'd done to be sentenced to death. Maybe try to figure out if he was really sorry for having committed that crime? Under other circumstances, those would be fine topics to pursue, but your time is limited. Every minute is precious. You need to find a way to share the most basic, core message of salvation. You need the Bible distilled down to its most concentrated essence.

The central message of the entire Bible, as pertaining to salvation, can be summed up in two simple words: Law and Gospel. In fact, this is such a simplification it can easily be overlooked or overcomplicated. But remembering these two words can prepare you to explain to anyone regarding, "the reason for the hope that is in you," without any time needed to prepare.

The Law is this: That, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23) and, "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Therefore, every single person, regardless of the life they've lived, and whether we'd judge it to be either good or bad, stands guilty before God and deserves His righteous condemnation.

And the Gospel is this: That, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life," (John 3:16) and Jesus, "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." (Romans 4:25)

Here's the end of the thought experiment: As you finish telling the condemned man that Jesus died for his sins and rose again from the dead, the warden opens the door and takes the man away. And the question is this: was proclaiming the Law and the Gospel enough for the man to be saved? According to John 3:16, as well as Jesus' clear testimony to the repentant thief on the other cross, the answer is, "Yes."

I pray that contemplating the central message of Christianity in this way will help you to more easily share your faith whenever the opportunity arises. ~

The greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labor worth while, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve Him. In all the world this is the noblest and most precious work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the salvation of souls. Now since we are all duty bound to suffer death, if need be, that we might bring a single soul to God, you can see how rich the estate of marriage is in good works. God has entrusted to its bosom souls begotten of its own body, on whom it can lavish all manner of Christian works. Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal. Whoever teaches the gospel to another is truly his apostle and bishop. Mitre and staff and great estates indeed produce idols, but teaching the gospel produces apostles and bishops. See therefore how good and great is God's work and ordinance!

Martin Luther