

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.

March 2024

The Treasure of Faith

Martin Luther

TRUE FAITH IN CHRIST IS a treasure beyond comparison which brings with it complete salvation and saves man from every evil, as Christ says in the last chapter of Mark 16:16: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Isaiah contemplated this treasure and foretold it in chapter 10: “The Lord will make a small and consuming word upon the land, and it will overflow with righteousness” (Isaiah 10:22). This is as though he said, “Faith, which is a small and perfect fulfilment of the law, will fill believers with so great a righteousness that they will need nothing more to become righteous.” So Paul says, Romans 10:10, “For man believes with his heart and so is justified.”



Should you ask how it happens that faith alone justifies and offers us such a treasure of great benefits without works in view of the fact that so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed in the Scriptures, I answer: First of all, remember what has been said, namely, that faith alone, without works, justifies, frees, and saves; we shall make this clearer later on. Here we must point out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises. Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability. That is why they are called the Old Testament and constitute the Old Testament. For example, the commandment, “You shall not covet” (Exodus 20:17), is a command which proves us all to be sinners, for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it. Therefore, in order not to covet and to fulfil the commandment, a man is compelled to despair of himself, to seek the help which he does not find in himself elsewhere and from someone else, as stated in Hosea 13:9: “Destruction is your own, O Israel: your help is only in me.” As we fare with respect to one commandment, so we fare with all, for it

is equally impossible for us to keep any one of them.

Now when a man has learned through the commandments to recognize his helplessness and is distressed about how he might satisfy the law—since the law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope—then, being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself nothing whereby he may be

justified and saved. Here the second part of Scripture comes to our aid, namely, the promises of God which declare the glory of God, saying, “If you wish to fulfil the law and not covet, as the law demands, come, believe in Christ in whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty, and all things are promised you. If you believe, you shall have all things; if you do not believe, you shall lack all things.” That which is impossible for you to accomplish by trying to fulfil all the works of the law—many and useless as they all are—you will accomplish quickly and easily through faith. God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing. “For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all,” as it is stated in Romans 11:32. Thus the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand and fulfil what the law prescribes so that all things may be God’s alone, both the commandments and the fulfilling of the commandments. He alone commands, he alone fulfils.

Therefore the promises of God belong to the New Testament. Indeed, they are the New Testament. Since these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free, and peaceful words, full of goodness, the soul which clings to them with a firm faith will be so closely united with them and altogether absorbed by them that it not only will share in all their power but will be saturated and intoxicated by them. If a touch of Christ healed, how much more will this most tender spiritual touch, this absorbing of the Word, communicate to the soul all things that belong to the Word. This, then, is how through

faith alone without works the soul is justified by the Word of God, sanctified, made true, peaceful, and free, filled with every blessing and truly made a child of God, as John 1:12 says: "But to all who ... believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

From what has been said it is easy to see from what source faith derives such great power and why a good work or all good works together cannot equal it. No good work can rely upon the Word of God or live in the soul, for faith alone and the Word of God rule in the soul. Just as the heated iron

glows like fire because of the union of fire with it, so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul. It is clear, then, that a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law. It is true that "the law is not laid down for the just" (1 Timothy 1:9). This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which does not induce us to live in idleness or wickedness but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation. This is the first power of faith. ~

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:1-6

Family Calling



God's Word is actually inscribed on one's spouse. When a man looks at his wife as if she were the only woman on earth, and when a woman looks at her husband as if he were the only man on earth; yes, if no king or queen, not even the sun itself sparkles any more brightly and lights up your eyes more than your own husband or wife, then right there you are face to face with God speaking. God promises to you your wife or husband, actually gives your spouse to you, saying: "The man shall be yours; the woman shall be yours. I am pleased beyond measure! Creatures earthly and heavenly are jumping for joy." For there is no jewelry more precious than God's Word; through it you come to regard your spouse as a gift of God and, as long you do that, you have no regrets.

Martin Luther

WA 34:52.12-21, translated by Hendrix, "Luther on Marriage," 347.

Marriage and the family include many different callings: as son or daughter, as spouse, as mother or father, brother- or sister-in-law, uncle or aunt, cousin, and so forth. Each calling has its own particular characteristics as well as its timing. The relationship between parent and child changes, for example, as the child becomes an adult and the parent ages. Uncles and aunts have a particularly significant calling in helping nieces and nephews to leave home. But no matter what the calling, they are all life-conditioning, life-shaping—points at which knowingly or without knowledge aforethought a person actually functions as God's mask, hand, or channel.

The familial callings are so important, in fact, that in this connection Luther can use language that he otherwise assiduously attacks and resists: called by God, the believer becomes God's partner and friend, working with God to look after the aging parent, to love a spouse, to give life to a child, and so to contribute to the future of the community. The partnership is not exclusive to the family—labor with head or hands, callings in church and state are all blessed by God as points of specific service. But the life-giving, life-shaping characteristics of the household give it a prior significance.

In this partnership, the believer is literally law-free. The relationship, whether as spouse or in some other familial connection, takes over. Caught up in it, the believer does without the law what the law requires. So older couples, commended for the years of love and service to one another, will generally reply that they didn't realize that there was an alternative—it just happened. This kind of lawlessness is a hallmark of grace, breaking loose in the down-to-earth connections of everyday life. In vocation, the sinner grasped by faith is becoming what Adam and Eve were intended to be, a free and joyous creature of the earth.

James Arne Nestingen

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Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

The Essence of Lent

Pastor Chuck Bylkas
South Range, Michigan

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the spirit driveth Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto Him.

Mark 1:9-13



EACH YEAR, THE FIRST SUNDAY of Lent directs our attention to the temptation of Jesus Christ. It is fitting that we should begin the Lenten season in this manner. In Adam, the fall of mankind begins with temptation, and so also in Christ, the redemption of the human race begins with temptation.

In his manner, Mark bears record of this event in his Gospel in a rather succinct way. What appears to be an unfolding drama, pitting good against evil is anything but uncertain. The Second Adam will not fail in His battle against the devil, the way the first Adam did. Christ will not fail in His encounter with Satan, **because He cannot fail.** Jesus Christ is the Son of the Most High God.

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. (Romans 5:18)

This is the best news for us as fallen sinners, because the Second Adam's victory is our victory as well. In His baptism, Christ joins Himself to the human race in order to save it. The season of Lent is a journey that leads us to mankind's redemption at the Cross. This is the new creation, from which there will be no fall. The Second Adam overcomes temptation for us, enlightens us with His teaching, suffers for us, dies for us, rises for us and ascends for us. *Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that*

like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection... (Romans 6:4-5)

This is the essence of Lent. Life springing forth from death. The seed of the woman has crushed the head of the serpent. We have the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ and newness of life in His death and Resurrection. God bless you all with the blessed assurance of Christ's finished work in this Lenten season.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57
Yours in Christ.

The Resurrection of the Body

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

1 Corinthians 15:12-28

We therefore have formed the belief that our bodies also do rise again. For although they go to corruption, yet they do not perish; for the earth, receiving the remains, preserves them, even like fertile seed mixed with more fertile ground. Again, as a bare grain is sown, and, germinating by the command of God its Creator, rises again, clothed upon and glorious, but not before it has died and suffered decomposition, and become mingled with the earth; so it is seen from this, that we have not entertained a vain belief in the resurrection of the body. But although it is dissolved at the appointed time, because of the primeval disobedience, it is placed, as it were, in the crucible of the earth, to be recast again; not then as this corruptible body, but pure, and no longer subject to decay: so that to each body its own soul shall be restored; and when it is clothed upon with this, it shall not experience sorrow, but shall rejoice, continuing permanently in a state of purity, having for its companion a just consort, not an insidious one, possessing in every respect the things pertaining to it, it shall receive these with perfect accuracy; it shall not receive bodies diverse from what they had been, nor delivered from suffering or disease, nor as rendered glorious, but as they departed this life, in sins or in righteous actions: and such as they were, such shall they be clothed with upon resuming life; and such as they were in unbelief, such shall they be faithfully judged.

Saint Irenaeus

Biblical Events for March

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children, all across the land,

Hello to all of you. Once again I do hope this finds you well. Maybe you are not well, as at this time of year sicknesses are present. I have been dealing with a virus for two weeks now and today my energy is low. Writing doesn't require too much energy, so it is possible.

I thought to look into some biblical events that happened in March.



It was around the month of March, hundreds of years before, that Moses consecrated his sons to be the first priests in the new tabernacle. At that time, this was the first Holy place for God. In it was kept the Ark of the Covenant.

This tabernacle was a tent structure, and it moved with the Israelites. Its final place to be set up was in Shiloh where it stayed for 369 years.

God instructed Moses to carry the Tabernacle with him as he led the Israelites out of Egypt. Then during the 40-year journey through the wilderness. It remained the holy place for God for 440 years, and after that time the First Temple was built.

The First Temple was built by King Solomon after King David had conquered Jerusalem. It was approximately 470 years later that King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the First Temple and took captive many Israelites from the city to Babylon. They would remain in captivity for 70 years under Nebuchadnezzar's rule. This was called the Babylonian Captivity.

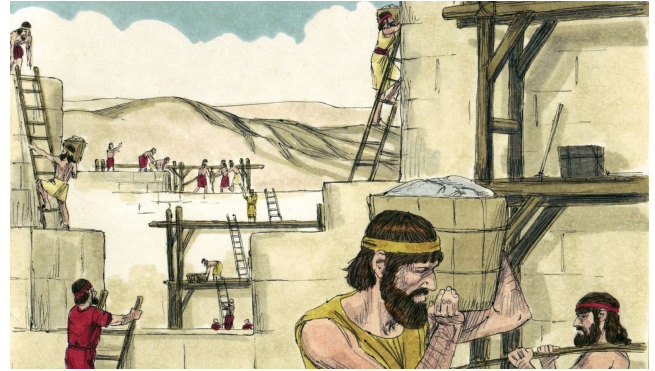
It was 100 years from the First Temple being destroyed, to the second when King Herod the Great made it all new again. That reconstruction took 46 years.

After construction was complete, the new Temple was rededicated. This Temple was called the Second Temple, later known as Herod's Temple.

Another event was the happening of Queen Esther putting her life on the line by going onto the King uninvited, to plead for the saving of her people, the Jews. Haman, the King's top man, wanted to have the Jews all killed. When the King finds out the horrible thing has been planned with great deception, he has Haman and his sons hung on the gallows. Haman's ten sons died on the very date that Haman had planned to destroy the Jews. Esther declared a time of fasting to remember this time of deliverance. This was celebrated every year.



Yet another event that became a tradition for the Jews was remembering the time that Nehemiah began the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This rebuilding took just 52 days, which I find incredible. The walled city wall is 4,018 meters (2.4966 miles), the average height is 12 meters (39.37 feet), and the average thickness is 2.5 meters (8.2 feet). I would have to say that took a lot of manpower.



King Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed the city of Jerusalem on March 16, 597 B.C.



Yet another and very special event was Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple to dedicate Him and to offer a sacrifice for her purification. It was at this time that Simeon and Anna prophesied over Jesus. Joseph and Mary marveled at the words that they spoke.



I hope you found these happenings interesting. They are all part of God's plan for mankind. Jesus was sent to the world to save us from sin and do away with the old ways and make all things new.

He makes our hearts new and forgave us by shedding His own blood. Such a great sacrifice! Let us keep learning about His will for us and leaning on His everlasting arms. God the Father and Jesus the Son love you all so much.

God's peace.

Good Works

Pastor Nicholas Kandoll
New York Mills, Minnesota

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Matthew 6:1-7

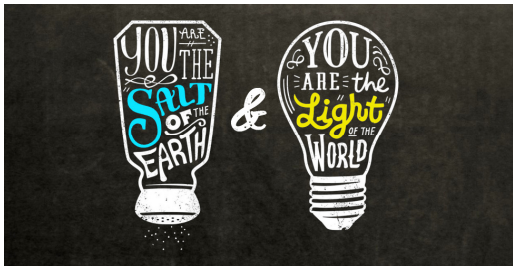
SOME MAY BE CONFUSED BY these words of Jesus. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount He says, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16) On the one hand Jesus says to do our works to be seen by others, and on the other He says if we do these things out in the open we have our reward. The difference lies in our motivation. Jesus doesn't want us to practice righteousness in order to heap up glory for ourselves ...*that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you they have their reward.* Rather, He calls us to give God all the glory.

This is an important reminder to us, especially during the season of Lent. There are plenty of pious Lenten practices that are good and glorify God, but if we do them in the wrong spirit we end up doing the opposite. But how are we supposed to control our motivations? Wouldn't God be just as pleased with us doing something good even if we ourselves have sinful intentions? Paul says in Romans 3: *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.* (Romans 3:20)

We can't control every thought that we have, and in our desire to do good works we will have sinful motives and intentions. The good works that we do flow from our faith; they are not for salvation. When in our attempt to serve our neighbor we have thoughts that pop up, the answer isn't to not attempt to do good works but to repent. To experience contrition, that is Godly sorrow over our sin, and look to Jesus who graciously forgives. This is how God works in this world. He accomplishes His good through sinners who are saved by grace. And we give Him all the glory.

God's peace.

Salt of the Earth and Light of the World



Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

"Ye are the salt." Jesus does not say, "You must be the salt." It is not for the disciples to decide whether they will be the salt of the earth, for they are so whether they like it or not; they have been made salt by the call they have received. Again, it is: "Ye are the salt," not "Ye have the salt." By identifying the salt with the apostolic proclamation the Reformers robbed the saying of all its sting. No, the word speaks of their whole existence in so far as it is grounded anew in the call of Christ. The call of Christ makes those who respond to it the salt of the earth in their total existence.

The call of Jesus makes the disciple community not only the salt but also the light of the world; their activity is visible. "Ye are the light. Once again it is not: "You are to be the light;" they are already the light because Christ has called them. They are a light which is seen of men, they cannot be otherwise, and if they were it would be a sign that they had not been called. How impossible, how utterly absurd it would be for the disciples—these disciples, such men as these!—to try and become the light of the world! No, they are already the light, and the call has made them so. Nor does Jesus say, "You have the light." The light is not an instrument which has been put into their hands, such as their preaching. It is the disciples themselves. The same Jesus who, speaking of Himself, said, "I am the light," says to His followers, "You are the light in your whole existence, provided you remain faithful to your calling. And since you are that light, you can no longer remain hidden, even if you want to." It is the property of light to shine. A city set on a hill cannot be hid; it can be seen for miles away, whether it is a fortified burgh, a stronghold, or a tottering ruin. This city set on the hill is the disciple community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
The Cost of Discipleship

Our Source of Life

Alvin Holmgren

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST is our source of life. The resurrection of Jesus is life itself. When Jesus spoke with Martha at the time of the death of her brother, Lazarus, He told her that her brother would rise again. Martha replied that she knew he would rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Then Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Then Jesus asked Martha, "Believest thou this?" She responded, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (John 11:25-27)

It is also through Jesus that we have received eternal life. We are confident that through Him we will be victorious over death, our final enemy. By His atoning sacrifice Jesus has paid our sin debt. He has ransomed us from the power of the grave; He has redeemed us from death. He has fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea, *O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.* (Hosea 13:14)

The celebration of Easter is a celebration of life. In order for us to rightly celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must first be able to celebrate our own resurrection. By this I do not mean a resurrection from physical death to physical life such as Lazarus experienced. My reference is to the life-giving transition from the darkness of spiritual death that Christ has made possible for us through His glorious resurrection from the dead. In our Christian faith, we do not only see a distant future hope that will be realized because of

the resurrection of Jesus, but the power of His resurrection has become a present reality. Apostle Paul explained it in these words, *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.* (Ephesians 2:1, 6-7) This is also what Apostle John was referring to when he wrote, *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.* (Revelation 20:6)



For these resurrection blessings, let us join Apostle Peter in the praise of God by saying, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Let us remember the promise of the Lord's second coming, and look forward to the day of His return. *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.* (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16-18)

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58



The Masks of God

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

Do you wear a mask? During the pandemic, that question became quite controversial. If you wore a mask, people thought you were afraid of “the” virus; if you didn’t, you were uncaring and unloving with regard to your neighbor, especially your weak or elderly neighbor. It seemed there was no good answer to the mask-wearing question.

Have you considered that God wears a mask? During the Reformation era, clarification transpired around the doctrine of vocation, or calling. Before that time, most people believed that those in religious service (priests, monks, nuns) had a holy calling, but the ordinary person had no calling from God. The Reformers taught that God has called ALL people to serve their neighbor, and He has put people into different positions to fulfill that calling. For example, you may be a husband or wife, a father or mother, a son or daughter. You might be an employer or employee. You could be a teacher or student, commander or foot soldier, farmer or grocery clerk. We often wear several of those titles, and many others as well.

As we fulfill the duties of each of those positions, God is “hidden” behind a mask, serving the people around us. And when others work in their vocations, God is hidden behind a mask, serving us through our neighbor. We serve our neighbor and God is working, hidden behind a mask. We serve our neighbor and He is glorified.

Here is what Martin Luther wrote about the masks of God:

What is our work in field and garden, in town and house, in battling and in ruling, to God, but the work of children, through which He bestows His gifts on the land, in the house, and everywhere? Our works are God’s masks, behind which He remains hidden, although He does all things. If Gideon had not obeyed and gone to battle with Midian, the Midianites would never have been conquered, although God could, of course, have conquered them without Gideon. He could give children without using men and women. But He does not want to do this. Instead, He joins man and woman so that it appears to be the work of man and woman, and yet He does it under the cover of such masks. He could also give you corn and fruit without your ploughing and planting, but that is not His will; neither is it His will that your ploughing and planting should produce corn and fruit; but you must plough and plant and say a blessing on your work and pray: “Now help, O God; give us now corn and fruit, dear Lord; for ploughing and planting will not yield us anything. It is Thy gift.”

Labor, and let Him give the fruits. Govern, and let Him give His blessing. Fight, and let Him give the victory. Preach, and let Him win hearts. Take a husband or a wife, and let Him produce the children. Eat and drink, and let Him nourish and strengthen you. And so on. In all our doings He is to work through us, and He alone shall have the glory from it, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:7: “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

God is the giver of all good gifts; but you must fall to, and take the bull by the horns, which means you must work to give God an occasion and a mask.

The “mask” that God wore when He took on human flesh was perhaps, for many years, His most hidden service to us. God Himself became Incarnate—the true God veiled in human flesh—for us and our salvation. So well-hidden was His divinity that His followers didn’t see His glory until He revealed it at the Transfiguration. For just a moment, Christ removed His “mask” and the glory of the Lord shone upon them.

Christ has transfigured the gloom of our dark night into the brilliance of His salvation. The hymn “And Can It Be?” by Charles Wesley reflects this thought well:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee.
Amazing love! how can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me!
No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th’eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Amazing love! how can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me!

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God Is Kind

Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:4-10

THE MESSAGE THAT PAUL DELIVERS is at the heart of the beauty of Easter: when Jesus rose from the dead He took us with Him. He made us who were dead in sins alive with Him, saving us and seating us together with and in Him in the heavenly places. Now He continues to show the riches of His grace to us by His kindness through Jesus Christ. Paul's ages to come aren't simply future but include the time we live in now. This is what God is doing now.

So here then is the truth of Easter: God is kind. He raised up the helpless and gave us new life. God is kind, a message that bears repeating because so often He is depicted by us as being anything but kind. God is kind. He has saved us by His grace, gifted us with salvation, and recreated us. We are the work of His hand created in Christ to do as He wants us to. In His kindness God has given us the works we are to do as gift, that now we may walk in them. Paul makes this clear in another of his epistles as well:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

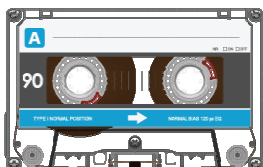
2 Corinthians 5:14-17

The love of Christ now holds us fast because we understand that the death of Christ is for all of humankind. Therefore, at the end, all will be resurrected, without exception, even as the Scripture says, some to eternal life and some to death; but all will be raised. So God in His kindness has stood in our stead to deliver us, and we in His kindness, no longer judge people in their oldness. but we know that through Christ they are new. No one is to be seen in the old but spoken to according to the new. The new creation has come in Christ; old things are gone and everything is new. This is now the way things are in the Spirit. They aren't discerned by the fleshly mind; only by the Spirit can we see and understand God's work rightly.

With Easter through God's kindness our world has changed forever and is now simply awaiting the revelation of that truth in human history, though in the Spirit it's already seen. So in the lyrics of Charles Wesley:

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise; Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. Alleluia!

A blessed Easter to all of you.
God's peace.



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