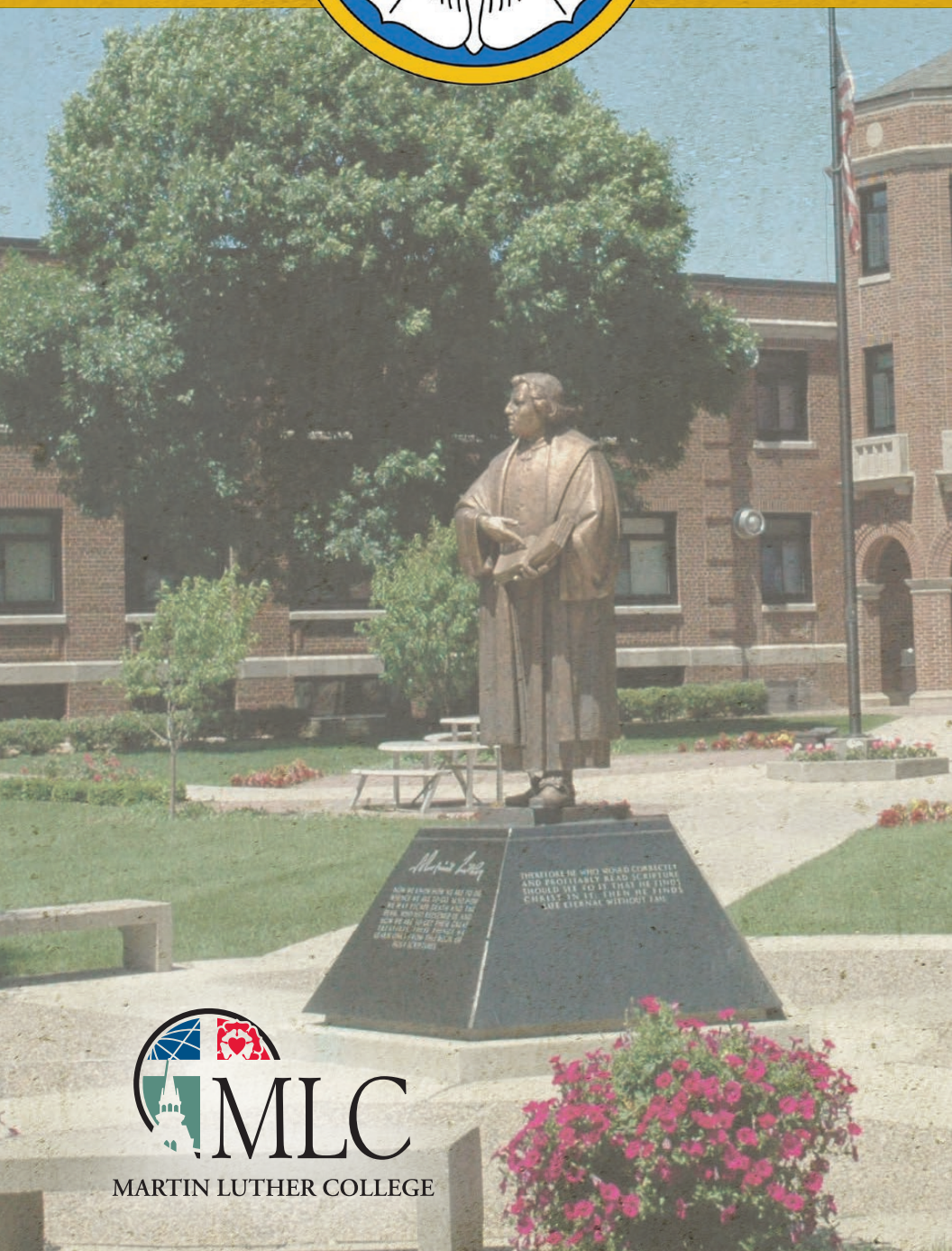


Reformation 2017

I SHALL NOT DIE, BUT LIVE



MLC

MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

A GIFT TO YOU FROM MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE





I SHALL NOT DIE, BUT LIVE.

Psalm 118:17

We should recognize this verse as a masterpiece.

How mightily the psalmist banishes death out of sight!

He will know nothing of dying and of sin.

At the same time he visualizes life most vividly and will hear of nothing but life.

But whoever will not see death, lives forever, as Christ says:

"If anyone keeps My Word, he will never see death" (John 8:51).

*He so immerses himself in life that death is swallowed up by life
(1 Corinthians 15:55)*

*and disappears completely, because he clings with a firm faith to
the right hand of God.*

*Thus all the saints have sung this verse and will continue to sing it
to the end.*

We note this especially in the case of the martyrs.

So far as the world is concerned, they die.

Yet their hearts say with a firm faith:

"I shall not die, but live."

Martin Luther

Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III

J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.

Concordia Publishing House

Vol. 14, pp. 83-87

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, please accept this devotion booklet as a gift from the Martin Luther College campus family. We pray that our Lord would strengthen your faith through his Word.



If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life. (Psalm 119:92-93)

Psalm 119 is the “Great Psalm of the Word.” Almost every one of its 176 verses has an explicit reference to Scripture. That underscores a critical point about the Word of God that Luther made as he wrote about this psalm: “God wants to give you his Spirit only through the external Word.”

Fully half a millennium of human history has passed since the start of the Lutheran Reformation, but we are still blessed through that crucial emphasis on “the external Word.”

There are many fundamental questions that everyone must face: “Is there a God? If so, what’s our relationship with him? What explains the troubles and tragedies of human life? Why am I here? What happens when I die?” We don’t rely on answers based on trivial human traditions or on fleeting human feelings. Rather, we have the confidence that comes from the certain answers that God himself provides us in his inspired, unchanging, inerrant Word.

In 1545, the year before he died, Luther said, “Let the one who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture.” In the verses from Psalm 119 that we are considering, God speaks to us about his “law,” his “precepts.” When we hear those words, we might naturally think of a hallmark of Reformation theology: the proper distinction between the doctrine of the law and the doctrine of the gospel. However, the Hebrew word for “law” that is used here, *torah*, has the basic meaning of “instruction,” of “teaching.” It is more general than the “Do this” and “Don’t do that” of God’s commands, although it certainly includes them. Torah can also be used in reference to the promises of God, his acts of providence, and his saving activity. In other words, torah can refer to either law or gospel.



God's instruction here includes the law. Sin is the root cause of all affliction; it makes us subject to perishing in the first place. But God's teaching here also includes the gospel. Don't skip over the word "if." That little word makes all the difference! Without God's Word, we're doomed to death. With it, however, God preserves our life.

The Word, and the Word alone—Sola Scriptura!—tells us how God has preserved our life. The central blessing the Psalms pointed ahead to was the coming of the Messiah. As the Word unfolds, it tells us how that promise was fulfilled in the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God has done justice to the world's sins in Christ; Jesus has paid the wages of all sin. Everyone who believes in Jesus as Savior, by the power of the Spirit that God gives through the Word, has been brought back into a right relationship with God. And that preserves our life!

Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of your life-giving and life-preserving Word. Use it to strengthen the faith of your followers and to bring others into your family. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Rev. Lawrence Olson (NWC '79, WLS '83) serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology, as director of the Staff Ministry Program and Congregational Assistant Program, and as an assistant football coach.



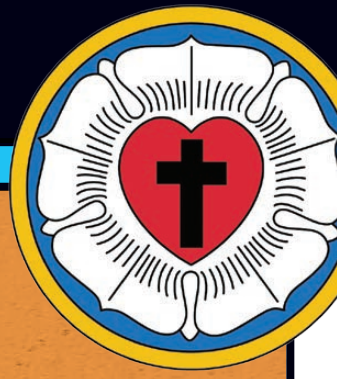
Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. (Psalm 119:105)

God created light. In Genesis 1:4 “God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.” Without light we have no sight. It reflects off objects and registers in the cells in the back of our eyeballs to form an image in our brain.

In Psalm 119:105 light is used to describe the Word of God in our world. The perfect creation is no longer “good,” but with the fall into sin by Adam and Eve the world has become evil. It was so given to evil that God almost completely destroyed it, saving only those eight humans in the ark. After the destruction of the Flood, God used light to show Noah a rainbow. The rainbow is the sign of the covenant “between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Genesis 9:16). This promise to preserve the creation was added to the promise of a Savior that God made to Adam and Eve. Since that time humankind has lived in a dark world with the promised light of the spoken word and the written word.

We imagine the Old Testament scrolls being written and read in daylight or lamplight. We don't know if Luther's readings and translations were all done in sunlight, oil, or candlelight, but they were all done in light. God's created sun, moon, and stars show his use of light to mark time in days, months, and years. He used light to show his presence as a pillar of fire to guide the Israelites. He directed that olive oil lamps be used in the temple. And he used light to direct Saul to be converted.

The technology of light production has changed in the 500 years since the Reformation. We have used oil and gas lamps, candles, electric lightbulbs, and LED light. As a child, I did not imagine I would use my laptop computer or phone and



a system of satellites orbiting the earth to read the Bible, but that is how God's Word comes to me daily.

It is still the Word, inspired by God to lead us to salvation and to light our path in this world. When it is dark, we need light to know where to take our next step. The Psalmist describes a light, both for our feet and path, which allows us to be guided both in our very next step and in those steps further down the path. The light allows us to see what may be good or harmful to us as we walk.

Jesus, also called the Word, reinforces this idea from the psalm when describing himself: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

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

CW 280:6



***Professor Greg Diersen (MLC '96)
serves Martin Luther College as
a professor of science.***

GOD'S WORD, A HAMMER AND FIRE



"Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"
(Jeremiah 23:29)

Sometimes we need a hammer. And God puts one into our hands, the hammer of Scripture. Yes, we need the lamp of God's Word to see what's out there. But sometimes we need a hammer to deal with what we find.

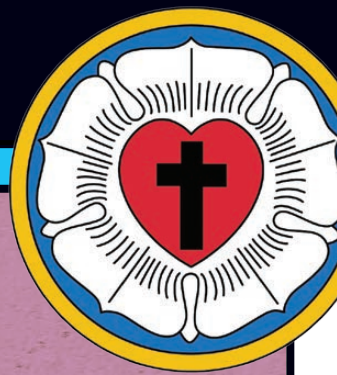
The Bible gives a wide range of pictures of itself—different images to describe what God's Word is and does. His Word is a seed that he plants. Scripture is rain that soaks in and nourishes, something sweet and delightful to eat, and something that gives light and understanding. The Bible is a sword that penetrates and makes sharp distinctions. God's Word is also a fire and a hammer to deal with what is cold and hard. All this and much more God gives and does with the Bible. Scripture is incredibly rich, vibrant, and powerful.

Sometimes we need a soft rain. Sometimes we need a hammer. Jeremiah needed the hammer of God's Word because of all the ideas and dreams the false priests and prophets were spreading. The religious people were declaring that everyone would be just fine even though they despised God. It was a soft message—ah, God doesn't really care—but it was also hard, because peace without God is such a popular notion. And the consequences would be severe.

"Yes," declares the Lord, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The Lord declares'" (Jeremiah 23:31).

Time for the hammer of truth to break the rocks of common opinion into pieces. God has spoken, and he has spoken clearly, with authority, and with love. You can look it up.

The fire and the hammer call us to repentance for our soft notions about the value or the power of God's Word. Scripture can be pointed and does hurt, but keep reading.



There's also the sweet and soaking gospel—just what the pieces need to hear.

Sola Scriptura—by Scripture alone. This Reformation phrase may seem too narrow to describe the source of life and truth. Only that? What kind of life and understanding can you have from a basis so limited and meager? Vegetables alone, internet alone, or work alone—anything alone seems small and poor. But Scripture alone is not meager at all. Read it and you will know. All of life and wisdom and love are there, from hammers to honey. God says,

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare. . . .

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;

The mountains and hills will burst into song
before you,

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands.
(Isaiah 55:2,12)

Thank you, Lord, for speaking to me. Thank you for the hammer and the seed and the rain you send in your Word. Help me to keep listening, so I may enjoy the full life you offer, now and in heaven. Amen.



Rev. Brian Dose (NWC '80, WLS '85)
*serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of English.*



I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Then the Lord replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed

Habakkuk lived when the book of Israel's history was almost closed . . . at a time when the idolatry and faithlessness and lovelessness of the people had just about reached its peak . . . when on the horizon stood the Babylonian armies God would send to conquer and punish heartless Israel.

But Habakkuk doesn't know this yet. What he does know is that when he looks around at the people of Israel and Judah, he doesn't like what he sees, and he wonders if God sees.

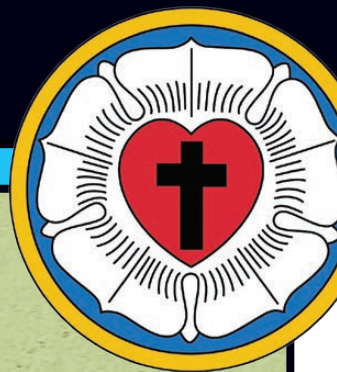
"Lord, how long do I have to call out to you but you don't listen? I'm frightened by the violence that I see—but you don't save! Why do you let me witness all this wrongdoing? What's going on? Don't you hear? Don't you care? Can't you help?"

Habakkuk knew that God condemned the lawbreaker—but he couldn't see it happening. And if the law was only a dead letter on a page, if God's law didn't mean what it said, what about God's promise? Deliverance? Rescue? Life? Habakkuk was struggling.

When someone struggles to hear what you're saying, you speak slowly and distinctly, and you repeat what you have to say until the person does hear and understand. In the same way, the Lord had to grab Habakkuk by the shoulders, look him in the eye, and say "Listen to me! Will the proud live? Will the greedy live? Will the treacherous live? Will idolaters live?"

"No, Habakkuk," the Lord continued. "The righteous man will live! The man I have washed, forgiven, redeemed, and paid for . . . the man I declare right and holy and innocent because I love him. That man will live! And he won't live by striving—I will strive for him! And he won't live by working—I will work for him! And he won't live by

time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.” (Habakkuk 2:1-4)



paying—I will pay for him! The righteous man will live by looking ahead to that day when the Savior I’ve promised will accomplish everything—putting an end to sin, covering guilt, and overcoming the grave. The righteous man will live by his faith in me, Habakkuk. Write that down and make it plain for everyone to see.”

The Lutheran Reformation celebrates the fact that God loved us enough to overcome our terrible hearing problem. He loved us enough to take us by the shoulders, look us in the eye, and say “Listen to me. Read my words! Read my words about Christ. Read the Scriptures and rejoice in my words about the life Christ lived, the death Christ died, and the incorruptible life Christ guarantees by his powerful resurrection.”

The Lutheran Reformation is the celebration of God’s Word, and Martin Luther College participates in this joyful celebration by training young men and women to listen to God speaking in the Scriptures . . . so that they, in turn, are able to make the Word about Christ plain to you and me.

Holy Spirit, help us listen closely to the words you speak to us in the Scriptures. Help us to listen, understand, and believe the words you speak about Christ. Then, in keeping with your love and promise, enable us to make the truth of Christ plain to all in this world. Amen.



Rev. Jeffrey Schone (NWC ‘83, WLS ‘87)
serves Martin Luther College as the vice president for student life.



"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in

Martin Luther was a man for whom the devil was as real as God and the gates of hell as real as heaven. Rather than dismiss him as a mere child of his premodern times, we could stand to inhabit the biblical world to the degree that he did. We too must live in the truth that only the Father can reveal by his Spirit, though it comes to us as a collision with how we naturally think and live. The reformer's bitter struggle against sin, the terrors of conscience, the relentless accusations of Satan—these had everything to do with the world of transforming grace that opened up for him in the Scriptures.

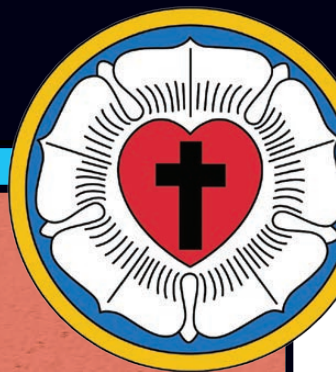
For several years this writer enjoyed a fragile friendship with a woman, now in heaven, who was ravaged by demons for much of her life. It is an experience I bless. Having been drawn into contact with evil so perverse, so pitiless, so personal, I can only report how much more things mean.

A line from a hymn—"Of the Father's love begotten, 'ere the worlds began to be"—can take your breath away! To contemplate the mystery of our identity—what it means to be a child of God—and how we each hold his very words in our two hands! What does it do to you, simply to mark the difference between the one to whom we belonged by birth, and the One who has us now!

How much it means to us that the kingdom of God is not founded upon "flesh and blood," on human ideas, on human frailty . . . on me!

Over against all the vague notions of the day, Peter made his confession, the one he could never have mustered on his own. Our brother Jesus is not only the Messiah, the Christ, but he is the very Son of the living God! The Rock on which we stand is Christ and only Christ, and upon him alone does the life of the Church depend,

heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”
(Matthew 16:15-18)



How much does it mean to you, Christian, that there is nothing the gates of hell can ever vomit up that could cancel the final Word from the cross: “It is finished!”

How much does it mean to you that no lie of the devil can obscure the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6), or snatch you, sinner-saint, from those beautiful, scarred hands!

“Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all.”

How blessed am I, dear Father in heaven, that you have given birth to this confession in me by your Word and by your Holy Spirit. I pray, let nothing move me from this safe and holy ground that is Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.



Rev. Mark Paustian (NWC '84, WLS '88)
serves **Martin Luther College** as a professor
of Hebrew and English.



"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39)

What do you think? Do you have eternal life?

It is an important question. It was an important question in Jesus' day. It was an important question in Luther's day. And it is still an important question in our day.

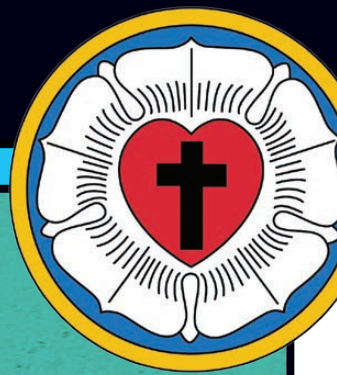
The people in our text to whom Jesus was speaking thought that they had eternal life. They were Jewish leaders, the religious experts of the day. In fact, in our text Jesus noted that they studied the Scriptures diligently. And why did they do that? Because they thought that the Scriptures were the source of eternal life for them.

But the Scriptures *are* the source of eternal life, aren't they? Yes, they are!

They are the source of eternal life because they testify about Jesus. The Old Testament Scriptures again and again, through prophecies and types and sacrifices, pointed to Jesus, the one who came and fulfilled all those prophecies and types and then sacrificed himself on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Yet the religious leaders to whom Jesus was speaking did not have eternal life. Why not?

They failed to understand the purpose of the Scriptures. The Jewish leaders thought the Scriptures were a rule book they had to follow to gain eternal life, rather than a book God in grace had given to show the Savior who had gained eternal life for them. They thought the Savior promised in the Old Testament was going to be a political savior from Rome, rather than a spiritual savior from sin.



Many people today also misunderstand the purpose of the Scriptures. They see the Ten Commandments not as the just demands of a Holy God that show them the need for a Savior, but as the moral ideas of an ancient civilization that need to be adjusted for today's world. They see Jesus not as the needed Savior from sin, but as a moral leader whose ideas about love and compassion are acceptable, but whose ideas about sin and judgment certainly are not.

What a blessing it is that our Lord used the work of Martin Luther to restore the basic truth of the Scriptures, that we are saved not by keeping a set of rules but by trusting in Jesus, the one whose life, death, and resurrection won forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

So what do you think? By God's grace we not only *think*, but through Spirit-worked faith we *know* and *trust* that we have eternal life, through the efforts not of ourselves but of our Savior Jesus, the one about whom the Scriptures testify.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, for working in our hearts through the Scriptures to assure us that those very Scriptures testify about our Savior Jesus in whom we have eternal life. Amen.



Rev. John Schmidt (NWC '70, WLS '74) **serves Martin Luther College as a professor of Greek.**

GOD'S WORD ALONE WILL SET US FREE



To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

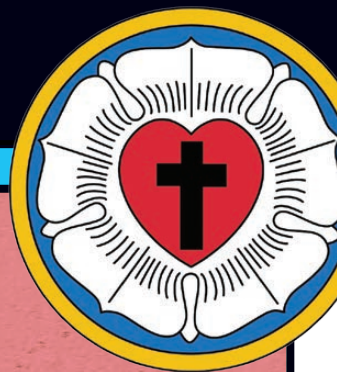
Early in life Martin Luther tried everything to free his soul from fear and guilt. He regularly confessed his sins to a priest. He abandoned his studies in law to join a monastery. He even tortured his body—all in the hopes of earning God's mercy. But no matter what Luther did, he never found the peace of mind he was seeking. He lived in constant fear that at death he would face a righteous God's wrath for his sins.

But eventually one thing did set Luther's soul free. As he studied God's Word as a professor at Wittenberg, the Holy Spirit led him to know the love of God in Christ. He learned that he stood righteous before God not by the things he did but through faith in the saving work of Christ alone. When God's Word led Luther to see this, he felt that he "was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates" (*Luther's Works* 34, p. 337). The truth of the saving work of Christ alone set Luther free from his fear and guilt.

Christ promised to do the same for all who cling to the pure teaching of his Word. He said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

First of all, his Word sets us free from the false notion that we can do anything to be right with God. Jesus reminded those who found hope in their righteous living, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Like slaves we entered this world with no ability to change our situation. Death awaited us all, "because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

But God's Word also sets us free from the guilt of our sin and the fear of death. It reminds us that, "In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in



accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7). His Word reveals that his holy life and innocent death ransomed us from sin's claim on us. His Word reminds us that his glorious resurrection has released us from death's power. His Word assures us that nothing more needs to be done because "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

When Christ's Word freed Luther's heart, he couldn't help but study, preach, and write about it often. He wanted so many others to share in his peace and joy. We too can't help but grow in it and go with it to the world. We too want so many others to share in the only truth that can set hearts free.

O Lord, we thank you for freeing us from sin, death, and the devil through Christ Jesus and your Word. Help us remain faithful to your Word by learning it gladly and teaching it purely. Amen.



***Rev. Brian Hennig (NWC '90, WLS '96)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of theology and history.***



"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours: you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the

Prayer is a special lifeline to God. Jesus taught his disciples, and us, to pray in the words of the Lord's Prayer. Our text from John 17 is another example of a special prayer of our Savior.

Think of someone you relied upon for sage advice and protection as a child or young person. Maybe it was a parent, grandparent, or another special someone in your life. You felt confidence and comfort in this person's ability to help you. Your trusted confidant provided an ear to listen, a heart that cared, and the ability to make things better. What a comfort!

Jesus here prays to God the Father. Jesus gives us another perfect example of prayer, and he intercedes for us. God the Father created all and preserves all. God the Father is the perfect protector and problem solver. This prayer of Jesus reinforces that he and the Father are one. Jesus' disciples, and those who believe in him, are sustained in their faith and preserved to life eternal. God provides an ear to listen, a heart that loves with an everlasting love, and the power to make all things right. What a comfort!

We are God's children through faith in Jesus. Here we see and hear Jesus praying that God would protect and bless his disciples. You and I are Jesus' modern-day disciples. He is also praying for our protection and blessing. These last times provide special challenges for believers. The world attacks our faith. The world belittles our faith. We face personal problems, family problems, financial problems, health problems, and the list goes on. Turn to God in prayer. He wants us to pray and promises to hear us. He loves us with an everlasting love. He sends his Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith. He provides protection from all life's problems. Jesus



world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.” (John 17:6-11)

prayed, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.” What a comfort!

Give thanks to God for his Holy Word in its truth and purity. We know that God has called us from a life of unbelief to a new life of faith through faith in Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life on earth and gave himself in our stead to cover our sins with his perfection. Jesus, now and forever, lives and rules in heaven.

Jesus’ disciples remained on earth to do his work. Today we are living our lives on earth to accomplish God’s will and do his work. Jesus’ example of prayer gives us confidence in God’s divine protection. Keep calm and carry on. Share the message of Jesus. Be assured that we are not alone. The hand of God is beneath you to uphold you, around you to sustain you, and before you to bless you. What a comfort!

**Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for teaching us to pray.
Remind us constantly that you and the Father are one.
Give us the confidence to come to the Father in prayer.
Give us the comfort that all things work together for the
eternal good of those who love you. Amen.**



Dr. Robert Klindworth (DMLC '70)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of education.

NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL



For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a

Have you ever had an experience that changed your life? The moment you met your spouse? The start of a rewarding career?

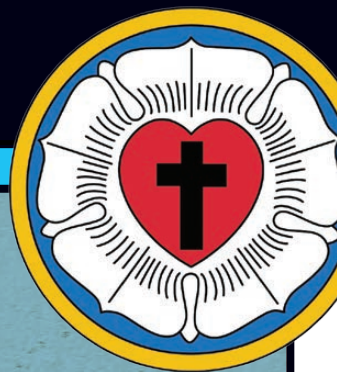
As a child of God, you have had such an experience. For most of us, it happened at a baptismal font, and we were too small to remember. But something happened that changed us forever.

You may know that Luther had such an experience. He referred to it as his Tower Experience. Luther explains: “I was aglow with the desire to understand Paul in his Letter to the Romans. But . . . the one expression in chapter 1 (v. 17) concerning the ‘righteousness of God’ blocked the way for me. For I hated the expression ‘righteousness of God,’ since I had been instructed . . . to understand it . . . as the ‘formal or active righteousness in which God proves himself righteous by punishing sinners and the unjust’” (*What Luther Says, Plass, p. 1226*).

Luther had been taught, and therefore believed, that the gospel revealed God to be only an angry Judge set to inflict punishment on sinners. And Luther’s conscience told him he deserved such punishment.

God’s Spirit graciously lifted Luther from despair with the good news of the righteousness of God. What does this mean? Righteousness means holiness. Picture shooting at a target and always hitting the bullseye. God wants people to be that perfect in obeying his will, not our will, all the time. Sadly, we are not even close. The same law that condemned Luther condemns us. The price for unrighteousness, for lack of holiness, is death and damnation.

righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)



God in his mercy saved sinners and announced his salvation in the gospel. In the words of Romans 1:16-17, the gospel reveals a righteousness from God. Incredibly, God gives the holiness we cannot produce ourselves. How does he do this? Through faith in Jesus, who was righteous in our place.

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, took on human flesh and lived under God's law. Jesus never sinned. He was the perfect Savior and the perfect sacrifice for sin. When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, his righteousness covers you. When God sees you, he sees the perfect life of his Son.

God revealed the gospel to Luther in his Word. And from that moment on, his life was changed. Has your life been changed by the good news of Jesus? Think of Luther. From fear to faith. From despair to delight. From hopeless to hope-filled. How often do you need that same gospel? When Satan accuses. When conscience keeps you awake. When guilt drives you down. Wonder of wonders, in his Son God has given you the righteousness he demands. You are forgiven.

Heavenly Father, in your Word you reveal the good news of righteousness won by Christ and given by faith. Draw us to this good news every day that we may serve you in the peace of forgiveness and the joy of your salvation. Amen.



Rev. John Boeder (NWC '86, WLS '90)
serves Martin Luther College as campus pastor, theology professor, assistant football coach, and director of the Daylight program.



For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (Romans 3:28)

God's Word is very clear. Salvation comes through faith alone. Whoever has faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin has eternal life. Period. There is nothing more to do. There are no strings attached.

This news seems too good to be true. Forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt, and eternal life in heaven are so valuable. Can they really be ours simply by believing in Jesus? In today's verse God answers, "Yes."

It's hard to accept this important truth. Faith can be so unpredictable, and it feels safer to put our eternal fate into something we can better control. Rather than rely on faith alone for salvation, most people point to the good things they do or the bad things they avoid for assurance.

Martin Luther was no different. He grew up knowing about Jesus, but he wanted to be sure that he would be saved. So he tried being a dutiful son, a diligent student, and the best monk. He believed that if he could just be more humble, inflict more self-punishment, or do more good works than the other monks, he could finally be confident in his salvation.

It didn't work. No matter what he did, how hard he tried, or how much better than others he may have seemed, he still made mistakes. The harder he tried to control his salvation, the farther it slipped away from him.

Martin Luther hated and blamed God for demanding a righteousness he could never earn. Then one day, the Holy Spirit opened Martin's mind to understand and believe what God had been telling him all along: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:17). Luther finally understood that the sacrifice of Christ is all that is needed, and that salvation is



fully ours only by faith, with no strings attached. He wrote, “I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates” (*Luther’s Works* 34, p. 336-337).

Luther knew how easy and how dangerous it is to make the gospel conditional. In fact, when he translated today’s passage into German, he included the word “alone” to make sure God’s point was clear. He wrote, “A person is justified by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.”

Like Luther, we do well to think the word “alone” whenever we read this verse. Being a good neighbor, student, spouse, son, or daughter does not bring us God’s forgiveness. Taking care of God’s creation, eating healthy, being a missionary, or any other work one might imagine does not get us closer to heaven. The only thing that saves is faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’ work is complete, and God’s saving power never fails those who have faith alone.

Jesus, thank you for doing everything needed for my salvation—your perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. Grant me the peace that only comes when I put my salvation in your hands through faith. Amen.



Dr. John Meyer (DMLC '87)
serves Martin Luther College as director of
graduate studies and continuing education.

NOT BY WORKS, BUT BY FAITH



What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

Lutherans in 2017 have a lot in common with their namesake from 1517, but there is one element of our experience that might seem foreign to Dr. Martin. Luther never wondered if he believed what he believed because it was convenient. In 1517 believing that sinners are declared righteous by faith was inconvenient.

The Reformers inherited the toxic teaching that God helps sinners not by forgiving them, but by putting some of Jesus' perfection into humans and instructing them to live according to that infused grace. How terrifying it would be to search your heart and wonder whether God was really in there! But Luther rejected that teaching, and it nearly cost him his life.

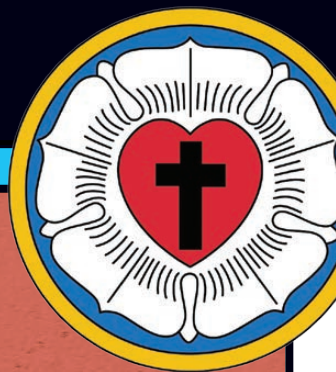
So what about us? Might we ever be tempted to believe what we believe just because we inherited it from our fathers?

For a moment let's set aside what doctrines we inherit from our predecessors, and ask a question we inherit from them: "What do the Scriptures say?" Before Protestants and Popes, the Apostle Paul asked the same question. Before any denominations or synods, God was declaring sinners not guilty for Jesus' sake.

Paul looks to Genesis 15 for proof. If anybody was on good terms with God, it was Abraham. After being chosen as patriarch for God's people and offering up his own son to the Lord, it seemed like Abraham had enough good work on his resume to earn friendship with his Heavenly Father. But what do the Scriptures say?

The account of Abraham is littered with evidences of his shortcomings. He doubted God's promises (Genesis 12). He

What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:1-3)



tried to pass off his wife as his sister (Genesis 20). Abraham, like all of us, failed to perfectly trust God. Abraham had an amazing faith, did amazing things, and had plenty to boast about. But not before God. That is what the Scriptures say.

When God wanted to save Abraham, he didn't tell him to look inside to try to find some righteousness. That would be terrifying. Thank God, that's not what the Scriptures say. "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15). The one place Scripture speaks of Abraham's righteousness, it speaks not of his doing but of his believing. Abraham trusted God. God declared him not guilty.

Jesus obeyed God's law perfectly, and his death on the cross undid every sin. Jesus settled your account with God before you could lift a finger to help.

What a gift we have inherited from our fathers—a heritage of combating every doubt by asking, "What do the Scriptures say?" Those Scriptures point us to a Savior who did everything in our place. God forgives sinners for Jesus' sake. Believe it, because he's been doing it that way since time began.

Father, you have preserved your Word to us for centuries. Direct our minds and hearts to the Scriptures and put Christ before our eyes so that we might continually find comfort in knowing that you love us for Jesus' sake. Amen.



Rev. Nathan Wordell (MLC '12, WLS '16)
serves Martin Luther College as a dorm supervisor and Latin instructor.



Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

What do you say when something happens that the Bible does not directly address? Real life is full of situations that could be considered gray areas. And while often we want to have a hard and fast rule for every problem this world throws our way, we can't always do that.

This is especially true when tragedy strikes. How can you make someone feel better without lying? Sometimes we look so hard for something—anything—to lift them up, that we end up saying things God does not promise.

Other times we maybe do know something true and scriptural to say. "They're in a better place." "God works out everything for the good of those who love him." While statements like these are true and do offer us comfort, they can become token lines spoken to a person without emotionally meeting them at their level. Do we take the time to listen? The pain that these people go through is shocking, and we are left scrambling for words to say.

The hard truth is I don't know what to say. What could I possibly offer to help in those situations? There is nothing I am able to do to heal them—nothing I can say to fix the problem. And sometimes Scripture does not directly address the circumstances we have to deal with.

But while every situation is unique, and while we may not have a scriptural example for every tragedy that strikes, God does not leave us without comfort. He tells us we stand in grace. Our risen Lord tells us that since he conquered sin and death, there is no wavering—no change in status—as we consider God's grace.

It can be tempting to try to reassure people with man-made arguments and clever, wise words of the philosophers. Certainly these ideas have their place. They seek to cheer us



up and lift our emotional state. But where do these thoughts lead us? Isn't it almost always to a method of self-healing—anything *except* what we truly need?

Instead, you and I stand in the impossible truth that all our sins have been forgiven by one man—the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. He offered himself in order to bring us into fellowship with the Maker and Preserver of all things. Martin Luther knew this truth when he made his famous “Here I stand” speech before a group of his peers. He knew the message of the gospel has never changed and will never change.

What better truth to share with all people? This promise allows us to sympathize with pain. This promise comforts weariness. This promise reassures the doubting. Jesus, the Christ, is risen indeed. He invites all people to be comforted by this truth. The sacrifice has been made. Therefore, we stand firmly and eternally in his grace.

**In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.**

CWS 752:1



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*served Martin Luther College for two years
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and now serves as pastor at Christ Our
Savior-Columbia, Tennessee.*



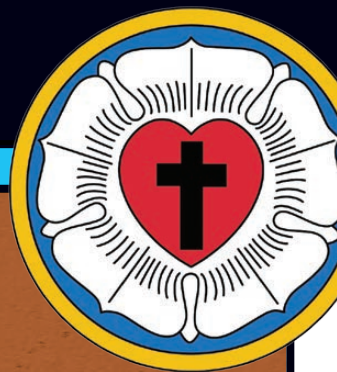
What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5)

The litmus test is a staple of any chemistry curriculum. Dip a small strip of litmus paper into a beaker full of liquid, and it will tell you if the substance is acidic or alkaline. Litmus is a simple, definitive, and effective test used all over the world.

In this verse, the apostle Paul offered a litmus test. Some men had infiltrated the Corinthian congregation. Paul referenced them as “super-apostles” later in this letter. We do not know much about them, but they tried to diminish Paul and elevate themselves. Even worse, they diminished Jesus and put themselves on pedestals. These false teachers deceived some in Corinth with their rhetoric. The Greeks valued oratory, and the false teachers influenced some church members with their fancy-sounding philosophies. In reality, these men were not teachers or apostles at all. They were merely entertainers drawing an audience for their own pride and benefit.

Paul provided a simple and plain proof of the genuineness of his teaching. It is a definitive test for any preacher. Paul preached the gospel message of the crucified and risen Jesus. Because of that gospel message, Paul and the other apostles made themselves servants, not just to Jesus, but also to the people with whom they shared the gospel. They didn’t boast or consider themselves super-apostles. Instead, they reflected the love of Jesus onto the congregations they served. They preached Christ not just with their message but also with their actions. The apostles did not do this for fame or glory, but because of Jesus.

Paul’s litmus test is just as needed today as it was 2000 years ago. There are still false teachers who masquerade as super-apostles. They preach their empty messages to masses of people. Their messages are full of entertaining rhetoric, but



they are devoid of anything of value. Apply the litmus test to every preacher you hear. Are they preaching Jesus Christ as Lord? Or are they peddling themselves?

We also apply the litmus test to our lives. What do our words and actions preach? Is the object Jesus or ourselves? Our sinful, selfish human nature has won too many times. We elevate ourselves over Jesus.

One of the great blessings of the Reformation was putting the spotlight back on Jesus and his teachings. Martin Luther could not find comfort in his own deeds and actions, and so he searched Scripture trying to find the answer to the guilt that ravaged him. What he found was the grace won by Jesus. Only Jesus can bring true and lasting peace.

Because of what Jesus has done for us, God doesn't see us as selfish sinners anymore. Instead, he sees the perfect Jesus. We can live boldly and confidently, proclaiming that Jesus is our Lord!

Lord Jesus, help us to proclaim you with everything we do in our lives. Forgive us for the times we have failed to preach you. We thank you for giving us the robe of perfection you won with your life, death, and resurrection. Amen.



*Rev. David Starr (MLC '10, WLS '14)
serves Martin Luther College as an
admissions counselor.*

WE BELIEVE AND THEREFORE SPEAK



It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will

An unexpected inheritance. A huge fourth-quarter come-from-behind victory. A doctor's pronouncement of "remission" or even "cured" as one has battled the dreaded C-word. Even something as simple as finding the flashlight and switching it on during a pitch-black power outage. These types of occurrences are not only what we might call "day-brighteners," but they also carry with them a degree of benefit and bounty. Likely we have all heard of or experienced these or similar experiences to some degree.

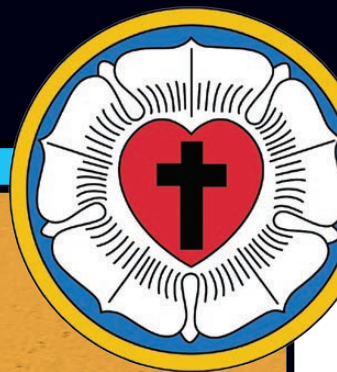
Thankfully, we are all recipients of the greatest gift ever. This gift comes to us as a total, complete, generous, and gracious gift. The gift is the promise and assurance that we will not die, but live.

Our verses for today proclaim it this way: "Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself" (2 Corinthians 4:14).

Two very noteworthy components help us realize the magnitude of this life-giving promise. The first component is obvious, but we may want to stick our heads in the sand like an ostrich to try and ignore it in our minds and our lives, because it is a truth every fiber within us does not like to deal with. The truth is: We will die, and so will everyone we know, including our loved ones. Our sins make this our reality, for the sinner must die. We may be able to prolong life with sound medical treatment, healthy eating, and fitness routines, but in the end we will die.

The second component deals with the manner and means by which God rescues us from our deadly reality. Of course, Jesus is the saving answer. His life, his death, his resurrection, and

also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. (2 Corinthians 4:13-14)



his ascension are the guarantee of our own resurrection from the dead and the promise of everlasting life in heaven.

Noteworthy as well is the way this saving gospel comes to us. In 2 Corinthians 14, Paul calls himself and us clay jars in which this gospel treasure is contained. Fragile jars. Plain, unadorned jars able to share the beautiful treasure we have been given, which is the gospel promise of life through Jesus. It is this message that the Holy Spirit uses—along with the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper—to spark faith, maintain faith, and nourish faith.

May you and I be clay jars that not only contain God's gift of life, but jars that pour out that message so others can believe the gospel truth.

Gracious God! I am the clay jar, you are the potter. Thanks for filling me with your gospel promises, which assure me of eternal life through Jesus. Give me the strength and courage to share these promises with my friends, family, and those I have contact with. Amen.



Rev. Douglas Lange (NWC '77, WLS '82)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of theology and physical education.

THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD



I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.
(Galatians 1:11-12)

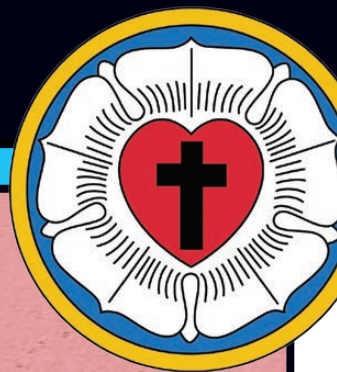
Do an internet search of “non-canonical gospels” and you will find a dozen or so writings with titles like these: “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” “The Gospel of Bartholomew,” and “The Gospel of Judas.” If you take the extra time to read or skim through one of those “gospels,” you will soon find out why it is categorized as a non-canonical gospel. The writing will reveal itself as a human document and not one written by God.

After God brought the apostle Paul to faith, some people charged the former persecutor of Christians with spreading a non-canonical gospel of sorts. The Judaizers accused Paul of watering down the gospel by preaching a salvation through faith in Jesus Christ without any works of the law—ceremonial laws especially.

In defense of his message and his ministry, Paul wrote: “The gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” Paul did not fabricate the gospel message he preached. He learned it, and he learned it like the other apostles—directly from the Lord, but after the Lord’s public ministry on earth.

Fast forward from Paul’s day to the 16th century. The gospel message of Jesus Christ that Martin Luther learned from the church of his day was “something that man made up.” What else can you call a message that says, “God has removed some of the punishment of your sins, but you are responsible for another part”? That is not a message of the Bible.

The Bible’s message is that there is full and free forgiveness of sins through faith in the Savior promised by God: Jesus Christ. That has always been the Bible’s message. After God



opened Luther's eyes to understand and believe that truth, Luther worked tirelessly to get that message into the hands of other people.

And aren't you glad he did? Without the message of the Bible, you would not have the answer to the question asked by the jailer in Philippi: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). No one has the answer to that question except God.

What a blessing it is when God reveals that answer through his Word. What he makes known in the pages of Holy Scripture is that his Son is the one in whom all the promises of the Messiah find fulfillment. In the Bible God tells you that his Son was your perfect substitute in life and in death. In Scripture God assures you that, though you might experience physical death, you will live forever in his presence. That gospel message is absolute truth!

Gracious God, thank you for revealing to me in Scripture the message of your forgiving love in Christ. Enable me by your Holy Spirit to cling to that message always, that I may enjoy life with you forevermore. Amen.



Rev. James Pope (NWC '77, WLS '81)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor of history, theology, and staff ministry courses.

NOT BY WORKS, BUT BY FAITH



We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be

It has been rightly said that there really are only two religions in the world. The one proclaims religion to be something that a person does to better oneself and to reach up to God. So, in many religions, we see rules upon rules—codes for moral goodness and even harsh treatment of the body that will somehow prompt God to look favorably upon people and reward them with eternal joy.

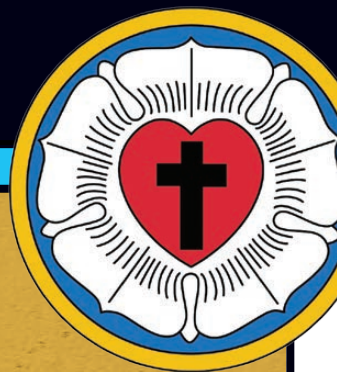
Even though this religion is most natural to man and most common in the world, it clashes directly with what God says about our sinful human condition. Luther understood God's assessment and expressed it this way in his *Smalcald Articles*: "This hereditary sin is so deep and horrible a corruption of nature that no mind can understand it, but it must be learned and believed from the revelation of Scripture."

In other words, we're so sinful by nature that we actually believe we aren't that sinful, much less deserving of damnation. So, in a sense, it's only logical for natural man to believe his religion can overcome his shortcomings and earn heaven.

In contrast, the other religion is not natural. It is revealed in Scripture and paints a far different picture. Yes, it is a realistic picture of our sinfulness and is sweeping in its verdict: "By the works of the law no one will be justified." We haven't a prayer of somehow fixing ourselves or impressing God.

More important, though, the Scriptures reveal the gospel of Jesus Christ that gives eternal hope to all sinners. For the gospel declares what Christ has done for all people—the Righteous One, the perfect Substitute, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This "other religion" doesn't

justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.
(Galatians 2:15-16)



try to reach up to God. By Spirit-worked faith it simply receives what God, in his grace and love, has reached down from heaven to freely give us in his Son: forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Earlier in his life, the apostle Paul had zealously pursued the path of earning God's favor. When he spoke the words above, Paul was rebuking Peter for slipping back into that kind of thinking as well. He did that by pointing Peter and the Galatians to Christ, the Jewish Messiah, who fulfilled all God's promises to his chosen people, and then spread that light of the gospel to the Gentiles too.

By God's grace, "we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ." Here is the heart of the gospel, the heart of the Reformation. And as emphatically as Paul spoke to Peter, Luther wrote: "Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth should sink to ruin."

Lord Jesus Christ, you are my righteousness; I am your sin. You became what you were not, so that I might become what I was not. Thank you, dear Lord, for your grace and mercy to me, a sinner. Amen.



Rev. Keith C. Wessel (NWC '87, WLS '91)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of New Testament, Greek, and Latin.



For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is

The words of our text ring clearly and sweetly in the ears of confessional Lutherans. This is one of the bulwarks of the Reformation. When we contemplate these words, we shudder at the warning they contain. I am under a curse because I have not kept the law. My works do not make me righteous; they condemn me.

But there is blessing here as well. God makes me righteous through faith. The burden of guilt and imperfection is lifted from me. I don't have to live with uncertainty, not knowing if I have done enough, if God is pleased with me yet. No, the certainty is in Christ, who has completely paid for my sins.

We can never repeat this beautiful news enough. We never tire of hearing that God is pleased to make us his children. The thrill of Easter always makes our pulses race and lifts our spirits like the excitement of our favorite team winning the championship.

But even though we celebrate the triumph of Christ and—in our Lutheran circles—point to justification by faith over and over again, the temptation to keep score of the things we do still lingers. The same old temptations to try to handle things ourselves, to bargain with God, even to think of ourselves as more deserving than others, are still very real.

Not convinced? Reality TV and talk shows are very popular. When I take a look, what thoughts run through my head? "Wow, is that person a mess! What do you expect, when you make the choices you do? Thanks, Lord, that I am not like that." There it is. This is not the first time thoughts like this have been recorded. Remember the Pharisee in the temple?

justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."
(Galatians 3:10-11)



There I am; I took his place. Jesus reminds us that it wasn't the Pharisee who went away justified.

Still not convinced? I still find myself envying those possessing more, materially speaking, than I do. And I wonder, "Why, Lord, is this person so blessed? Look at what he does! Look at what he doesn't do! I am a devoted follower! Why am I not receiving more?" There it is again. I want the Lord to look at all the good I am and do, and reward me.

The more I examine my thoughts and motivations, the more I realize that I need to hear the words of our text more frequently. I need to repent of all those times when I set these words aside. There is nothing in me deserving of anything except eternal punishment. I am no better than any other sinner that lives.

Then that sweet gospel message uplifts me: "The righteous will live by faith."

Holy and gracious God, when I consider my works and ways as deserving anything good from you, lead me back to your warning. Then lead me back to your promise of justification by what Christ has done on my behalf. Strengthen my trust in the righteousness that is mine through faith in your Son. Amen.



Prof. Daniel Fenske (DMLC '87)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of life sciences.



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Two of the gospel's most articulate spokesmen once championed the law as the road to heaven. They thought they could earn God's favor with their deeds, and they gave it their best shot. By human standards they did all right. In fact, they overachieved. The apostle Paul rated his former self, the excellent Pharisee Saul, "As for righteousness based on the law, faultless." Martin Luther looked back at his days in the monastery and said, "If a monk could be considered holy, I too was holy."

But that same law gave their efforts their true ranking. "I consider them garbage," Paul later wrote. Luther regretted his monastic righteousness as "nothing but a puddle of manure." Paul summed up, "By the works of the law no one will be justified," and Luther sang, "My own good works availed me naught, no merit they attaining." The law grades such works with an F: futile and fatal.

But in trying to earn their own salvation, the stellar Pharisee and the top-tier monk had only extended the logic of the pride within us all. They merely provided vivid examples of that inborn sense that I must—and that I even can—do something to impress God. Surely he will give me credit for being better than most and trying sincerely—or at least meaning well. Even we who know Jesus as our Savior still struggle with that sinful arrogance. Our temptation is to ruin God's grace by improving on it, by earning just a bit of it with our own goodness.

So the Holy Spirit moved Paul to say not only yes to the positive, but also no to the negative. Yes, grace alone saves us. Yes, only God's undeserved love, acting in mercy, saved us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Yes, only by faith do



we make that salvation our own. No, nothing about us is involved. No, we were ugly with sin, filthy in our self-righteousness, and stinking with guilt too big for the perfume of good intentions. Again, yes, salvation is a gift. Yes, it comes completely from God's love. So, no, our works have nothing to do with it. We don't have even some vague wish to believe. We were powerless to help—dead, actually. Only by contrast with the law can we see the gospel.

Or preach the gospel. As Luther once put it, "A man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will, and works, and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another—God alone."

I'm saved by grace, given a gift. My worth and works have nothing to do with it. It's all Jesus—his worth, his works. Thank God.

Holy Spirit, by your law keep reminding me of my sin and my utter helplessness to save myself. By your gospel keep reviewing for me that Jesus has saved me by doing all in my place. Hold my faith's focus on his cross and empty tomb, until I reach heaven by grace alone, by faith alone. Amen.



Rev. Daniel Balge (NWC '80, WLS '85) serves Martin Luther College as the academic dean for preseminary studies and a professor of Greek.



Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your

We're all impressionable. I remember being in grade school and wanting to play basketball like Michael Jordan, to be able to fix things like my dad (still waiting), and to be a teacher like my 7th-grade role model.

We all pattern the way we do certain things after someone we admire. It may range from the way we dress to the way we walk to the way we wear our hair or hold our cell phone. We copy people's expressions and mannerisms because we think they're funny, memorable, or cool.

As Christians what an opportunity we have to teach. Every day you and I come into contact with so many people. Maybe it's at school. Maybe it's at work. Maybe it's a neighbor or someone you walk past on the street or at the store. It doesn't matter if they are Christians or not. It doesn't matter if you know them or not. You are a teacher. People will learn something from you. Perhaps it will be via a compliment. Perhaps it will be via a reprimand. You may not even say anything. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

What is it that our actions and words are teaching people? Does the world see that we are sinful, or does the world see that we are saved? Certainly both are true, but I fear the world sees more of the former in me than the latter. The world sees me—sees all of us—as frustrated, tired, impatient, inattentive, cruel, lazy, and abusive in our own lives as well as in and toward the lives of those around us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we instead show the world how thankful we are for all that our God has done for us. Out of thanksgiving for the perfect life, innocent suffering and death of Jesus, sins forgiven, and the promise of life eternal, could we teach others—teach them by showing

hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:16-17)



and sharing love, dedication, patience, attention, time, and energy? Silence and non-participation can be just as good a teacher. Our silence may speak volumes about our faith, or it may be the admonishment needed in a situation. Then when someone asks us why we're so quiet, we can take advantage of the opportunity to speak about the hope we have in Jesus.

Teach one another in love. You have the perfect example and teacher in Jesus. He has led the way with his perfect life and death on the cross, teaching us humility. When he rose from the dead, he assured us of victory in heaven for all who believe, teaching us confidence. We model his teaching when in love, as we strive to grow together as our Lord's disciples, we teach one another.

Lord and Savior, Jesus, we confess our lack of perseverance in teaching others in word and deed according to your saving message. Thank you for the assurance of your love and forgiveness, which you give us by grace through faith. Bless us in our efforts to teach those around us of this love, glorifying you in all we say and do. Amen.



Dr. Jeff Wiechman (DMLC '90)
serves Martin Luther College as vice
president for academics.

TEST ALL THINGS BY THE WORD



Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22)

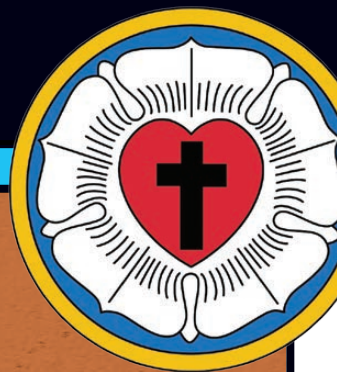
For more than 800 years the British government has conducted the Trial of the Pyx, a test of the Royal Mint's coinage. During this annual investigation, a random sampling of coins is compared to trial plates, which serve as the official monetary standard. This check for purity, weight, and size protects against forgery and theft, and insures confidence in the currency.

For more than 2000 years Christians have tested preaching and teaching against the standard of Holy Scripture. Notably, Martin Luther found the teaching of the church sadly wanting when compared to the Bible, and his attempts for reform led to the Reformation. We are still charged with examining preaching and teaching, carefully weighing each against God's standards, including a proper presentation of the law and gospel.

We must ask: Are we ignoring what God has commanded in order to avoid confrontation over issues that are at odds with the popular sentiment? If we seek to gain popularity by obscuring God's law, we risk allowing ourselves and others to persist in sin. And if our sins can be ignored, why do we even need the gospel?

We must inquire: Is this declaration adding to what the Bible says, making rules that God has not? Engaging in legalism burdens the consciences of believers by requiring works or practices above and beyond the work that Jesus has already done on our behalf.

We must question: Are we focusing on people and their deeds rather than on the redemptive work of Christ? Looking to ourselves will only lead to despair, as we realize how far we fall



from the perfection God demands. As a monk, Luther lived this crushing reality, saying of Christ, “I regarded him only as a severe and terrible Judge.” In consequence, we must reject anything that does not meet the standard of Holy Scripture.

True preaching reveres the Bible in its entirety, ultimately leading us to the hope we have in Christ. We hold onto teaching that clearly wields the law, convicting us of any mishandling of the Word, and that eagerly pronounces the gospel truth, forgiveness to repentant hearts. In forgiveness and joy we endeavor to share the precious truths of the Bible. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we handle the Word with great care as a treasured inheritance.

Therefore, we test preaching and teaching with care. We hold tightly to what measures up and reject all that does not. We are encouraged by that same good news that even in our frailty God has chosen us to be his messengers, and he promises, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:8). Thankfully, the message given us is clear: he has forgiven us, and in his grace, by his work, we are saved.

Dear heavenly Father, strengthen us in your Word. Instill in us a reverence for your saving gospel message, that we would vigilantly test all teaching and preaching. Equip us to pass it faithfully from nation to nation and from generation to generation. Amen.



Professor Benjamin Clemons (MLC '03) serves Martin Luther College as academic dean for educational studies and urban ministry professor.

GUARD THE GOOD DEPOSIT



Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Timothy 1:13-14 CSB)

You've probably had this happen to you before: You're walking into the house after a big shopping trip, carrying an ambitious number of bags in both hands, when *rrrip!* The berries go bouncing away, the eggs scramble on the pavement, and the milk pours out quicker than you can say "Moo." You can do your best to hang on to a freshly purchased bag of groceries, but if the handles aren't strong enough—*rrrip!*

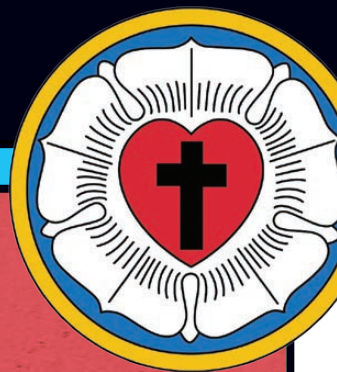
Holding on to a bag of groceries is one thing. Holding on to the sound teaching of God's Word is another. The apostle Paul wrote in a letter to his younger co-worker Timothy, "Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

Paul had passed on to Timothy the sound teaching he had received from Jesus. This sound teaching was the truth that Jesus was the Savior of the world, "who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). A bag of good groceries can't even compare to how valuable this truth is!

So Paul didn't just tell Timothy to hold on to this truth. He also gave him the handles to hold it. And these handles were strong enough to make sure this truth never got *rripped* out of Timothy's hands. Paul said, "Hold on . . . in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

Faith and love. There's no better way to hold on to the sound teaching God has given us in the Bible.

That's how Luther was able to pick up the gospel in a time when the church had let it slip away with the flimsy handles of tradition and works-righteousness. With the handle of faith in Christ Jesus, Luther could see the truth about his salvation



revealed in the Bible. With the handle of the love that is in Christ Jesus, Luther could see the love of his Savior behind every word of the Scriptures.

It's those handles, faith and love, that keep the precious teaching of the gospel from ever slipping out of our hands too.

The devil will try to convince you that following God's Word isn't worth all the effort. He's a liar! Hold on to the gospel with faith in Jesus.

Voices throughout the world will say that the Scriptures are outdated and contradictory. Don't listen! Hold on to the gospel with faith in Jesus.

The sin corrupting your life can make you think that the words of the Bible are only going to judge you and punish you. When that happens, hold on tight to the gospel with the love that is in your Savior, Jesus.

Holy Spirit, guard the truth of the gospel from ever being ripped out of my heart. Through Word and sacrament, help me hold on to it with faith and with the love that is in Christ Jesus. Amen.



*Seminarian Julius Buelow (MLC '12)
served Martin Luther College as a Hebrew
instructor in 2016-2017.*

OUR HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS



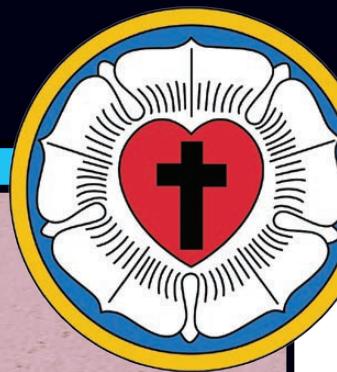
Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

Although 500,000 tourists are expected to visit Wittenberg in 2017, fewer than 100 locals gather for worship on a typical Sunday at the City Church, where Martin Luther preached often, was married, and saw his six children baptized.

Closer to home, our synod has seen a concerning decline in membership during the past three decades. The apparent disregard for God's Word reflected by these trends can invite believers to grow discouraged or despondent. When we allow the seeming successes or apparent failures of the earthly church to become a measure of Christ's merit, our doubt in his promises is sin.

The book of Hebrews was written to an audience facing temptations to shift their confidence from the cross. The devil used persecution and imprisonment inflicted by Emperor Nero's government to encourage uncertainty regarding Jesus. Fourteen hundred years later, Luther would reorient the church of his time to rely upon the work of Christ rather than the works of man. In a similar fashion, the author to the Hebrews spent much of his epistle establishing that Jesus' sacrifice was absolutely perfect and all-powerful.

In this letter, sinful Christians of every era are reassured that our eternal salvation is anchored in Christ alone. For first-century followers, this meant discarding the familiar Judaic rituals of the past and recognizing Jesus' single atoning sacrifice as definitively superior. For Luther's contemporaries, this meant abandoning the empty relief of indulgences, which diminished Jesus' victory for monetary profit. For present-day disciples, this means clinging fast to the cross even when this world whispers that Christ's work is incomplete, outdated, or irrelevant. Responding to Jesus' incomparable love, we yearn to come to him. Scripture offers the exact invitations



we desire: “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings” (10:22) and “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (10:23). Forget whatever clever distractions the devil tailors to our age. Return to the waiting arms of your omnipotent Savior.

During this Reformation anniversary celebration, much has been written about Luther’s role as a pivotal figure in history. And yet, the most important service God allowed Luther to provide was guiding our focus back to the one whose impact is truly unparalleled, Jesus Christ.

Luther is often depicted pointing to the Bible during his courageous stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521, when he defended Scripture as the sole source of his convictions. Today, on our campus and across the globe, we strive to continue pointing to the same Scripture. And today also our Lord continues to redirect hearts and minds to the eternal life he provides only through his Son.

Lord, despite the adversity that remains ever-present in this dying world, the perfect salvation offered in Christ remains steadfast. Guide us to respond to this promise with lives of love to you and service toward others. Amen.



***Professor Paul Grubbs (MLC '01)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of English.***

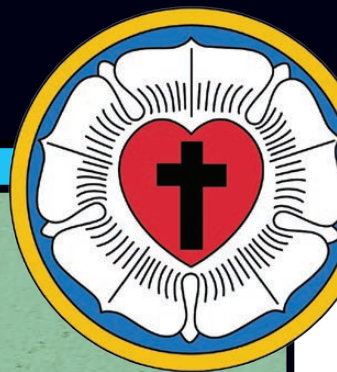


Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Leadership is a buzzword in church, school, and business circles. Lots of effort and energy are spent on distinguishing different styles and how they interact. Lots of time is spent in training, in formulating a sense of mission and a vision for the future. What, for you, are the key characteristics of a good leader? Competence, confidence, commitment, creativity, integrity, honesty, passion, patience, dependability, decisiveness—and this is only a partial list. Recall those who “spoke the word of God” to you. What leadership qualities did they have?

When the writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of “leaders,” the emphasis was on their faith. What they believed showed in how they lived. They communicated what was most important to them—that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” These leaders shared a message of enduring and eternal love. No doubt each of the leaders referred to in our verse could recall their lives “before Christ.” Some of them may have been unbelievers; some of them may have been attracted to the deceptive morality of the Pharisees; some of them were undoubtedly devout believers who were waiting patiently for God to reveal his salvation. All of them surely spoke about weakness and sin, doubts and fears, about how much all people need the promise of God’s forgiveness. No doubt these leaders had many of the qualities we listed above, each of them colored by the Christian faith they professed.

There is no question that God raised up and trained Martin Luther to be a leader, though early on this may not have seemed very evident. Luther had retreated to the seclusion of a monastery because he thought he could find peace there. But try as he did, he could not become holy on



his own. By the Word of God, he came to hear the true gospel—our enormous debt of sin was laid on Jesus, and his holy life was credited to us. As Luther considered the truth of the verse above, he wrote: “As Peter, Paul, and other saints like us in body, blood, and infirmity were made blessed by the grace of God through faith, so we are comforted by their example that God will look in mercy and grace on our infirmity.”

By those who knew him, Luther was encouraged to study and to take a leadership role in the church. He became a passionate and tireless witness of God’s grace in Christ. He confessed before councils, he taught in classrooms, he preached from pulpits, he wrote volumes of commentary that still instruct. We remember him as a remarkable leader. But, as Luther himself said, “I did nothing: the Word did it all.” That is the kind of faith to remember and imitate.

Lord God, you have appointed leaders in your church, but you see how unsuited they are on their own to meet so great and difficult a task. If they had lacked your help, they would have ruined everything long ago. Help them to devote their mouths and hearts to you as they learn and ponder diligently on your Word. Use them as instruments of your saving gospel, and strengthen them for their difficult work. Amen. *(Luther’s Sacristy Prayer, adapted and modified)*



Rev. Paul Koelpin (NWC ‘86, WLS ‘90) serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and history and as the men’s soccer coach.



Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.
(1 Peter 2:2)

Do you remember that tagline? And the milk mustache that went with it? "Got Milk?" was one of the most successful taglines in advertising history.

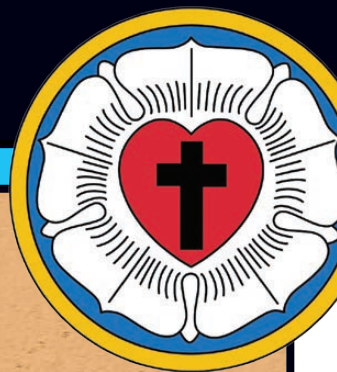
"Got Milk?" This is also a good question for Christians to ask themselves. Except the milk Christians need is "the pure spiritual milk"—the Word of God.

"Pure milk," Peter says. When I worked on a dairy farm, I would occasionally drink a glass of raw milk straight from the bulk tank. Unpasteurized milk, however, can carry dangerous bacteria such as Salmonella, E. coli, and Listeria. So it is with an impure Word of God. The "dangerous bacteria" of incorrect teachings can put an eternal soul at risk.

Of greatest concern is the dangerous bacteria of works-righteousness. The impurity of works-righteousness says I can save myself by my own efforts; I'm not completely dependent on Jesus and his saving work. Though it is the way we all think about salvation by nature, this dangerous bacteria can kill the soul. Paul told the Galatian Christians, "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law."

The pure milk of God's Word announces to sinners, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. . . . By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This is that tall glass of cold milk that satisfies your thirst when a guilty conscience is making you sweat. Only this pure milk of the gospel of Jesus saves.

And so Peter encourages us to long for it "like newborn babies." What a striking image! We've seen that one-week-old screaming at the top of its lungs because it's hungry.



Thrashing its head from side to side as it searches desperately for its mother's breast. Once it latches on and starts to drink—instant silence. Perfect contentment. Rich nutrition. Peace. Peter encourages us to be like that with God's Word. "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk."

"That by it you may grow up into salvation." Saving faith in Jesus does not create itself, nor does it grow by itself. That's God's work. He does it as we drink the pure spiritual milk of his Word. Through it, God empowers us to grow in our ability to "put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander" and latch on with ever greater confidence to the forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus won for us.

"Milk. It does a body good," the old commercial said. The pure spiritual milk of the Word does a soul even better.

Dear Holy Spirit, feed my soul daily with the pure Word of God, and through it strengthen my faith and draw me closer to you. Amen.



***Rev. James Danell (NWC '86, WLS '90)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of German.***

ALL GOD'S PEOPLE ARE PRIESTS



But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Harold stepped into the pulpit and addressed the congregation.

"I am not a pastor," Harold said. "I never studied at a seminary. I've raised cotton, and now I work for an association of cotton growers. I am not a professional preacher or public speaker. I don't generally get up in front of other people and give talks. So I'm rather nervous about standing up here this morning. In fact, if I weren't behind this pulpit, you could see my knees knocking!"

That was how Harold began his message on a Sunday when the pastor was away. The church was a small congregation, far from any others of its synod. When the pastor was traveling to a national meeting or other obligations, church council members would lead Sunday services. Harold's message on this day focused on words from the apostle Peter: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

"All God's people are priests," Harold continued. "Priests have the right to approach God directly; we are welcome in God's presence. Through Jesus Christ we all 'have access to the Father by one Spirit' (Ephesians 2:18). When we were baptized, we became part of the priesthood of all believers in Jesus. That gives us the privilege of approaching God 'with freedom and confidence' (Ephesians 3:12), and also the privilege to proclaim Christ to the world. We declare the praises of the Lord, who brought us out of darkness and into the light, who rescued us from death and gave us life. We all share in that gospel mission."



The Reformation reaffirmed the truth that all God's people are equal members of God's kingdom, a universal priesthood of those who pray and proclaim in the name of Jesus.

Martin Luther wrote: "If a group of pious Christians settled in a wilderness and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if they were to agree to choose one from their own midst to baptize, give communion, announce forgiveness and preach, such a man would be as truly a priest as he would be if all bishops and popes had consecrated him. This is why anyone may baptize and give absolution in case of necessity, which would be impossible if we were not all priests."

Harold fulfilled such a role in his congregation in the pastor's absence. Each of God's people fulfills a more general role of worship and witness in everyday life. God's Spirit is with all of his people—all of his priests—as we come to him in prayer and go for him to others, with news of his grace.

Jesus our Lord, we praise you for what you have done for us. Embolden all of us as your people—a royal priesthood—to come to you for blessing and to speak for you, extending your blessing to others. Amen.



Rev. David Sellnow (NWC '82, WLS '86)
serves Martin Luther College as a professor
of theology, philosophy, and history.



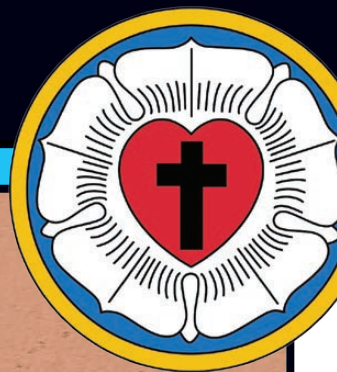
We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19)

“Completely reliable”? Really? Can anything be completely reliable? My GPS is almost always reliable; only a few times has it misled me. Regular updates seem to help a little. My vehicle is usually reliable; only rarely has it failed me. Apparently, batteries do wear out. My friends are often reliable, but occasionally some have forgotten me. Belated birthday wishes are better than none, I guess. It’s hard to imagine anything being completely reliable. Even the most sophisticated piece of equipment designed for use in life-or-death situations has a backup—just in case.

God’s Word is different. In Scripture, we have something completely reliable. We never have to update or replace the message, we never will be forgotten, and we never need a back-up plan just in case something doesn’t work.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, along with James and John, saw with his own eyes the face of Jesus begin to shine and his clothes become white as light—a glimpse into glory itself. Peter witnessed Jesus talking with Elijah and Moses. Peter heard with his own ears the voice from heaven say, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5). And Peter assures us that the event was neither fiction nor fantasy: “For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

Not only did Peter hear and see what transpired on that day, but he tells us that “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable.” Yes, in Jesus Christ we have the Word of truth made flesh. In Scripture we have recorded for us both the prophecies and the fulfillment of the



prophecies. Amazing! In Scripture, and in Scripture alone, we find the unchanging truths of salvation—no fiction, no fantasy. “Sola Scriptura” was one of the foundational truths of the Reformation, and it remains a foundational truth for us today.

When Martin Luther stood firm and refused to recant at the Diet of Worms, he clearly declared that he could not agree to anything outside of what was recorded in God’s Word: “I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” He had heeded the admonition to “pay attention to it” and to “listen to him.” He had steadied his focus on the “light shining in a dark place.”

Like Luther, may we too have the confidence to stand firm when the assaults of this present world seek to attack not just us, but the very source of our truth.

Sola Scriptura. Scripture alone. Completely reliable.

Lord Jesus, the path to heaven is revealed in your Holy Word. Grant that we pay attention to it, treasure it, trust it, and share it with others who have not yet come to know you. Amen.



***Professor Thomas Hunter (DMLC '75)
serves Martin Luther College as director of
international services and professor of English.***



Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though

Anger erupts: "Why didn't you tell me?" One neighbor did not call and forewarn the other when he saw water bubbling up in the yard next door. So when the water pipe completely ruptured, the cost for plumbing and water damage was extensive. To have such knowledge and keep silent is unthinkable.

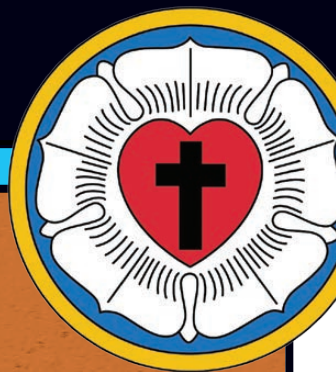
How much more so when such knowledge deals with life issues and not just plumbing issues? What if someone had knowledge to guarantee that your life possesses true peace and noble purpose, not just for some 80 years but for forever? Our Father above does not keep silent!

God does not want you to be surprised. From the very beginning, he graciously speaks the eternal truths vital for eternal life. We know where we come from. We know why sin, suffering, and death exist. We know the answer is in Jesus, the One born of a virgin. We know Jesus has prepared a place for us. We know what he—the judge of the living and the dead—will say on the Last Day. We know eternal truth because we know him who is the Truth, the Incarnate Word revealed in the Holy Word.

This Word is inspired by the Spirit, not invented by human beings. Like trade winds filling the sails of a schooner, the Spirit moved human authors, sinners though they were, to write a perfect testimony of God's saving activity. Only the omnipotent Lord God could bring his message without error or confusion. Inspired, not invented.

No human could ever imagine, let alone invent, truths beyond the ability of his senses to observe. Yet we learn from Scripture of a God who is three yet one. Of the sinless one becoming sin for us. Of a holy supper where the Incarnate

*human, spoke from God as they were
carried along by the Holy Spirit.
(2 Peter 1:20-21)*



God is really present. Of the Spirit's power to create new life in dead hearts.

We know the big things. Let's trust the Savior in the little things as well. The length of our pilgrimages we leave to God, but Scripture tells us we have forever lives in heaven. Our health and wealth are never guaranteed, but Scripture tells us these corrupt bodies will be transformed like Christ's glorious body. Inspired, not invented.

Dear Lord, forgive us for the times we refuse to listen, neglecting your living Word and the prayerful pondering of your promises. Forgive for the sake of your Son Jesus, whose perfect use of the Word is now credited to us through baptism. Holy Spirit, you who inspired the living Word of the living Savior, inspire our hearts to study that Word every day. Sola Scriptura.

**Lord, open now my heart to hear,
And through your Word to me draw near.
Let me your Word e'er pure retain;
Let me your child and heir remain.
Your Word inspires my heart within;
Your Word grants healing from my sin.
Your Word has pow'r to guide and bless;
Your Word brings peace and happiness. Amen.**

CW 282:1,2



**Rev. Mark Zarling (NWC '76, WLS '80)
serves Martin Luther College as president.**



Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of

The story is told that Emperor Napoleon III of France offered a prize to anyone who could make a satisfactory butter substitute to feed his army. The result was a combination of vegetable oils and animal fat that evolved into the product known today as margarine.

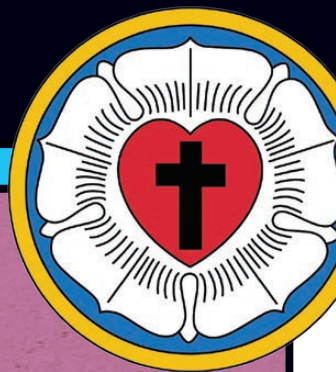
Although this inventive spread had the taste and texture of butter, its gray-white color made it unappetizing to the masses. Only after yellow food dyes were added to the manufacturing process did the product gain broad acceptance. The addition of yellow food coloring made it difficult to distinguish margarine from butter by its appearance. As recently as the mid-1960s it was impossible to buy colored margarine in the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin, due to strong opposition from the dairy industry.

The manufacturing of margarine has increased in sophistication over the years to package its enhanced color with improved texture and taste. Now only someone with discerning taste buds can tell the difference between these two popular spreads. It's easy to mistake margarine for the real thing!

Imposters on the food front are one thing; imposters in the spiritual realm are another. Food manufacturers expend considerable resources and effort to test food products, analyze their content, and ensure their safety. The apostle John suggests that we make a similar effort in the spiritual realm: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4 :1).

But such careful testing of the spirits is not done from a distance, nor can it be done in ignorance. John goes on in

God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. (1 John 4:1-2)



the next verse to provide advice for the wary Christian: “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

None other than Satan himself is the great imposter. His main objective is to deceive and to confuse the people of the world by replacing the free gift of eternal life through Christ alone with a lie. He has thousands of years of experience with this approach. His first victims were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Years later, Luther recognized that many in his day were caught in the devil’s deceptive snare; the ruse continues today. Luther’s emphasis that “Christ came to rescue us from Satan, death, and sin, from which we could not be rescued by our own strength” (*Luther’s Works, Volume 30*) is as important today as it was 500 years ago.

God grant us the zeal to “test the spirits” and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

O Holy Spirit, the world is filled with imposters claiming to have the answers to life’s important questions. Grant us a rich measure of discernment to know the truth about Jesus Christ, our only source of eternal life, and to accept the Apostle’s challenge to test the spirits in our search for truth. Amen.



Professor Steven Thiesfeldt (DMLC ‘74)
serves Martin Luther College as vice president
for administration.



Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. (Jude 3)

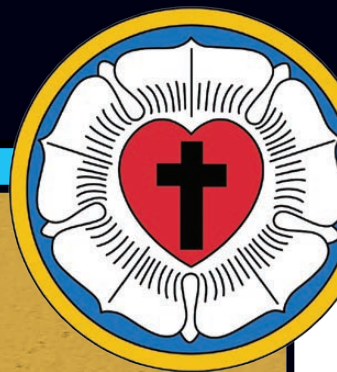
Although we recognize October 31, 1517, as the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, one could argue that April 18, 1521, defined it. When Luther nailed his now famous “95 Theses” to a church door in Wittenberg, he was still hopeful that the Roman Catholic Church could be reformed. He didn’t want to leave it or destroy it—only to see it reformed. But at the Diet of Worms three-and-a-half years later, when he stood before the most powerful secular and religious authorities of his time, it became clear that things would not end as he had hoped.

If you are even a little familiar with Reformation history, you have likely heard Luther’s final words on that April day in Worms. When asked if he would retract what he had written and renounce his teachings, he declared, “Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of Scripture or by manifest evidence . . . I cannot and will not recant, for we must never act contrary to our conscience. . . . Here I stand. God help me! Amen!”

Luther literally put his life on the line that day to contend for the Christian faith. Pope and Emperor condemned Luther as a heretic and declared him an outlaw.

As sons and daughters of the Reformation, we may envision ourselves standing where Luther stood—contending for the faith. In our hearts we want to make a bold confession of what we believe. And yes, we even believe that we would stake our life on it.

But in reality we know how easy it is to compromise our beliefs and to conform our lives to things contrary to the Christian faith. The secular world screams about tolerance



and demands that we accept what God's Word calls sin. From many Christian churches, the call is going out to set aside the teaching that salvation is found in Christ alone.

So how can we "contend for the faith" in spite of opposition? We stand where Luther stood. He would not compromise his belief that salvation is only possible by God's grace alone, through faith alone, as revealed in Scripture alone. And the very thing that Luther confessed gave him the strength to contend for the faith. He found his courage in Christ alone. Through careful study of God's Word, he learned to distinguish truth from error. There he found the faith "that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." And that same Word motivated him to stand unmoved on its truth.

As we observe the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, it's fitting to recall Luther's struggle for the faith. May we too "contend for the faith" found in the Scriptures, finding our courage and strength in the object of that faith—Jesus Christ our Lord.

Dearest Jesus, empower your church to contend for the faith that you have once for all entrusted to your holy people. Amen.



Rev. Michael Otterstatter (NWC '90, WLS '94)
serves **Martin Luther College** as vice president
for mission advancement.



I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (Revelation 3:8)

What is the secret to success? Everyone wants to know. Including churches. Experts will tell you that one of the biggest keys to being successful is that you have to play to your strengths. The same is true for the church.

But that was the problem for the church in Philadelphia in the book of Revelation. The problem with playing to their strengths is that they had a little problem even finding their strengths. They didn't look very successful. Even Jesus admits it. He says, "I know that you have little strength." Some might look at our synod or our churches and conclude the same.

But it turns out that Jesus thought that this little church was wildly successful. How could that be? The church at Philadelphia had figured out that the secret to success is not playing to our strengths but to Christ's. Jesus goes on to say, "I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name." The church at Philadelphia didn't put their hope in numbers or programs or pastors or budgets or buildings—they put it in one thing: Christ and his Word alone!

For a church like this, for a church like ours, people with little strength, our risen Savior says, "See I have placed before you an open door." Jesus opened that door when he died on the cross. Jesus allowed his strength to be sapped on that cross for every time we've gotten wrapped up in gauging our success according to the world's standards instead of his. But because he did die and then rise on Easter morning, it means your sins are all forgiven and gone . . . forever!

He opened a door for you that can never be shut. Never. It can never be shut no matter how hard the devil tries to



convince you he's shut it. Your conscience can't shut that door no matter how often it accuses you. Your sins can't shut that door no matter how high they're piled up. Why? Because Jesus wants you in heaven forever, and he's strong enough to hold open the door so it can never be shut. This is our strength—Jesus is our success! Now, no more death. Only life!

So are we a successful church? Well, it turns out that every kindergartner in Sunday school already knows the answer: "Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me!"

When I am weak, then in Jesus I am strong. When we hold to Jesus and his Word, then we are successful. May we always be a church that knows that secret!

Lord Jesus, bless your church with success. Teach us not to look for success in outward accomplishments and praise, but in your accomplishments for our salvation and in all you tell us in your Word. Be our strength and success today and every day. Amen.



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Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give

We close our series by highlighting the “eternal gospel.” This gospel proclaimed to our first parents assures us that God’s providential care and love have an everlasting impact. It’s the same gospel the Psalmist highlights when he says, “I will not die, but live and proclaim what the Lord has done.”

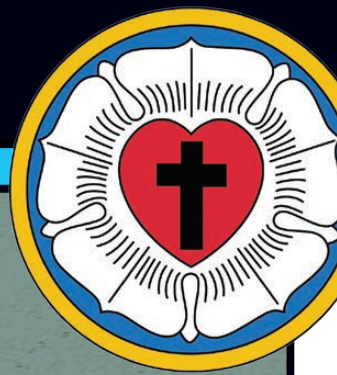
No wonder Martin Luther wrote this Bible passage on a castle wall when the fate of the Reformation hung in the balance. Why? This gospel is so precious that the angel of Revelation wants the world to know it.

The “eternal gospel” is God’s Word in a nutshell. It tells us that God’s creative love made our world, “the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” for us to live in. It tells us that God’s redeeming love sent his Son to save us from eternal death. It tells us this so that we can enjoy God’s marvelous acts of mercy, kindness, and care by “worshiping him and giving him the glory.”

This gospel is ours to have and hold, to believe and confess forever. Both this divine message and the church that confesses it are endless and enduring.

How do we know? Messengers tell us. God’s Word comes to us by word of mouth, by messengers, by angels. For this reason Revelation 14:6-7 is the regular lesson for the Festival of Reformation. In Christian history Martin Luther is among those divine messengers to preach the gospel of God’s mercy and love from the Scriptures, and he does so fearlessly and clearly to generations whose faith is falling into unbelief.

St. John’s Revelation is filled with visions of angels. God’s angel takes believers into the glory of heaven and then, like a flashback, immediately back to earth to see conditions



him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” (Revelation 14:6-7)

before “the Judgment.” He preaches the gospel and the law purposefully with us in mind. After envisioning the heavenly bliss for believers, God’s angel brings us back to our reality, the way our world lives before Jesus’ final appearance. “Fear God!” he warns sincerely. And his warning strikes home, not softly but “in a loud voice.” Children of the earth, hear “the eternal gospel! Give him the glory.”

The angel comes “to those who live on the earth,” yet as the messenger he “flies in mid-air” above the earth to get the big picture. The vision encompasses everyone on planet Earth. It is meant for you and me, for “every nation, tribe, language, and people.” None is to be spared; none is to be an exception to this message.

And the enduring message is timed to reach us on the final hour of Judgment Day. To all who are self-absorbed and pay no attention to the warning, the message is clear, “Fear God, repent, and live with him forever!”

Abide with us, Lord Jesus. It is toward evening, and the day of final judgment is near. Vindicate your name among the nations, Lord God. Let your eternal gospel be known throughout the world to your glory and our good. Even so, we pray, Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.



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*I will not die but live, and will proclaim what
the Lord has done. (Psalm 118:17)*





