



The Branches

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Reflections of Hope

“O Lord, how long?” How many days of your life do you feel like this? If you’re human, don’t lie, I know you’ve said it. “How long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Why do you show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?” Yes, I know you’ve accused God too. As if God is sending us problems for fun. As if our loving God wants to see us suffer. I know you’ve at least thought those words, because so have I, and we’re all struggling against the old Adam. Or Eve, in most of our cases.

You’ve thought them, I’ve thought them, and the prophets thought them. Habakkuk had the guts to write them down. He was burdened too. He became frustrated. He became impatient. He became troubled. And God preserved the prophet’s words for our sake. That short little book sounds like a friend to identify with in time of trouble. Reading it when under duress is like picking up the phone to a good and wise friend. He starts out with “I’ve been there too, you’re not alone” and ends with helpful, hopeful words. Habakkuk is a prophet with the same attitudes we have, even though the troubles he speaks of were heavier in nature than most of ours.

Hope is something that Habakkuk finds again. He never really lost it, as we shouldn’t. “O Lord, how long?” still assumes that it is coming to an end at some point. We realize seasons come and go and our troubles do too, eventually.

The prophet prays. This is a sign that he holds hope in the right places also. We mustn’t forget to bring our troubles to Jesus. As the hymn says, we bear needless pain when we don’t unload our burdens on Him; He can handle it.

And in the end, hope revives a bit of joy in the prophet, as it should in us. We have God’s promises written all over the Bible— promises of love, of strength, of a bright future in eternity because of Christ. Habakkuk reaffirms that though bad things happen, we should hope in the Lord. “Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls— Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

We may also find reflections of the hope given to us in each other. I won’t keep you any longer here; open your new issue to see more of the hope you share with your sisters in Christ!

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

“The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills.”

—Habakkuk 3:19a

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Hope

I have been pondering now for awhile about the subject of hope. The more I tried to come up with some stories of hope that I might share, the more “hopeless” and helpless I felt. So I studied the subject from a more subjective point of view than my own experiences. After all, I have been through quite a few experiences in my life. I was the oldest of six, had a schizophrenic mother, am the mother of eight children, we lost three pregnancies— one was attacked by a virus and died as a result at the five-month point. I have to say that through all this, I wasn’t a very good example of a hopeful Christian. But, what God really wants us to see is the Object of our faith and hope— Jesus Christ.

The trials and troubles that we have living on this earth are going to make this life one under the cross. Our hope is in Christ and what He did for us. Some of my favorite Scriptures during heavy times are: Hebrews 13:5b: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” and 1 Corinthians 10:13b: “But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

“Faith and hope are not the same affections,” as Luther says in *What Luther Says #2096*, “For faith is not hope nor hope faith; and yet because of great affinity that exists between them, it is impossible to separate them... By faith we began (our spiritual life), by hope we continue it and by revelation we shall obtain the whole.” A synonym for hope is “trust.”

The biggest snag that I run into when trials come is whether I will make it through or not. I tend to lose all hope and start to panic and despair quickly. God’s Word is, of course, our greatest strength in these times— in His means of grace— where there is forgiveness of all sin and comfort and hope. God also helps us get through by giving doctors and medicines, friends and family, food and drink, sunshine and rain, and a church family, to name only a few examples, for our earthly welfare.

One thing that never ceases to amaze me is how we can go to church and hear God’s Word of comfort and hope, no matter what each of us is going through, that very same Word gives us all comfort. Two specific times come to my mind. One is during Lent, when we ponder and meditate upon Christ’s Passion. The pastor reminds us of how Christ suffered and died for us, that He did that for us, and that all the benefits of His work are given to us in our baptism. The second example is in our current study of the book of Revelation in Bible Study, where we see the horror of Satan’s power, but we know that God still has a greater power over him.

“Faith teaches that there is a resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. Then hope adds: Well, if that is really true, then let us stake all we have on it, and let us suffer whatever we must, if thereafter we shall become such great lords” (*What Luther Says #2076*).

—Marianna Gummerus, Calvary, Marquette, MI

Wanted

Table prayers. What words are tradition at your table?
Share daily meal graces and/or holiday blessings with us all.

Also Wanted

Bedtime prayers for children, either ones you grew up with, your children used, or the cute— and perhaps humorous— ones they came up with at the spur of the moment.

A Child of Hope

The joy of expecting a child is one of God's many blessings. You are filled with all kinds of emotions: excitement, anxiety, and hope. You hope all goes well with the pregnancy, you hope that your baby will be healthy, and you hope you will be a good parent.

My husband and I found out we were expecting our second child in the summer of 2004. We were filled with joy and hope, but God chose to take our little boy from us on September 22, 2004. Of course we went through all of the sinful emotions, anger at God for taking away our hope and sadness that we wouldn't be able to watch our baby grow. As the Lord in His mercy healed our hearts we realized that God has spared our little one the evils of this world. We know that He is a loving and merciful God, which gives us hope that our baby is with Him in heaven.

Over a year has passed and we are now expecting another baby to be born in May. It has not been an easy pregnancy so far. There have been many doctor visits to check the health of the baby and I had a procedure done to reduce the risk of a miscarriage. Many prayers have been said that God will keep this baby safe and healthy if it is His will. As my husband and I look forward to this new hope, I know that even if God decides to take this one from us we have an even greater Hope in our lives.

Long ago another mother was expecting a child, but this Child wasn't an ordinary child. He wasn't born to fulfill the hopes and dreams of His earthly parents, but to fulfill His Heavenly Father's promise of a Savior born for our sins. This Child was the Hope of the whole world. During Advent we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ Child. He is the Light we celebrate at Christmas. It is only through Him, not of ourselves, that we have the hope of eternal life. We, in our sinfulness, want to cling to the hopes of this world. But this world is only temporary and will soon pass. As we celebrate Christmas and look forward to the New Year ahead with all of our hopes, let us remember to cling to the Hope that is everlasting. That Hope is Jesus Christ our Savior!

—Leah Fossum, Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC

Living at the Foot of the Cross

When I awake each morning
And I think about my day,
I know my work won't be a loss
Living at the foot of the cross.

Each daily task I manage
In the hope to see it through
Has joy I know will get across
Living at the foot of the cross.

My friends and family know me
While the stranger I must show
The love of Christ will not exhaust
Living at the foot of the cross.

My Savior is my glory,
All Scriptures give me my hope.
His Word does on my heart emboss
Living at the foot of the cross

—Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace, Fridley, MN

Encouragements

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Luke 12:40

“Are you ready yet?” “Hurry up please! We’ll be late!” Those of you that know me well, know that being on time is not one of my best virtues. I think that my children get it from me– when I worked in town before we were married, my nickname was “ten-after”– as in ten after 8:00 a.m., when I usually got to work! I spend a huge amount of time blazing around, trying not to be “late,” when actually, it is later that it has ever been. If the Lord came today at noon, would I be ready? Would I have my children prepared? The time we have here on earth is indeed our “time of grace,” given to us by God. Whenever that time is finished, that’s it – no more time to make the Lord the number one priority in our lives. I have filled my time with things that seem important, but in an eternal view, really do not matter.

I read a story that was very thought provoking. It starts out with Satan trying to figure out how to thwart God’s plan to save His people. Three of Satan’s assistants are with him, and one says “We could tell them that God doesn’t care about them.” Their leader scowls and says that Christians already know that God cares. The next one says “We could tell them that God isn’t real.” Again Satan is angry and says Christians know that God is real. The third assistant comes up with a better plan. He says “We can whisper to them: there is no hurry, there is no hurry.” Satan liked that one. I am very guilty of thinking that I will have more time to read that Bible story to the children another day. I get distracted by life, and forget what my life is really supposed to be about. My focus should always be on the eternal, not the material and earthly goals.

So, why is it so easy for me to get distracted by worldly things? Is it that eternal goals require me to actually apply myself? That I have to think about what I’m saying and doing, instead of just numbly moving through my days? Is it really that difficult to look at everything and everyone I meet, with an eternal view? Does doing the Lord’s work take more time, or is it my selfish sinful flesh that is too lazy to do it? Difficult questions to ask myself, but necessary. Because it is getting late!

I am also aware that there have been times when I’ve passed up an opportune moment to speak to someone about the Lord, for whatever reason. God, in His grace, sometimes gives me another chance to do what I was supposed to do the first time. But what about the times when I don’t get another chance? Hopefully, there is another Christian that person comes in contact with that will talk to them about Christ, and His loving sacrifice for us. The question that rings in my ears is “What if there is not another Christian?” Then I really blew it– big time.

So my prayer today is that the Lord will work in my heart to show me when I need to open my mouth (usually not a problem!) and speak about Him, and not to get so distracted by earthly goals. Now, I need to go make supper– it’s Late!

–Julie Schopp, St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD

**With my lamp well trimmed and burning;
Swift to hear and slow to roam,
Watching for Thy glad returning
To restore me to my home.**

TLH 606



CLC Postcard

From St. Stephen, Mountain View, California

California— it sounds so far away, but we're one with you in the Spirit. Come west and see us! We love visitors. What will you find here? Incredible diversity of cultures. A beautiful setting. An even more beautiful Christian congregation: warm and zealous, and eager to "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:10). The church and school share the mission to equip the saints and to bring the Gospel to those who may not yet know Jesus Christ.

Many of our members are Lutherans by choice rather than birth. This breeds a wonderful freshness and joy which finds expression in a blend of contemporary and traditional worship. Special services and fellowship opportunities are sprinkled throughout the year. Join us for our Good Friday firelight vigil and Easter Sunday worship (often our young people have a special way of bringing the events of the Passion to life) followed by a gourmet brunch. May brings the school Family Fun night and a church/school barbecue at beautiful Sunset Beach. In June we celebrate Confirmation— what a fantastic blessing to hear the confirmands share their faith in the Savior. Next summer, Lord willing, we will host the first annual Camp Cornerstone—a two week VBS-style day camp. High schoolers: check out Ambassador Camp in late July—a long weekend at a camp in the redwood forests near the Pacific Ocean. If you are not in that age bracket, come in late September for the Fall Retreat—spiritual refreshment and encouragement for all. If you visit at Reformation you just might find yourself in a medieval German village, or watching a play set in the studies and prisons of the Reformers. Or fellowship together with us at Christmas— an uplifting set of services with glorious choral music and the children proclaiming the wonders of our Father's love.

You are all of course most heartily welcome any time of the year—we hope to see many of you here at St. Stephen soon! For information or directions, please call (650)964-5915.

—Susi Povolny, St. Stephen, Mountain View, CA

News & Notes

Two Summer Youth Camps in 2006! The Jamestown congregation will be hosting Roughrider Youth Camp in Jamestown, ND. Dates for this camp are June 25–July 1. Information regarding this camp will be released this spring.

CLC Youth Camp, run by Nick Stelter, Alana Ahrens, and their dedicated staff will also be holding a session in 2006. CLC Youth Camp will be held at Camp JIM (Jesus Is Mine) in Pillager, MN from June 11–June 17. Watch for more information in the upcoming months.

Why two camps? The Lord has blessed our current camp programs so much that we need two to meet the demands of our synod. In 2004, Roughrider (Jamestown, ND) filled 85 camper slots in less than 1 week. In 2005, CLC Youth Camp (Eau Claire, WI) filled 110 camper slots in less than 3 weeks. The camps are blessed with an abundance of volunteers to help. What a great way to serve our Lord and our synod!

Both camps are co-ed and accept campers going into 5th grade–12th grade. CLC members are the majority of attendees. Your camper may bring a friend along. CLC members have registration priority, but between the camps we will have over 250 slots available! The programs at the camps are different; campers may choose to attend one or the other, or both.

Keep an eye out for information in announcements in your bulletins, at big CLC functions, and through CLC correspondence (website, Phileo-talk, CLC Slinger, etc.). See you all this summer!

—Alana Ahrens, Faith, St. Louis, MO

Blessed Country

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

Psalm 33:12

“**O**ne nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Listening to a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, anyone might think that our United States of America is truly a theocracy, a union of people governed by and under the authority of God. Some say the founders of our nation did have some such intentions, others argue, “No.” But, intentional or not, can we say our beloved United States is a “nation whose God is the Lord?” *Whose* god? The god of one or more of the 2000 different religious denominations worshiped in over 500,000 churches, temples, and mosques in the U.S. today? You and I know there is only one true God, maker of Heaven and earth, a Triune God who sent His only begotten Son to redeem us with His holy precious blood, and the Holy Spirit who has called, enlightened, and sanctified us in the one true faith. So when someone says there is only one God, he is right, but when he insists we *all* worship the *same* god, he is wrong. How can we then say that our nation of 295,734,130 people is a nation whose God is the Lord?

We are citizens of the United States of America, but as believers in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are also and primarily citizens of the kingdom of God. And as citizens of God’s kingdom, living on Earth, we have been given instructions as to how our Heavenly King wants us to regard the government under which we live. In Romans 13:1, we are told, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.”

In the letter to Titus, St. Paul tells him to “Remind them (the congregations) to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.” Lately it seems to be more and more acceptable to speak evil of those in authority and command of our nation. Rather than joining and participating in this practice, we as Christians can pray for those who govern us (as well as for those who would vent their anger and frustration this way). St. Paul further writes to Timothy, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” As I read this, I wondered if these words were written at the time that Christians were being persecuted and even put to death by “those in authority” at the time?

It is God who controls our nation and all others. Psalm 22 reads, “For the kingdom is the Lord’s and He rules over the nations.” Quoting from an essay by the recently departed Rev. Paul F. Nolting: “Basic to the concept of the Kingdom of God is the activity of ruling by the King, Jesus Christ, in the hearts of His subjects. When the King establishes His rule in a human heart He frees the individual from the guilt and power of sin. Then He begins to motivate, guide, and control the behavior of that individual in every relationship in life... But who are those subjects in whose hearts the King so rules? They are those who have become reconciled to their God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... This Biblical concept of the rule of the King in the hearts and lives of His subjects finds no better expression than in Luther’s classic explanation of the second article of the Apostle’s Creed.”

“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is *my Lord*; Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death, that I should be his own and live under Him *in His kingdom*, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from death, lives and reigns to all eternity.”

Martin Luther once said: "It is out of the question that there can be a common Christian government over one country or a great number of people; for the wicked are always far more numerous than the pious. Therefore a man who would undertake to govern an entire country with the Gospel would be like a shepherd who would place into one stable wolves, lions, eagles, and sheep, letting them freely mingle with one another, and saying, 'Take care of yourselves. Be good and peaceable among yourselves...'" The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina brought pictures into our homes of animal-like behavior on the part of some of the people herded into the same "stable" with the more urban label of "Super Dome." And yes, this took place in our own nation. Farther from home, we are at war with a people who regard us as infidels and consider it a religious duty towards *their* god to kill us, even if it means killing themselves at the same time. Many of us have loved ones risking their lives to defend and preserve the "liberty and justice" our nation promises to its citizens.

Both the war and Hurricane Katrina are calamities being blamed by some on the government or other entities or individuals, and of course, Mother Nature gets her share of the blame (that incipient description used by the media makes me cringe when I hear it). There are many places in the Bible that speak of the Lord's command of the weather. For instance, Psalm 107:25 tells us, "For *He* commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea." And in Psalm 83, the psalmist pleads with the Lord to "pursue them (Israel's enemies) with your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm." Why? "That they may know that You, whose name alone is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth." It surely is appropriate then to consider that Katrina, a disastrous storm said to be unprecedented in its scope and magnitude, was the result of God's wrath. On the other hand, we cannot presume to know His specific reasons, which are beyond our understanding. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord." The Bible does have many examples of God demonstrating His wrath against sin and unbelief by using the natural forces at His command. We know that He is an omniscient, omnipotent God who is in control of all things, but also that He is a God of love, mercy, goodness, and truth, and that we are assured of His love through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Let us thank God that we are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that (we) may proclaim the praises of Him who called (us) out of darkness into His marvelous light, who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

**O sweet and blessed country, the home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country, that eager hearts expect!
Jesus, in mercy bring us to that dear land of rest,
Who art, with God the Father and Spirit ever blest. (TLH 605:5)**

*—Julie Mueller, Lakewood, Denver, CO;
This was presented at the 2005 Chadron,
NE CLC Women's Retreat as a morning devotion.
It was printed here with permission of the author.*

**"Patriotism is easy to understand in America;
it means looking out for yourself by looking out for your country."**

—Calvin Coolidge, 1872–1933

20's and 30's Retreat

For four days in August, 51 men and women in their 20's and 30's—and 9 others—retreated to Cuivre River State Park near St. Louis, Missouri, for the second annual Arise and Shine Retreat. The retreat was sponsored by Faith Lutheran Church of Manchester, Missouri.

Pastor Todd Ohlmann of St. Louis and Pastor David Povolny of San Francisco opened with a service of thanksgiving as an introductory session to our weekend. This year's theme was "Be Transformed not Conformed," based on Romans 12:1-2: "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

In six sessions throughout the weekend, presenters spoke about a Christian's transformed life with his or her peers, as men, as women, as mentors, as a single/married person and with his or her time and money.

Pastor Luke Bernthal of Spring, Texas, gave three devotions focusing on the transformation of our mind, body, and spirit. Chris Fletcher of St. Louis spoke of God's amazing transformation of his life from godlessness back to Christ, and the role that friends play in our lives. His wife, Cindy, added her story during a break-out session as the men and women talked about their respective friendships. Pastor Dave Povolny presented four sessions— one on being a Christian man, one on being a Christian woman, one on mentorship, and one on God's view of being single and being married. Dan Schierenbeck of Kansas City, Missouri, focused our minds on having Christ-transformed priorities in regard to time and money.

Perhaps the highlight of the weekend was Christian fellowship. Beyond afternoon free time, late night bonfires, and meals with Christian friends, attendees enjoyed group time in which to have focused, personal discussion and reflection on the subjects in each day's sessions.

This year Arise and Shine was blessed to have eight wonderful cooks—one from Minnesota, one from Nebraska, four from South Carolina, and two from Louisiana. In addition, many thanks need to be given to the men and women of the St. Louis congregation who put this weekend of Christian fellowship together.

From food to fun in the sun, and from new friendships to strengthening each person's transformation, Christ truly blessed the second annual Arise and Shine retreat.

—Sarah Olmanson, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

"We need hope for living far more than for dying. Dying is easy work compared with living. Dying is a moment's transition; living, a transaction of years. It is the length of the rope that puts the sag in it. Hope tightens the cords and tunes up the heart-strings. Work well, then; suffer patiently, rejoicing in hope. God knows all, and yet is the God of Hope. And when we have hoped to the end here, He will give us something to look forward to, for all eternity. For 'hope abidith.'"

—Maltbie D. Babcock, 1858-1901

Transformed

The following was written as a summary of lessons learned throughout the 20's and 30's weekend:

You made me a new creation
You transformed me by your blood
I sing of your grace, shout your glory, praise you Jehovah.

Transform my transient life
To walk instead in your footsteps
Shine your perfect friendship
That I may reflect it.

As a man, Lord,
Let me be a servant
As I lead your people.

As a woman, Lord,
Incline me to follow faithful leaders
And nurture your children.

Grant me peace in my path
Following your purpose
Help me treat this borrowed temple
As a vessel of your grace.

Be my perfect mentor
As I guide others along your way.
Transform my priorities
Gladly giving back of my firstfruits

Mind, body, spirit—continue to transform me
Increase in me your Spirit and let my actions follow.
Thanking you always for my transformation by your grace.

—Submitted by Sarah Olmanson, Immanuel, Mankato, MN



A Look Ahead

We're still looking for themes for the upcoming year. Whether you have one idea or four, send them in! Plus, we're always in search of new thoughts, either as your own article or an idea for someone else to write on.

The last installment of our "Reflections" series is April: Reflections of Faith. Please aim to have articles in by mid-February. July's theme will be "Liberty," so ponder away! As usual, mail submissions to Abby Matzke, the editor, at the address on page 16.

CLC Women's Retreat West 2005

Thirty-seven women attended the CLC Women's Retreat West, in Chadron State Park, September 9th through 11th. The atmosphere was one of warm Christian camaraderie, interspersed with serious discussion, humor, and lots of good eating!

The congregations represented were: Immanuel, Mankato, MN-3; Grace, Valentine, NE-11; Good Shepherd, Rapid City, SD-8; Prince of Peace, Loveland, CO-4; Redeemer, Cheyenne, WY-7; St. Paul, Lakewood, CO-2; Faith, New Ulm, MN-1; and one guest from Bayard, NE.

Friday afternoon was registration and check-in, cabins were assigned and schedules distributed. Just like camp, it was exciting to see where we'd be rooming and who our cabin-mates would be. Kelly Fleischer of Mankato presented the opening address, entitled, "Your Worldview: Is it Secular or Biblical?" Using appropriate Bible references, she showed how our lives must be Christ-oriented. Bible studying helps us gain knowledge, skill, and application in the use of God's Word. We must remember that Jesus is our Cornerstone, and our day-to-day decisions should never contradict His word. The discussion that ensued confirmed the fact that we all want to be immersed in a Biblical Worldview. The evening ended with snacks and entertainment provided by the Cheyenne ladies.

Saturday morning began with a nutritious breakfast provided by the Rapid City "crew." Julie Mueller of Denver/Lakewood presented a Morning Devotion. Topics pertaining to "The Christian Worldview" were given throughout the morning. Ruth Claeyes of Rapid City talked about "Overpopulation/Children are a Blessing from the Lord." Children are a blessing from God, and He has given us the resources to care for them. Priscilla Bade presented thoughts concerning "Environmentalism/Good Stewardship of the Earth." We discussed the fact that God is in charge, what our role is, and what we should be doing as Christians. "My Individual Rights/Our Christian Family" was the topic given by Loree Crawford. God has planned the family with the man as the head and the woman at his side as his helper. Barbara Preszler conducted an activity in which "Marriage" was discussed. Each of five groups studied Scripture and other articles regarding single parent families, alternate family choices, homosexual unions, and feminism. Each person then reported back to a mixed group with the conclusions. The last presentation of the morning was given by Barb Ruegge of Cheyenne, entitled "Respect Life." Abortion, birth control, stem cell research, cloning, and euthanasia were presented. God's Word is clear about how He desires His people to deal with these issues. Through our Christian actions and our prayers, His Will prevails.

The Cheyenne group provided lunch. Then a light-hearted afternoon of learning began. Attendees chose from a variety of activities. Kristi Kesterson of Loveland taught Making a Quilt Top. Louise Mayhew of Valentine taught Making a Boa or Scarf. Marilyn Greening of Cheyenne taught Calligraphy. Kristin McDaniel of Denver taught Writing Memoirs. Gloria Hanson of Loveland taught Cake Decorating. Sylvia Sprengeler of Cheyenne taught 3-Dimensional Star Making. All of these projects were great fun!

Then a few brave souls took a long, vigorous walk under the direction of Krista McDaniel. A wonderful banquet was provided by the Valentine girls. Ruth Ahrens of Valentine then kept the group in stitches with her presentation on "Humor and Heart Health." The evening wrapped up in a sing-a-long with Jeannie Hoffman of Valentine on her harmonica and Ruth Ahrens at the keyboard. Of course, there was another snack before bedtime.

On Sunday morning, Laila Fleischer of Cheyenne presented, "So... What Can We Do?" We, as Christians, cannot sit idly by. We are not of the world, but we are certainly in the world, and must do our share in exposing the wrong that we see and take part in promoting the right way. The worship service was conducted by Rev. John Klatt of Good Shepherd, Rapid City, who spoke on "You are the salt of the earth...the light of the world." We are to exhibit, by our Christian living, that we are giving glory to God in all areas of our lives. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12a).

—Barbara Ruegge, Redeemer, Cheyenne, WYI

CLC Youth Camp 2005

CLC Youth Camp once again returned to the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College June 20-25. With 108 campers, two directors, eight counselors, ten support staff, four teachers, and 21 pre-campers, the campus was abuzz with activity.

This year's theme was Spiritual Warfare. In chapels, campers heard about their God-given allies to ward off the devil, the world, and their flesh. In Bible classes, they learned about the devil's weapons. And afterwards, for the first time at camp, finished with discussion groups.

Campers woke up early for calisthenics, aimed high in archery, made marshmallow guns in handicrafts, kicked up their heels in line dancing, cooled off at the pool, and performed comedies in skit practice.

Tying into the theme was the Ultimate Team Competition, where eight teams challenged each other in one daily activity, culminating in Friday's day-long competition and Ultimate Relay.

Campers also enjoyed a different activity each night, including ice breakers at the beginning of the week and Bunko, a ski show, movies, skits, and star gazing. The Lord truly blessed the week of campers and staff with edification, fun, and friends.

—Sarah Olmanson, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

Retreat!

The 7th Annual CLC Women's Retreat is scheduled for April 21-23, 2006, at the Schwan Retreat and Conference Center near Trego, WI. The Theme is Proverbs 24:3-4, stressing a woman's effect on the family, as a mother, aunt, sister, or a grandmother. Many large and small group sessions are planned for all to learn and to share information. By early January the brochures should be in all churches of the midwest, though all are encouraged to attend. Talk to your pastor if you don't see the brochures in your church, or e-mail Pastor Nolting at pnolting@hickorytech.net, or Laila Fleischer at lfleischer2@hotmail.com. Do not let the cost of the retreat stop you from coming—scholarship money is available by talking to Ruth Mueller at 507-387-6788. We hope all of you—young and old—will be there. We'll have a great time!!

**"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
my flesh also will rest in hope."**

—Psalm 16:9



CLC Girls

Sharing Our Faith

Hi, I am Jessica Schreyer from Mankato, Minnesota. I like to read preteen magazines but I have a hard time finding decent ones, so I thought it would be fun to hear what other girls in the CLC think about certain subjects. It could be really neat to read what other CLC girls have written about and not worry that it might be offensive. We will pick subjects, and any girl age 8-14 can write what they think about it, helping us all learn to be stronger in our faith. We could write about things like hobbies, sports, food, pets, fashions, games, friends, relatives...just about anything. We're not professionals, so we don't have to write perfectly. This will be a regular section in *The Branches*. Enjoy this first run of CLC Girls. It will be great to hear from you in the future!

—Jessica Schreyer, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

—Romans 1:16

How CLC girls share their faith with others:

1. Tell them about God
2. Talk about things in the Bible
3. Write songs about Jesus like the ones in the hymnal and share them.
4. Tell them what you learned in church.
5. Set a good example like being kind to people and they will probably start being kind too!

—Deszira Payne, Age 13, Prince of Peace, Hecla, SD

When I do home devotion I memorize Bible verses. I help my two sisters, Emily and Rebecca, learn their Bible verses. I also help them follow the rules.

Once, my sister, Emily and I were at a park and we met two bullies. They were mean to us. Emily and I told them about how Jesus does not want us to be mean to others. He wants us to be good. We told them that they were making a wrong choice. Then, they were very nice to us and wanted to play. We had fun playing together.

—Cecelia Hanel, Age 8, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

I think girls shouldn't be scared or embarrassed about sharing God's Word. They shouldn't think they'll get teased because it's good to share God's Word with others. Even if it's only a few girls, and it's only through faith in Christ Jesus that we're saved. If your friends are using bad language or making fun of God, talk to them and remind them that in the Bible God says: "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." So keep God's Word holy!

—Emily Salmon, Age 10, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

CLC Girls & Gossip

For April, tell us how CLC Girls handle gossip. Two verses to consider are Psalm 52:2 and 34:13. Include your name, age, and congregation. Send to Jessica at jessino21@aol.com, or to Abby Matzke (info. on page 16).

A Hallelujah Life

“This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it!”

Psalm 118:24.

I had the privilege to travel down to Phoenix, AZ to help my mother and father prepare for a big move. After living in that area for over 30 years, they had decided the time had come that they needed to move to California to be closer to one of their children. As I was driving around town with my father, tying up loose ends and running errands, he would every now and then exclaim “Hallelujah!” During a time when many would be filled with fear about the unknown or worry about all the things that needed to be done, he instead was rejoicing at all of the blessings that he saw pouring forth from his heavenly Father’s hands. He was at peace and joyful knowing that his loving Savior was guiding and directing all things and would continue to bless them in all things to come.

“The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore”

Psalm 121:7-8.

That time with my parents has become a precious memory. Not just because of the time together, but because once again they have left an imprint on my heart and soul. The influence of Christian parents never seems to end, no matter how old we grow. I so often find myself stressed about the pile of things to get done and caught up in the worries the devil tempts me with. I let the little problems of this life blot out the blessings God pours into our lives like storm clouds block out the sun.

**“Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you,’
says the Lord and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel”**

Isaiah 41:14.

Sometimes when stress and worry seem to be getting the best of me, the Lord in His goodness gives me a glimpse of my father riding in his Toyota Camry saying, “Hallelujah!” Then I realize how ridiculous I am, getting upset with the little cares of the day when Jesus has taken care of all my big problems! He has taken away all of my sins! How silly to give in to the pressures of this life when Jesus has won the victory and heaven is mine! What really is there to worry about when the Lord is in control of my life, guiding and directing all things with my eternal welfare as His chief goal?

Since that time with my parents, I have a new prayer: “Lord, help me live a Hallelujah life!”

—Gloria Wilke, Gethsemane, Saginaw, MI

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

—Philippians 4:4-7



Women of Faith

This afternoon I was doing some preparation for our women's Bible study group which meets weekly here in Eau Claire. (I am actually a member of Peace With God, Onalaska, but the kind ladies let me attend.) All of us are members of Messiah Church in Eau Claire, and quite a few of us are wives of retired pastors or professors or mothers of the same.

For 6 or 7 years I was working afternoons in the office at ILC and was not able to attend. I really missed the study and also the feeling of encouragement that comes from reading and discussing the truths and promises of God's Word with fellow-Christians. I was happy to return.

We have usually been meeting in rooms available at two senior apartment buildings where several of our group live, but we have also met in private homes. There are usually nine or ten of us present.

We begin our hour with the reading of a brief devotion which we take turns supplying, and this is followed by the singing of a hymn. After this, we spend the rest of the hour reading through several chapters of the Bible.

At present we are in the book of Isaiah. We go around the table with each person reading several verses. We all have our own Bibles which are in various translations, and this sometimes adds to our understanding. Then quite a few of us bring commentaries and we read and discuss what these say on each section. If we are unsure of something, we go home and ask our husbands or sons and report back the next week.

I would encourage other women to think about starting such a group in your congregation. Life is full of problems and dangers and we need all the help we can get from God's Word and the assembling of ourselves together.

—Susan Lau, Peace With God, Onalaska, WI

"They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

—Acts 17:11

Wanted

Food Editor(s).

We are on the lookout for individuals to try out the recipes that are received, making sure they are accurate when typed into the issue, and to come up with upcoming recipe themes if necessary.

A group of about three women would be ideal to share the work and swap ideas.

Also Wanted

Favorite Easter Sunday recipes or menus for the April issue.

Make our mouths water!

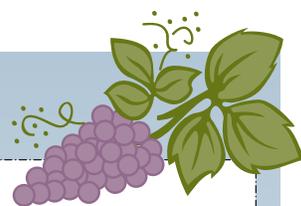
Subscription Renewal Update

Sisters—this issue marks the third of four for the 2005-06 subscription year. Stay tuned for April's edition and renewal information for 2006-07. Thank you to all who have been in touch and ordered Christmas subscriptions for family and/or friends! Feel free to call, write, or email anytime.

—Tina Eichstadt, Business Manager (info. on page 16)

Calling All Educators!

Are you trying to inspire your students to write? Encourage them to write an article to share in *The Branches*. Material need not be devotional in nature—biographies of a faithful, influential woman in their life would be perfect for “Women of Faith,” for example. A bit of humor for “A Time to Laugh” would tickle us all. Consider a Book Review to direct us to some quality reading. If you have an aspiring journalist, report to us from a church event at your own congregation! Please send submissions to the Editor at the address on page 16.



Delicious Dishes

Upside-Down Pizza

- 1 pound sausage
- 32 oz jar spaghetti sauce
- 1 lb mozzarella cheese
- 2/3 cup flour
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 eggs

Brown sausage; add spaghetti sauce. Pour the sausage and sauce into a 9 × 13 greased pan. Top with 1/2 pound of mozzarella cheese. Mix together the flour, salt, milk, and eggs, beat well. Top cheese with flour mixture. Add on top of flour mixture another 1/2 pound of cheese. Bake 350° for 25 minutes.

—Ellen Bratz,
Peace Thru Christ,
Middleton, WI

Charlene's Smiley Face Chocolate Pound Cake

- 1 c. butter, softened
- 2 c. sugar
- 1 c. firmly packed brown sugar
- 6 large eggs
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 1/4 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 c. cocoa
- 8 oz. of sour cream
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- powdered sugar (opt.)

Beat butter at medium speed for 2 min. Gradually add sugars, beating 5-7 min. Add eggs one at a time, beating just until yellow disappears. Combine flour, soda, and cocoa. Add to creamed mixture alternately with sour cream, beginning and ending with the flour mixture. Mix at lowest speed just until blended after each addition. Stir in vanilla. Spoon into a greased and floured 10 inch tube or bundt pan. Bake at 325° for 1 hour and 20 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Cool in pan for 15 min., then remove; cool completely on rack. Sprinkle with powdered sugar. Cut it into pieces and top with cool whip.

—Kathy Schaller, Mt. Zion, Detroit, MI



P.O. Box 238
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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

***“Sorrows will shake
but not break us.
Hope will set the music
ringing and quicken our
lagging pace.”***

—Maltbie D. Babcock



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All submissions should be sent to Abby Matzke. All subscription information should be sent to Tina Eichstadt.

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