



First Things ~ January, 2023

Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?

The Book of Concord, the 600-plus-page book which contains the doctrinal statements of the Lutheran Church is not light reading. But there are some places where it really grabs your attention and speaks to your heart. One of them is when it talks about what the Bible teaches about election.

The Bible teaches that before the world began, God chose (or elected) each one of us to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. It also teaches that God then set in motion a plan for each one of us to get to come to faith, grow in the faith, and remain in the faith until at the end of time he will welcome us into heaven. (Read [Ephesians 1:3-10](#) and [Romans 8:28-30](#).) Concerning this teaching about election, the Formula of Concord declares:

The teaching about election also gives us wonderful comfort in crosses and trials. For it teaches that before time began God determined and decreed that he would stand by us in every trouble, grant us patience, give us comfort, create hope, and provide a way out of all things so that we may be saved.

*Paul speaks about election the same comforting way in Romans 8. He teaches that God preordained what sort of crosses and sufferings he would use to conform each one of his elect to **the image of his Son**, and that the cross of each person must **work together for the good** of that person.*

In other words, the sufferings that we face here on earth do not happen by chance. Rather, God knows us so well that he knows exactly what problems and challenges that we need to experience each day of our life to keep us in the faith and to help us grow in the faith. In 2023 may we learn to view the challenges – yes, even the sufferings we go through – as part of God’s plan to get us to the gates of glory.

[Paul Gerhardt](#), the Lutheran hymn writer who suffered more than his share of pain and suffering in his life, understood this well when he wrote the hymn *Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me* (# 831 in blue hymnal):

Why should cross and trial grieve me?
Christ is near with his cheer;
never will he leave me.
Who can rob me of the heaven
that God’s Son for me won
when his life was given?

God gives me my days of gladness,
and I will trust him still
when he sends me sadness.
God is good; his love attends me
day by day, come what may,
guides me and defends me.

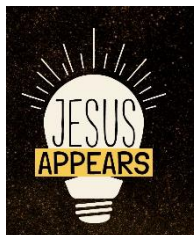
When life’s troubles rise to meet me,
though their weight may be great,
they will not defeat me.
God, my loving Savior, sees them;
he who knows all my woes
knows how best to end them.

Since I know God never fails me,
in his voice I’ll rejoice
when grim death assails me.
Trusting in my Savior’s merit,
safe at last, troubles past,
I shall heav’n inherit.

Looking Ahead to the New Year of Worship

On January 6 (it's a Friday this year), the Christian Church celebrates the journey of the Wise Men, or Magi, to worship the Christ child. It is recorded in Matthew chapter 2. This day, January 6, is called by two names: some call it the **Gentile Christmas**, the first time that Gentiles came to worship Jesus Christ. It's also called **Epiphany**, which come from a Greek word that means "to reveal."

The "season of Epiphany" when our paraments (or altar cloths) change to green will last from this coming Sunday, January 8 through Sunday, February 19. Here are the themes and texts for the Sundays of Epiphany this year which are divided into two parts: 1. **Christ Appears** and 2. **The Savior's Sermon**.



January 8 – Jesus appears as the **Anointed One** – [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

January 15 – Jesus appears as the **Lamb of God** – [John 1:29-41](#)

January 22 – Jesus appears as the **Light in the Darkness** – [Matthew 4:12-23](#)

January 29 – **Jesus: Trust in God's Strength** – [Matthew 5:13-20](#)

February 5 – **Jesus: You Are...So Be** – [Matthew 5:21-37](#)

February 12 – **Jesus: Live A Holy Life** – [Matthew 5:38-48](#)

February 19 – **Transfiguration Sunday** – [Matthew 17:1-9](#)

February 19 is **Transfiguration Sunday**, both the last Sunday of Epiphany and also the Sunday before **Lent** which begins on **Ash Wednesday** (February 22 this year). So, you can start marking your calendars for our **Wednesday evening Lenten services**: February 22; March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. And by the end of Lent, the days will be longer, and the snow will be gone (hopefully).



Board for Lay Ministry Update

The **annual meeting** will take place on **Sunday, January 29** after worship. We invite all members to attend.

The proposed budget for 2023 will be available in the church entryway on **Sunday, January 8**. Comments on the proposed budget will be considered by the Board for Lay Ministry at their meeting on **Monday, January 23**.

Through the month of November, **offerings and other income** was **\$216,324**. Through the month of November, total **expenses** were **\$226,457**. So, the **deficit** for the year (through the month of November) is **\$10,134**.

Area WELS Update

Pastor Gregory Pope was installed as the new pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Holmen on Sunday, December 11.

Other area congregations which are vacant are Rock of Ages in Rochester, Our Savior's in Kasson. St. John's in Lewiston is calling a second pastor and the Rochester multi-site congregation – called Resurrection and Life – is calling a third pastor.

January at First Lutheran

1. **Sunday Worship** – I plan to be in the pulpit ever Sunday in January
2. **Sunday Bible Study** will resume on Sunday, January 8. During the month of January, we'll be looking at the **teachings of other Christian church bodies here in America**

3. **CrossTalk**, our children's ministry, resumes on Sunday, January 8
4. **Monday Bible Study** starts up again on Monday, January 9. We're nearing the end of our study of Paul's Epistle to the **Galatians**
5. **Confirmation Class** for 7th and 8th graders meets on Wednesdays at 6:30 PM
6. **Choir** rehearses on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM
7. **Women Of the Word (WOW)** – plans are uncertain right now, watch for announcements
8. **Men's Bible Study** will meet on Thursday, January 19 with the topic – **Where is our church going???**
9. **First Women** will be meeting again on Saturday, January 14 at 10:00 AM.

Mark Your Calendars

April 22, 2023 – WELS Coulee Women's Retreat will take place at Luther High School – check out more information [HERE](#)

May 22-25, 2023 – Bus Trip to Ark Encounter and Creation Museum – you can find more information in the church entryway

From WELS Q & A, By Professor David Scharf

My New Year's resolution is to manage better what God has given me to glorify him with my life. Any suggestions?

Everything you have is a gift from God. One could categorize God's gifts with five Ts: talents, time, temple, truth, and treasures. Being a steward (or manager) is managing God's resources in God's way because of God's love. By managing his gifts, you glorify God ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)).

Managing talents

The apostle Peter says, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others" ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). That begs the question: How do you determine what your talents and abilities are?

- Try everything. Only by trying everything can you find out what you are good at and love to do. It's like signing your child up for Little League baseball. You don't sign your child up for a specific position. The coach will play your child at every position to see which one is a fit. Use that same mentality with opportunities in front of you: Try every position!
- Ask yourself what you love to do. Often what you love to do is what you are good at.
- Open your eyes to the opportunities around you. Who needs you right now?
- Ask someone you love, "What am I good at?" Sometimes you don't see yourself as clearly as other people see you. Family and friends can give you an objective perspective.
- Take a "Time and Talents" survey online as well as a DISC personality test or CliftonStrengths assessment. It can be helpful to match your talents with your personality so you can best manage your talents to God's glory.

Managing time

Wasting time means using your time in a way that does no one any good, not even yourself. The apostle Paul offers perspective and motivation for managing your time wisely: **Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life** ([Galatians 6:8](#)).

Knowing that eternity in heaven awaits helps you prioritize your use of time on earth. Picture a time line that runs from 0 to 10,000 years. Your life would be a sliver on that time line. Now imagine that time line goes for 24 hours instead of 10,000 years. That sliver now represents about 11 minutes. Imagine waking up one morning to your alarm, but it won't shut off. You hit your head on the headboard as you sit up. There is no coffee because the coffee maker broke and no hot shower because the water heater went out. How were the first 11 minutes of that day? Terrible. Now imagine the whole rest of the day going

perfectly. You meet the love of your life and get engaged, you win the lottery three times without even playing, you get promoted at work, and on and on and on. At the end of that day, if someone asked how your day was, what would you say? You'd say, "This was the best day of my life!" You would not even think about the first 11 minutes. The same is true with this difficult sliver of your life on earth and eternity in heaven. You can give so much of yourself in this life to the glory of God knowing that eternal life awaits you.

Managing temple

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies ([1 Corinthians 6:19,20](#)). Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That puts how you treat your body into perspective. Scripture gives you great freedom in how you manage the body God gave you. Christians can make different decisions on that issue and still be good Christians. Where God's Word has not spoken, it's not good or bad stewardship; it's just stewardship. If you remember that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, it will help you make those decisions.

Paul answers why. **You are not your own; you were bought at a price.** In a sense, Jesus went to his Father in heaven and said, "How much will it take to buy them?" The Father said, "Only the most priceless offering will do." And so Jesus offered himself on the cross.

You were bought at a price. That's almost an understatement! What is the only thing you can do? Honor God with the body he has given you. It brings him glory!

Managing truth

God has entrusted us with his truth. [1 Corinthians 4:1](#) says, **This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.** Part of managing God's truth is appreciating how big of a treasure God has given you in his Word and not going to look for meaning anywhere else.

Think about what you have in the Bible. You have a love letter from your Father in heaven signed in the blood of Jesus. It tells you all the answers to life's biggest questions, provides you with counsel for every situation, comforts you in every tragedy, and promises you the riches of heaven because of Jesus' life and death for you. This is the truth God gives you to manage.

But how do you do that? Read it every day. Keep it pure by not trying to explain away plain truth or letting others attack the truth without a response. Read it every day. Share it with everyone in your life. Read it every day. Let it alone guide your life. Did I mention reading it every day? Blessings as you manage God's truth because it brings God glory!

Managing treasures

You need to recognize that your money is actually God's money. Everything belongs to him (cf. [Psalm 24:1](#)). So how much are you to give? Instead of telling you an amount, God gives you principles. **On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up** ([1 Corinthians 16:2](#)).

On the first day... What would you rather have: contentment or a billion dollars? The right answer is contentment. You can't have contentment unless God is the priority.

Of every week... You will want to give an offering regularly or whenever you have been blessed. As you are blessed, so you give.

Each one of you... Everyone who has received can give, even children! Young children can teach us something about managing treasures. Why did my five-year-old want to give Jesus all of the \$10 gift they had received? Because they implicitly trust me to provide for them. You can trust God too!

Set aside...in keeping with your income. Plan your offerings and make them a proportionate amount of what you make.

Stewardship is a chance to say thank you not just with our voice but also with our hands. It brings God glory!

Check out more [WELS Q & A](#).