



The Branches

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Reflections of Love

"A man is walking during a new moon, looking at the ground as intently as possible, trying to find his way. But a new moon is dark, and darkness is black, and there is no light there. The shadow of the world is falling upon it, blocking the light of the sun. It has nothing to reflect and shows no hint that the sun even exists. Surely this man will stumble often. He cannot find his way.

A man is walking during a full moon. He can walk confidently, as he can see his path quite well. A full moon is bright, the light pure white, and even the moon's blemishes are beautiful. The shadow of the world has been removed from it and the sun's rays bounce off it toward the ground. It reflects a fraction of the brightness, but it is enough to let all know without a doubt that the sun is there even though hidden by a world. This man can find his way. That is, of course, unless he chooses to close his eyes – but that is a different direction than I'm heading with this comparison right now.

Let's face it: this world is dark. It hides the Son. And it casts a big shadow over those things that should be lighting the way. Consider that we are akin to the moon. Believers are used to reflect God's love – through His Word – to those whose path is still dark. Our words and actions are viewed by those around us. Granted, an unbeliever may read the Bible on his own. That would probably put him in complete daylight, which is about half a world away from my analogy. But for most people, Christ is seen by reflection in His followers.

I cannot count the times I've heard, "That was (or wasn't) very Christian," and "Christians are hypocrites." The second comment proves our sinfulness on one hand, but let's focus on the fact that anything is being said at all. Someone is watching. A lot of someones. The world. And conclusions are made by what is seen. Like it or not, when you call yourself Christian, you are seen as a reflection of Christ. Remember that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and you know that you are seen as a reflection of that Love.

"No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us" (4:12). This verse shows us how we reflect Christ. We love one another. We can demonstrate perfect love even in our imperfect state by caring and doing for others. As Christians, we're called to reflect Son-light as the moon reflects sunlight.

—Abby Matzke, St. Peter's, Stambaugh, MI

"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in the world."

—1 John 4:17

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CLC Youth Conference 2005

Our God Is An Awesome God

A bus and two vans departed from Mankato on August 8, 2005, heading southwest to Como, Colorado. Many boarded the bus thinking, "Why am I going to this conference *again*?" Others were excited to meet new faces as well as chat with familiar ones. After a stop in Wall, South Dakota, and an overnight lodging arrangement at *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church* in Rapid City, we were on our way. None of us truly knew what was in store, but we were eager to make the journey.

Como, Colorado is a small town. Less than forty people inhabit the place that resembles a slum district with broken-down outhouses. I guess it goes without saying that when we saw the town, we were not too excited to be there. Thankfully, Mr. Paul Stelter, our bus driver, kept driving through the town until we reached our destination at an elevation of 10,125 feet. As soon as we got to our campground, we all had to admit how great our God is to have created such breath-taking scenery. Rocky Mountains everywhere!

Our camp sessions began late Tuesday night with Pastor Paul Nolting telling us how life is a gift from our Heavenly Father. The week's succeeding sessions centered on the theme "Lift High, Live Strong," based on the Galatians 5 passage, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, against such there is no law." Each of these fruits (or "nuggets") was discussed by our amazing speakers, including Pastor Luke Bernthal, Dr. Jim Sydow, Professor Mike Sydow, Pastor Dave Povolny, and Tina Eichstadt.

Kristen Nolting was in charge of all the music for this year's conference. She did a spectacular job of making sure we all knew why we were at this conference and by teaching us some very uplifting tunes. We sang many songs, but decided on only three to sing for the worship service at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Lakewood (Denver), Colorado on our return trip. I think everyone's favorite song was "Praise His Name." If you want to know why, you will find out when you watch the 2005 Youth Conference film.

The Christian fellowship was a definite blessing of this conference. With close to 78 CLC youth along with 18 top-notch counselors and speakers, one was likely to meet new people. In discussion groups and, of course, at lunch, many friends were made and many deep subjects were broached. The skit and talent show night was extremely inspirational and entertaining. It even included Brent Schreyer and Company singing the old German favorite, "*Du Bist Ein Musikant*." A sometimes hilarious but fun-filled night was had by all.

At the conclusion of Saturday night and reaching into early Sunday morning, we had time to sit around the fireplace and reflect on our week with the Lord as well as our thoughts about returning home. We could sense the Lord's presence among us! We reassured each other that, "the Holy Spirit's got your back." It was a very emotional and a spiritual time for all of us. I believe many young people were drawn closer to their Lord that night.

Making memories has never been as much a blessing as it was at Youth Conference 2005. Friends, skits, hikes, whitewater rafting, music, and our Lord's continuing presence summarize the blessings of this year's conference. What was so beautiful about this year was that it was a brand new Youth Conference, but it still contained the same old message of Christ's love. That message is the only thing that is unchanging in this sinful world, and it is further proof that "Our God is an Awesome God."

—Alison Hansen, Immanuel, Mankato, MN; first printed in the Immanuel Home Messenger, August 2005

"Love sacrifices all things to bless the thing it loves."

—Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873)

True Love!

Ahhh...I've finally found True Love!

I may only be nineteen years old, but I have been searching my whole life for “True Love.” Searching and searching, and yet getting so frustrated. Going down literally every alleyway in an effort to fulfill my desire for love. Now, being only nineteen, “true love” has mostly meant finding romantic love. I have dated young boys, old boys, Christian boys, worldly boys, bi-racial boys...pretty much every type of boy. They all had one very glaring thing in common. None of them fulfilled my desire for true love.

Two weeks ago I finally realized that maybe none of these men were going to fulfill whatever it was in my heart that needed filling. Like every good young woman, I did what was expected. I ran to my daddy. I called him up and told him that I was confused. I felt as though somewhere along the way of growing up I had lost the innocent little girl that I was in my heart. I had forsaken that clarity of childhood and muddied it with the pursuit of romance. Boy after boy had distracted me from Jesus and instilled in me a very real doubt that God was sufficient. I decided to stop. Stop it all. Stop the internet “friendship” sites (which really mean “flirt with as many strangers as possible”), stop all the dates, stop so desperately floundering to find a man to validate me as a woman. It felt good. And I was excited to start. Start letting Jesus’ love fill me. Start letting my life reflect His love for me. There was still one small problem. I felt alone and unsure of how to go about being truly “in love” with Jesus.

Then Youth Conference. Thank Jesus for Youth Conference. Before arriving in Colorado, I have to admit, I was very skeptical. I thought it was going to be kind of boring. An extension of the classroom...with a view. I was scared of the social aspect. Nervous that people would think I was different, loud, too outgoing, etc. As we approached Camp Como I knew I was right about at least one thing. The view was *wonderful* and I recommend the Rocky Mountains to anyone. I was about to discover that Jesus had so much more in store for all of us. The topic this year’s conference focused on was the fruit of the Spirit as outlined for us in Galatians 5:22-23. Of course one of the fruits listed is love. I was excited to study this fruit since love has obviously fascinated and driven me. Pastor Luke Bernthal and Tina Eichstadt were scheduled to speak. The time came for the session to start and I put on my *super* listening cap and tuned in. I was ready. Not sure what for, but I was ready to hear whatever was going to be said.

It was such a simple, sweet revelation that Jesus had for me that day. His love. Wow. His love surpasses any earthly comprehension of love. Pastor Luke and Tina had a picture of Jesus hugging a young woman to His heart. The holes were still in Jesus’ hands. We closed our eyes and mentally put ourselves in Jesus’ embrace. It was the most incredible thing to really imagine me as the recipient of such a selfless love. I have never found that type of love in any human. Sure, boys have cared for me, given me gifts, spent money, time, effort, sentimentality, listened, shared, protected, served, and loved me. But *none*, not *one*, has done it with the grace, attention, and passion that Jesus has. Amazing. Jesus is the Lover of my *soul*. The peace that overwhelmed me at knowing that I had captured Jesus’ love and that He sacrificed Himself for *me* was exhilarating. Terrified, I hobbled, shattered, smudged, and chipped towards Jesus. Glowing in His love, I walked, excited, refreshed, and whole, holding the hand of my True Love. And in that moment I left my broken heart, dissatisfaction, and confusion behind. The quest for true love was answered in the arms of Jesus! Amen!

—Becky Povolny, *Messiah, Eau Claire, WI*

**In the New King James Version of the Bible,
the word “love” appears 361 times.**

More Reflections from Youth Conference...

The Meaning of Love

The session on “Love” as a part of the Fruit of the Spirit looked at love from a Christ-centered perspective. The take-away “nugget” was, “First, Christ loved us. As a result, we love Him. Only then can we truly love others.” Several Scripture supports were given for each part of that “nugget,” but I Corinthians 13 was used in all three to illustrate that not only that chapter embodies Christ Himself, but our desired response to Him through our New Man. More than an often-used marriage text, this chapter also is our guidebook in all our relationships—children to parents, friends to friends, dating relationships, and many others. It was a joy to see the maturity of thinking and the God-given desire to care for one another in this way as brothers and sisters in Christ! May it be so for each of us in our daily lives!

—Tina Eichstadt, Reporter

This session was one that I really, really enjoyed. It gave me a new way of looking at things, and it really helped me understand more clearly the Bible’s definition of love. Another thing it helped me to realize was that you cannot just throw “love” around and you cannot just play with someone’s emotions, because no matter how small of an impact you think you made, it could have meant a lot more to the other person. It could’ve left them resistant to other relationships and could’ve scarred their emotions. It’s not good to mess with other’s emotions because it can really make a difference.

It was so nice having all of the other girls there to discuss this topic with, to know and understand their thoughts and feelings on the topic too. This was a topic that I really enjoyed.

—Kelly Grams, Berea, Sioux Falls, SD

Love in a Different Light

This conference, one of the sessions that we had was on love. Tina Eichstadt and Pastor Luke Bernthal spoke on this subject. We talked about love in a little different light.

Using objects to illustrate, we used a candle as a man, and the candle holder as a woman. We split up males and females, and this is what I learned. We should not light our candles too soon. We need to wait until we are ready. God knows when we really are. Someone also mentioned how the candles we had were square. That was put aside until someone stated that the candles may be square at first, but once lit, they mold into something else. The men came back and told us that they talked about how they need to be careful with the glass holders—they can’t just kick them around.

We also talked about ourselves as sponges. We are hard; we have hard hearts. When we are filled with God’s love however, we “drip,” or reflect, God’s love to others. God’s love for us and our love back to Him “saturates” all our other relationships. We also had “nuggets” for each section. Our “nugget” was as follows: “First, Christ loved us. As a result, we love Him. Only then can we truly love others.” We had a few passages for this session. 1 John 4 is full of love thoughts, and we studied 1 John 4:8b-10. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 also has a lot of love thoughts. God is love!

—Amanda Geiger, Immanuel, Mankato, MN



Reflections Everywhere

Who is it that I see as I gaze into the mirror
With graying hair
And time-worn skin
And memory faltering more I fear?

A lake is dark and dreary while the clouds pass overhead.
The surface still,
No breath of air,
No bubbling stream from which it's fed.

A newborn babe with mattered eyes the breath of life draws in.
With body blue
The cries are heard
When hunger, pain, and fear begin.

Why use these three unique objects-- mirror, lake, and baby new?
Your attitude
Develops from
Reflections as they seem to you.

The mirror reflects all that I am and how I look to you.
The lake serene
Will still reflect
The shoreline and the sunset too.

But best of all a baby's eyes that sparkle with his smile
Reflect the love
The Father had
To send this soul to earth awhile.

One's attitude determines whether mirror, lake, or birth
Holds treasures deep
Eternally
Reflecting God's love on this earth.

So be the mirror reflecting God's Son-shine on the lake.
To each you meet
Along life's way
Love and forgive for Jesus' sake.

—*Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace, Fridley, MN*



Moonlight Cruise

Our city of Madison is built around Lake Mendota and Lake Monona with the capitol residing on a hill on the isthmus in between. From many different parts of the city one can see the dome of this magnificent building shining at night like a beacon. A local business on the lake offers boat trips on Lake Mendota to see points of interest around its perimeter. Most cruises are quite costly and feature a full meal with the trip, but a brochure we picked up listed some of the trips for the summer season which included three full-moon cruises at about half the cost of the normal fare. The times for these particular trips would be from 9:30-11:30 pm on the night of the full moon and would include only light snacks rather than a full meal.

For August the trip happened to land on a Friday night, and since no other activity was planned, we signed up, designating this to be my birthday present. Rather than give each other presents anymore, we often pick a special activity to enjoy together. This summer of 2005 has been very warm and dry with few rainy days, so we were pretty sure of a beautiful nighttime cruise with the full moon reflecting a ribbon of romantic light to guide our way. However, on Thursday evening a series of tornadoes hit the communities around Madison with full force, destroying more than 20 homes, damaging many more, and killing one man. There were predictions of more storms to arise on Friday night. Needless to say, I was a little nervous about my birthday present! Later on Thursday night, the skies cleared and the moon, nearly full, shone lovely into our bedroom. We held out hope for Friday night.

The dock from which our trip would launch is about 5 miles from our home in Middleton. We left at 8:45 on Friday and all the way over in the car we marveled at the rising moon, that globe of reflected sunlight, big and orange, shining in the night sky. The temperatures were very mild, we hardly had a need for a sweater, and the winds were calm. We were giving thanks to the Lord for granting us such a beautiful night to enjoy the trip on the lake with a full moon to add the special touch! By 9:30 when the cruise began, there were clouds starting to make their way across the sky and some were beginning to cover the moon. For about 25 minutes the moon peeked in and out of those light clouds, but after that it was pretty much blanketed by them. Oh well, we had a memorable trip despite the lack of moonlight. The boat took us past the Governor's Mansion, as close to the capitol building as we could get on the water, along past the University of Wisconsin's Union Terrace where live music was being played and a crowd of people were milling around, and after that back across the lake to the dock.

While anticipating this nighttime cruise and imagining the scene I would experience, I began to contemplate the rhymes, phrases or song tunes in which the word moon is found. Here are a few of those that came to mind: "I see the moon and the moon sees me, God bless the moon and God bless me." Or, "The man in the moon came down too soon..." Or (something more profound) "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night" (Psalm 121:6). And from one of my favorite hymns, "Fair is the sunshine, Fair is the moonlight..." (TLH 657:2). In early science lessons we are made aware that the moon has no light of its own, but reflects the light from the gaseous matter we know as the sun. But it is no less beautiful because of this fact. Do you think that most everyone enjoys seeing the moon rise in the night sky and grow from small crescent shape to full glowing globe as the month progresses?

In the same way as the moon has no light of its own, we Christians have no light of our own either. For by faith we know it is the Spirit through the Word who enlightens our hearts. He gives us the will and power to reflect the light of Him who is the true Light of the World— Jesus, our Savior from sin and death. Our deeds of love do give pleasure and beauty to this planet earth when we "declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Just as the moon is magnificent in the night sky, so are the saints of God who "are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..." (Eph. 2:10). We are lights to those who walk in darkness, beacons of hope who shine more beautifully than our state's capitol dome!

Dear Lord, help me to be a full moon over the lake of this world, not basking in the glory of my reflected light, but praising You for all Your Goodness in sending Jesus, the Sun and our Savior. Amen.

—Ruth Bernthal, *Peace Thru Christ, Middleton, WI*

News & Notes

The Gethsemane Lutheran Church Women of Spokane, Washington have published a new cookbook this past year. They would like to make it available to all sister congregations and friends of the CLC. The cookbook is filled with over 200 delicious recipes. It is bound in a small three-ring binder to allow for the addition of extra sheets. The GLCW hope you enjoy the recipes as much as they do. The cookbooks cost \$14 per book, which includes shipping fees. Checks can be made out to the GLCW. To order, you may contact us either by email or send a written request to the church. Thank you and God Bless!

The Gethsemane Lutheran Church Women,
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Look for a recipe from Gethsemane's cookbook in the this issue: Bavarian Apple Torte



A Look Ahead

**“Earth has
no sorrow that
Heaven cannot heal.”**

—Thomas Moore,
1779-1852

Themes and Deadlines!

Reflections continue for the next two issues. January 2006 will include articles on “Reflections of Hope.” Articles should be submitted as soon as possible; aim for mid-November to beat the holiday rush. Keep April’s theme in mind also: “Reflections of Faith.” Articles for April should be in by mid-February.

Don’t forget! We are always looking for theme suggestions from you! Send both ideas and articles to the editor’s address as found on the back page.

Special Offer!

As we approach the holiday season, we think of the tradition of exchanging gifts. While we certainly don’t want our earthly gift giving to overshadow the ultimate Gift we have been given in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, you may want to consider subscriptions as Christmas gifts. A special offer for the holidays is a \$5.00 “trial” subscription for a 1/2 year (January and April 2006 issues). This offer ends December 31, 2005. Simply send a check for 5.00 per gift subscription with names, home and email addresses, and phone numbers to The Business Manager. You will receive a gift certificate for each subscription electronically (or by mail if you don’t have email) for you to print and put in an envelope, card, or gift.

A blessed Advent and Christmas season to you all. May the joy of the birth of the Christ child overflow in your hearts and reach out to others with Love!

CLC Postcard

From St. Paul Lutheran Church, Vernon, B.C., Canada

The Okanagan Valley in beautiful British Columbia is where we call home. The small town of Vernon is nestled among three lakes and surrounded by forest-covered mountains. There are many hiking/mountain bike trails, mountain fishing lakes, tourist attractions of many kinds, and Silver Star Mountain Ski Resort a mere 20 minutes from Vernon.

Vernon is made up of many ethnic groups including East Indian, Oriental, Russian and Ukrainian, German, and many French-speaking people, as well as a very strong British influence in the speech, customs, and sports. The area around Vernon is covered with fruit orchards (apples, peaches, apricots, and cherries), as well as vineyards, and ranch land.

Our church family does not have a building of their own to worship in yet, but we have just begun worshipping in a Seventh Day Adventist building. We have a German and English service every Sunday. There are about 30 very friendly people in our church, many of whom have immigrated from Germany. They have some very frightening stories to tell about their escape.

If you find yourself planning a trip out west, we would enjoy it very much if you were to pop up into Canada and spend a little time in our valley. The Lord's blessings to you all.

—Julie Reim, St. Paul, Vernon, BC, Canada

Delicious Dishes



Avocado and Tomato Appetizers

2 avocados peeled, pitted, chopped

2 tomatoes, chopped

1/2 large red onion, chopped

juice from 1 lemon

container of spreadable cream cheese with garlic and herbs

Toss the first 4 ingredients together in a bowl. Spread cream cheese on Rice Thins (not Rice Cakes) or Breton Crackers, top with the avocado mix and eat. This does not keep very well, so you'll have to eat it all. Enjoy!

—Julie Reim, St. Paul, Vernon, BC, Canada

To pit and peel an avocado, slice lengthwise around the pit. Twist the halves to separate them. Gently lift the pit out with the tip of a spoon. Spoon the meat out of the peel.

Bavarian Apple Torte

1/2 c. margarine

1 egg

1/3 c. sugar

1/2 tsp vanilla

1/4 tsp. vanilla

1/3 c. sugar

1 c. flour

1/2 tsp. cinnamon

1/4 c. sugar

4 c. peeled & sliced apples

1 (8-oz) pkg. cream cheese, softened

1/4 c. sliced almonds

Cream the margarine, 1/3 c. sugar, and vanilla. Blend in flour. Spread the dough in the bottom of a 9 inch springform pan. Combine softened cream cheese and 1/4 c. sugar. Blend in egg and vanilla. Pour on top of the pastry dough. Combine remaining sugar and cinnamon. Toss apples in sugar mixture. Spoon over the cream cheese layer and sprinkle with sliced almonds. Bake at 450° degrees for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 400° degrees and bake another 25 minutes. Cool pan on wire rack before removing rim of pan. Slice and serve with whipped cream.

—Excerpted from *The Gethsemane Lutheran Church Women of Spokane, WA's cookbook*

Book Review

John Adams

I'm sure everyone has read some early American history, but David McCullough makes it come alive as you see events as they were impacted by Adams. A farmer, he left his land and family reluctantly to help in the shaping of our country. Spending months, and in some instances years, away from home, you realize that great sacrifices were made by his wife and children left to manage on their own. You encounter many of the famous founders, but primarily as they relate to the temperament and drive of Adams. Such easy reading should remind us that a study of history doesn't always have to be a chore!

—Edith Haertl, Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ

Motherhood: The Second Oldest Profession

On an impulse, I picked this one by Erma Bombeck up at the local library because of the title. I sat down as soon as the baby took a nap and cracked it open. The first couple chapters had me laughing. Then I must have had enough of the irony of motherhood, because it started sounding bitter in many ways. The remainder of the book revolved around reiterating the difficult issues mothers deal with in raising children in a very sarcastic tone, meant to be humorous. Erma fails to compensate with positive characters, situations, and the more charming side of motherhood. I didn't pick it up looking for "religious" reading, but was disappointed to find the only references to God in two places (aside from vain use of His name): one, in the imaginative state of doling out children to mothers and naming them after patron saints, and two, creating "mothers" as nearly equal to Himself. From mothers turning to alcohol because of ungrateful children to mothers being put in homes after losing their minds, I found myself skipping whole chapters to avoid more negativism.

I tried to read past the sarcasm in the hopes of finding redeeming qualities in the Second Oldest Profession. God says I will find it in my life, but this book gives little hope of more than just distress and strife to come. I recommend avoiding this book.

—Abby Matzke, St. Peter's, Stambaugh, MI

"To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting."

—Edmund Burke, 1729-1797

A Time To Laugh

Sunday after church a mom asked her young daughter what the Sunday School lesson was about. She replied, "Don't be scared, you'll get your quilt." Needless to say, the mom was perplexed. Later in the day the pastor stopped by and the mom asked him what the morning's Sunday School lesson really was. He said "Be not afraid, the Comforter is coming."

—Rhoda Krause, Luther Memorial, Fond du Lac, WI

The Seedling

She presses the soil firmly around the base of the plant. It seems to straighten, stretch and spread, testing the air around it, as though judging whether this can be a place to thrive. She smooths a bent leaf, thoughtfully. She has chosen the spot with care, a protected place where it will receive adequate sunshine and moisture to nourish, with just enough shade to protect from the harshest summer heat. It looks so lovely, and yet vulnerable, she thinks. It will face challenges as it grows. There will be good days and bad, days of building up and days of testing. Strong winds and harsh rain may try the endurance of branch, stem, and root. What will it be like in a month, two months? Will it have become a tall, mature plant, producing fruit? Will it have survived the tests of time and nature? That survival will require daily vigilance, weeding out anything which would hamper, enriching the soil to encourage its growth. And when winter has blanketed it with snow, and nothing of it remains except its seed, will it have fulfilled her expectations?

Nearby the child watches as she, too, presses a plant into the soil. The mother pauses, sits back, smiles. What does the future hold for this child? She, too, has been freshly planted in the soil of this life, equally lovely, equally vulnerable. She will face challenges as she grows, will experience days of building up and days of testing. What will she be like as she is shaped by the influences around her? What can be done to encourage strong, healthy growth in that maturing process? The mother understands that she will need that same daily vigilance to protect this child from the storms of life. There will be weeds to remove, enrichment to be generously given. This, too, will require a great deal of time and effort, and the challenge is daunting. If a plant withers or is overcome by the elements, it is easily replaced. But this child is irreplaceable. Where can a mother find the wisdom and endurance to guide through all the years to come? She remembers the promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Yet she will need first to be strengthened by Him, to be filled with His wisdom, before she will have the ability to train up this child, to ensure that when she is old she will not depart from it. In the Word, the manual, the mother will find the directions. She prays for wisdom to use what she learns to direct the child. "I can do all things, through Christ, who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). He will guide both mother and child as they share the day-to-day experiences of life. And when the child is old, will she have become a mature Christian, will she have lived a Godly life, filling that spot in which He has placed her? Will she have grown to a ripe old age, producing seed with which to replenish the earth?

The mother's heart swells with love for this child, this gift from the Lord. Yet she understands that as intense as her love is, the love which the Lord has for the child is infinitely greater, and that He will guide and nourish them both through whatever life brings, and will carry them safely to the final harvest-home.

—Eunice Roehl, *Messiah, Eau Claire, WI*

Lord of My Life

Oh, may I daily, hourly, strive
In heavenly grace to grow,
To Thee and to Thy glory live,
Dead to all else below!
Tread in the path my Savior trod,
Though thorny, yet the path of God.

—TLH 24, verse 4

A Generous Donation

A generous individual has made a donation in order for women who cannot otherwise subscribe at this time to be able to do so. There are four of these subscriptions still available. They will be given on a first come, first served basis.

Please contact Tina Eichstadt at the address on the back page to inquire.

Encouragements

**“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”**

—Psalm 139:14

I received this passage, along with a wonderful, thoughtful message from one of you. We had a conversation regarding frustration with our physical appearances. This is something that I struggle with very much. Over the course of 12 years of marriage (and 7 pregnancies) I have gained many pounds. Now, I want to be quick to point out that this does not bother Ray at all, it is Julie’s hang-up. There are times when I have trouble just getting dressed to go somewhere because nothing fits like I’d like it to. Anyway, in the email I received the other day from my friend, she brought several points to my attention.

The above passage says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and we need to praise Him. In the Bible, there is no side-note stating that this passage is null and void if you have gained weight, your hair has turned gray or fallen out, or you now have wrinkles. We are God’s—every part of us. When I read this next part, I knew my friend was right: the devil does a happy dance every time I moan and complain about my body shape—especially when I do it out loud in front of my children. I tell them that God loves them more than they can imagine, and they are beautifully made by Him. Then I go on and on about how this shirt does not fit, or how I am embarrassed by my weight...blah, blah, blah. I am actually sabotaging my own mission! My mission is to teach them that we are to praise and worship God—that He has a reason and purpose for each of us—that He loves us deeply and desires a personal relationship with them. But I give them the impression that I am not fearfully and wonderfully made, and that the primary focus is on my body shape instead of worshiping the Lord and doing His will. What a great deal of time I have wasted on worrying about weight and looks, turning my heart away from what is truly its only job: following and praising the Lord. As my friend said, it is not our clothes (or frumpy body, gray hair, laugh lines, or pigeon toes) that go to church on Sunday to worship the Lord, it is us.

Another one of my friends, whom I call my “big sister,” and I were also talking along these same lines. Our discussion was about the “me-ism” mentality that is so easy to fall into. It is the devil’s playground—very subtle. He could never whisper in your ear “Hey!! Christian lady...go rob that bank!!” Obviously we would refuse. No...he takes a much more subtle approach—one that gets us to focus on us, and away from the Lord’s holiness. If I am fretting about *my* body, or *my* job, *my* church, *my* bills, *my* health—my goodness!! It’s impossible to look at Him, when I am concentrating on myself. So, when I am tempted to focus on “me” and “my” I need to look instead to Him, and His forgiveness, His Holiness, His love for us, and His will for my life.

What a blessing that the Lord used both of these dear friends of mine to bring this point into focus. He has very gently reminded me that I have other concerns that need to take up my time—ones that are far reaching, and God pleasing! God Bless each of you!

—Julie Schopp, St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD



The Family's Menagerie

When you have a family
Your home is a menagerie.
Little boys and puppies
(Not flushable guppies)
Girls and cats—
For us, once, high school and bats!

When you gain one fuzzy friend
Be sure it's never going to end.
Two cats produce so many kittens
The vet thinks I'm smitten,
But we've paid his rent
With the dollars spent
On neuters, spays, and prevention of rabies.

"Hey Mom, couldn't we have another baby?"
"Not with a turtle and the cries he makes,
And your little brother's fascination with snakes."
Blue parakeet feathers cover the floor,
Someone, please, fasten the gerbil cage door
And explain to me their fascination
With multiplication procreation.

Then children grew and critters diminished.
Father sighed, "At last we are finished?"
But a kitten was rescued
And Mom's pulse quickened
When someone asked, "Would you like some chickens?"
So I confess the children didn't start this lark;
If the truth be known, it is Mother's Ark.

—Nancy Battig, Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ

Our Heritage in Luther's Seal

Martin Luther's Seal is a fitting symbol for the Reformation which had its beginning on October 31, 1517, the Eve of All Saint's Day. It was then that he posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of All Saint's Church in Wittenberg, Germany. In commemoration of that event, we observe the Festival of Reformation. Luther designed the emblem while teaching at the University of Wittenberg and called it "a badge of my theology." He used it as his private seal on the title page of his authorized documents, essays, and books. The design was cut in stone at the doorway of his home in Wittenberg.

The seal shows a cross on a heart imposed on the Messianic rose and surrounded by a circle to denote eternity. Luther said, "...in my heart (is) the image of a Man hanging on a cross." He further declared that the cross is to remind us that it is faith in the Crucified that saves us, and pointed to the words of Paul in Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." To Luther, the rose signified that "The Christian's heart is resting on roses/E'en while beneath the cross reposes." The circle refers to the permanence of God's Word of which Peter writes "the Word of the Lord endureth forever" (1 Peter 1:25).

The symbolic colors display a black cross in the center, indicating sin, shame, and suffering. It is placed on a red heart to represent the saving blood of Jesus and His great love. The heart is set in the midst of a white rose to show that faith yields joy, peace, and comfort. To Luther, white reflected the glory of angels.

The rose is set on a sky-blue background representing heaven. The gold ring encircling the rose signifies the gift of everlasting life. Since the ring is gold, the most precious metal, it symbolizes the bliss of heaven which is more precious than all other treasures.

With the Reformer Luther, we see the Scriptures speak clearly: "...having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Luther's Seal proclaims the joy of that faith which looks forward to the heavenly joy which shall be ours forever.

—Doris Hallauer, Bethel, Morris, MN; reprinted from Women in Fellowship, Fall 1988

"Don't worry about the world coming to an end today.
It's already tomorrow in Australia."



—Charles Schultz, Peanuts comic strip creator



Kitchen Tips for Fall

- **Crunchy crystals?** A slice of apple placed with hardened brown sugar should soften it.
- **Out, spot!** A raw potato and water rinse takes food stains off your hands.
- **Sprouting spuds in storage?** An apple tossed in a bag of potatoes prevents budding.
- **Non-sticky digits:** Wash your hands with cold water before pressing Rice Krispies treats in the pan—the marshmallows won't stick to you.

Women of Faith

As Christian women, we each strive (or should be striving) to become more Christlike in our daily lives. But often life's mishaps and our own failures are discouraging. We get off track; we lose focus.

Gain focus again by reading Scripture! Seems like a simple enough answer. But reading it may not be enough for some of us. We don't take it personally. We don't read each verse, chapter, or book as it applies to our daily walk. Try the following little exercise in making the Bible talk to you as an individual.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

Now reread the verse by replacing the name "Jesus" where "love" is. "Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade himself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Jesus never fails."

Now, put your own name where "love" was and where you inserted "Jesus." Now, it is personal.

Don't forget: we will still fail. Don't be discouraged. That is what Christ came for, and we will still need His saving grace no matter how hard we try or how well we do!

Go Out on a Limb—Send it In!

Thank you for a great first year of *The Branches*. We appreciate your support through our continuing "growth" phase and your tolerance of changing formats and somewhat belated issues! With God's blessing may this forum for sharing gifts and encouragements continue to reach across the miles.

On a personal note, I'd like to appeal to all of you for a bit of assistance. With so much more room with the new format, coming up with material for each issue is more challenging. If anyone has glanced at the dull little box on the back page, you might have noticed that there are very few people claiming to be "staff" to produce this magazine. And with the additional footwork to be done in tracking down articles, it's getting a bit lonely! My own responsibilities as mom doubled as of August 7, and the already short nights are not leaving as much room for my seat-of-the-pants editing.

Here's where I ask—or plead—for help. There are over 300 women (and a few good men) out there waiting for your talents and thoughts to come to them through *The Branches*. Have something you're thinking of sharing? Go out on a limb—send it in! Two babies and just a few other responsibilities prevent me from sending you a personal invitation—or I would!

Why send in anything? Well, this is your magazine. You, the women of the CLC, are the talent behind it. You are the sisters, daughters, mothers, grandmothers, and friends of faith that are here to share that faith with others. You are the experts, the teachers, cooks, nurses, wives, musicians, businesswomen, etc., who have opinions, advice, and stories to share. And I can guarantee that you all have something worth sharing!

Your excuses are gone...pick up a pen and join in!

—Abby Matzke, your volunteer Editor-by-night

Letters to the Editor

Just thought I would send a quick email to comment on the new format of the CLC Ladies Newsletter. It is GREAT. Was so surprised to get it in with my mail. Great articles. This brings the ladies of the synod closer than ever before.

—Ellen Bratz, *Peace Thru Christ, Middleton, WI*

I have enjoyed all the articles in *The Branches* and wish to commend you and all the staff who make it possible. Your new choice of paper and additional pages seems to be a wise decision, good stewardship of funds, in my opinion.

—Ruth Bernthal, *Peace Thru Christ, Middleton, WI*

The last issue was the best yet. Personally, I thought that the content was exceptional; inspirational and with real substance. I enjoyed it very much...thanks.

—Julie Mueller, *St. Paul's, Denver, CO*

Editor's Note

There is one correction for the past July 2005 issue. The poem titled "It's In The Valleys I Grow" was written by an unknown author and submitted by Trudy Wales.

Thanks for sending it in, Trudy!

News & Notes

Hello, sisters in Christ! Just by way of an information update...here is the latest set of "stats" as of 9/1/05 for *The Branches* magazine. For those of you who have been blessed with the gift of math skill and/or interest, if there are other pieces of information about our fellowship in this medium that you'd like to see don't hesitate to drop the Business Manager a note or email (address on last page).

Annual subscriptions paid to date—264.

Outstanding subscription pledged but not paid—74.

Gift subscriptions purchased—33.

CLC Congregations represented in our subscriber list—62.

If you are receiving this issue and haven't yet paid for the 2005-06 subscription year, please consider this a friendly reminder. The Business Manager would be overjoyed to accept your payment by 12/1/05, if possible.

A warm thank you to all who have provided feedback to date on the new look/paper. The responses are overwhelmingly positive. Please say an extra prayer of thanksgiving for finding a new printer—and one in our family of believers as well!



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***I am the Vine,
you are the branches.
He who abides in Me,
and I in him,
bears much fruit;
for without Me
you can do nothing.***

—John 15:5

**Ashamed of Jesus?
Sooner far**

**Let evening blush
to own a star.**

**He sheds the beams
of light divine**

**O'er this benighted
soul of mine.**

—TLH 346, V. 2



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