



The Branches

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Reflections of Faith

My daughter was in the midst of a week’s worth of “terrible-twos” tantrums. She’d follow me around just to whine at me. She’d grab my knees and not allow me to accomplish things that she wanted me to do. Then she’d throw herself to the ground in front of me and purposefully hit her forehead on the floor so I’d take pity and pick her up. Knowing she’d do it more if I caved, I would go about my business, but then she, realizing her plan failed and her head hurt, would cry harder.

All of you mothers know how irritating this is. Whining puts nerves on edge, and a few days of that stresses out the best of us. Yet through the tantrums, I love her. I do my best to stay patient and wait her out, knowing that all will work out, even when she doesn’t understand. Even when she hollers too loudly to hear me console her. And even when she won’t calm down enough to receive a better alternative to her demands.

That must be how God views us. We want certain things, and after we’ve asked nicely and haven’t received, we forget that God sees what is actually beneficial for us and we start demanding. We whine, cry, and try to get in His way to make him see us, as if He somehow doesn’t. We are being so loud and obnoxious that we don’t allow Him to give us things that are even better.

Our Father is much more patient through our “tantrums.” He, in His infinite wisdom, ignores our juvenile demands and waits out our selfish and devious tactics that are meant to make Him cave in to our will. He knows that every “I want” would not be good for us. When He says “no,” and I say “yes” and try to bend His will to mine, He knows His way is for the best. Like a child in a tantrum, we often are too busy complaining and devising to hear the words, “You can’t have that cookie because a feast is coming.” God loves us through it all.

I, for one, am glad God has more patience with us than I can muster up any day.

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

*“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,
says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil,
to give you a future and a hope.”*

—Jeremiah 27:22

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The Everyday Things

I remember sitting on my mother's lap, as a child, listening to her read story after story to me. Sometimes we would sit and play silly made-up games. I remember being lovingly admonished for having a "sassy" mouth. I remember being spanked for lying about eating a peanut from the bulk bin at the grocery store. I remember how my mom always had time to listen to me. As I got older and didn't always feel like talking, she asked me questions and engaged me in conversation. I remember going to church every Sunday and attending a Christian school from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Looking back at my childhood, I see my mother's faith in God reflected in the everyday things. She spent time with me, taught me to be honest and kind, listened to me, taught me the importance of knowing God, and ultimately loved me unconditionally (Thank you, Mom!).

As mothers, we know that being a mother is one of the most important jobs entrusted to us. It can be extremely overwhelming and yet rewarding at the same time. My prayer is that my children can look back at their childhoods and see my faith reflected in the everyday things. Daily, I ask the Lord to give me wisdom to be the kind of mother my children need. On a specific day, one child may need extra hugs and love, another may need admonishments, and the other may yet need something entirely different. As I think about the importance of being a godly mother, I realize the need to pray for wisdom and the need to pray that my children see my faith reflected in their everyday lives. I pray that when my children see me doing my daily devotion, they realize the importance of having an intimate relationship with God. I pray that when I spend time with my children and listen to them, they realize that they are important to me and loved unconditionally, just as our Father loves us unconditionally. I pray that as I discipline my children they come to know the importance of submitting to me and ultimately submitting to the Lord. I pray that as they see me taking care of the house and making dinner, they realize the importance of being responsible and being good stewards of what God has given us. I pray that as I spend time helping at church or at our Christian school, they learn the importance of being a servant for the Lord. Mothers do have a very important job. Thankfully, we have the Lord guiding us each day. May God bless all mothers, young and old, as we reflect our faith in God in the everyday things.

—Julie Busch, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

Overheard in an Orchard

Said the Robin to the Sparrow: "I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so."
Said the Sparrow to the Robin: "Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me."

—Written by Elizabeth Cheney; Published in the
Oct. 4, 1927, issue of *The Lutheran Witness*.

"Faith is a Christian's right eye, without which he cannot look for Christ;
right hand, without which he cannot do for Christ; it is his tongue, without which he
cannot speak for Christ; it is his vital spirit, without which he cannot act for Christ."

—Thomas Brooks

Ancestors and Descendents

Last year I met my mother's cousin. I'm not sure if my mother ever met her. She grew up in a far away state and was 28 years younger than my mother; only 2 years older than I am. Her father had married late in life, so she was a generation removed from all her cousins. We explored the common threads of family history; catching each other up on the stories of the sides of the family each of us had never met. When we compared the stories that had been passed down through the years about my great-grandparents (her grandparents), the stories were remarkably similar. They had homesteaded on the barren Colorado plains and were dirt poor. He grew broom corn and made brooms for a living. He also played fiddle for the neighborhood dances.

During the evening of talk, she stopped and said, "I need to ask you a question. Are the people on your side of the family Christians?" I told her while I couldn't look into their hearts, most of them were church goers and were actively involved in their church life. She smiled and said her sister would be happy to hear that. Their side of the family was like that too. We mused about who in the family had been the Christian influence.

This week, while reading my Bible, a verse popped out at me and reminded me of that conversation. Isaiah 59:20-21 says, "'The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,' says the Lord. 'As for Me,' says the Lord, 'This is my covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendent's descendants,' says the Lord, 'from this time and forevermore.'"

Thank God that He instilled the gospel in our ancestors and taught them to teach it to their children and their children's children "from this time and forevermore." What a comforting thought! May God help us do the same for our children and our grandchildren.

—Nancy Hansen, Prince of Peace, Hecla, SD

CLC Postcard

Hello, from Nebraska's only CLC church, Grace Evangelical Lutheran, located in the heart of the Sandhills. Valentine is situated in North Central Nebraska, only 9 miles from the South Dakota border, with a population of 3,000 people. The church is currently being served by Pastor James Naumann. This year marks a special year as we will be celebrating our 45th anniversary.

The members of Grace support a Christian Day School. There are currently 8 children enrolled who are being served by Principal James Arndt and Mrs. Louise Mayhew. Grace also offers Sunday School, VBS, Bible Class, Fellowship Group, Ladies Aid, Youth Group, Choir, church campouts, and lots of potlucks!

If you find yourself planning a trip in our direction, we would love for you to stop in and spend some time with us. We are always happy to take you site seeing, as the area offers Nebraska's tallest waterfall, canoeing the Niobrara River, great camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, and great Midwestern hospitality.

We might not be a big church, but we all share a common faith in Jesus, as our Savior.

—Tracy Ohlmann, Grace, Valentine, NE

Bearing Up Under Grief and Loss

Sometime during our life each of us will have to cope with grief and loss. God's grace and comfort will give us hope. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

We can find help, comfort, and strength to cope. No matter what the tremendous grief is that we face, the Scriptures are foundational to successful recovery. My own loss was my husband's death. Yours could be anything from death to divorce or disappointments in life.

God's Word was my constant consolation and companion. God says, "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10). He keeps His promise. He strengthens and upholds us by His Word. But where is that Word? Below are some places where God speaks comfort, hope, and Victory!

Words to Focus our Mind on God

"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

—Psalm 18:2

Also: Psalm 27:1, Psalm 147:5

Words of Comfort

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

—2 Corinthians 1:3-4

"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry."

—Psalm 34:15

Also: John 14:27

Words of Understanding

"The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works."

—Psalm 145:8-9

"Jesus wept."

—John 11:35

Also: Isaiah 53:3

Words of Care and Help

"For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock."

—Psalm 27:5

Also: Psalm 34:17-18



Words of Hope

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

—Psalm 30:5b

Also: Psalm 36:7,9, Romans 5:5

Words of Assurance

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

—Matthew 28:20b

"For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

—Hebrews 13:5b

Also: Romans 8:28a, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Words of Victory

"He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces."

—Isaiah 25:8a

Also: 2 Corinthians 2:14a, Jude 1:24-25.

During trials, a person finds out who his true friends are. In my trial, I found God by my side. He was my indispensable and faithful friend when I lost my best friend and soul-mate. He did not let me down, but stayed by my side and spoke to me through His Word. I would like to share the two following verses which reminded me to trust Him through the circumstances:

"The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

—Psalm 19:9b-10D

Psalm 119:75-77: "I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, According to Your word to your servant. Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; For Your law is my delight."

—Kathy Kauno, Redemption, Lynwood, WA

Reflections of Faith

Faith — Freely Given!
Not received for what we do.
Given by the Holy Spirit
Keeps our focus, Lord, on You.

When we're challenged here on earth,
As a Mother, Friend or Wife,
May we seek You first dear Lord
And in faith proceed with life.

You are always with us Savior
With Your legions by our side.
May we know and feel Your presence
With the faith that You provide.

Then those tasks You set before us
With the gifts You give to do,
We can manage to fulfill, Lord.
And in faith we'll glory You.

—Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace, Fridley, MN

Encouragements

**“I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away,
bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat
and the strong, and feed them in judgment.”**

—Ezekiel 34:16

If you are not as close to the Lord as you once were, make no mistake about who moved.” That is a quote I heard quite awhile ago—and it still grabs me every time I read it. I’m sure that everyone has gone through a time in their life when they felt as if the Lord was far away, maybe even unreachable. The truth is that the Lord is the same always; it is mankind that changes. Yes, there are times when He “withdraws” to strengthen our faith, but He is still there. Even Billy Graham speaks of a difficult time in his life, when God seemed to have disappeared. Mr. Graham wrote to his wise, faithful mother, and she told him to get on his knees and pray, and reach up through the confusion, God would be there. He did as she suggested, and describes the experience as one of the most moving and wonderful of his whole life. See...you should always listen to your mother!

In the last month since Ray and I lost baby Jacob, I have had many “why?” moments, and have felt very alone at times. Looking back now, I see that I was never alone, and most of the time was being carried by my Lord and Savior. There are many instances where I can see the Lord working in our family. Our 11-year-old daughter, Katie, came to me a few days after the miscarriage, and said “Mom, I know why Jacob had to die. It was to strengthen our faith in God.” Those of you who know Katie know that she is a very private person and does not share things easily, so for her to say such a thing was huge. One really special time was when Ray, Andrew, and Katie made Jacob’s casket from wood, and Ray engraved Jacob’s name into the top of the box. It may seem like a small thing, but I felt the Lord’s presence then. Our family has become closer through this experience, because the Lord carried us. Although there were times when I, in my human weakness, did not have the strength to pray, the Lord searched for me, strengthened me, and brought me back. I had people that would tell me that I was so strong, and I would tell them that my strength was not my own. Last week, someone put it another way. She said, “You were not strong, you just were not alone!” How profound! I know that the Lord sent her specifically to me that day, because I needed to hear that. We are never alone—ever!

No matter what our circumstance, the Lord seeks to find us, to bring us back. How amazing to think that the Son of God, the Savior of the World, wants to be close to us! What a beautiful gift! God be with you all until next time.

—Julie Schopp, St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD

Bedtime Prayer

Jesus, unto Thee I pray;
Thou hast guarded me all day. Safe I am while in Thy sight,
Safely let me sleep tonight.
Bless my friends, the whole world bless,
Grant unto them peace and rest;
Keep me ever in Thy sight,
So to all I say good night.

—Tracy Ohlmann, Grace, Valentine, NE

Stephen Langton
(1150–1228), the
Archbishop of Canterbury,
is believed to be the first
person to divide the Bible
into chapters. His divisions
are still in use today.

Come With Us to the Plain

**“’Tis good, Lord, to be here, Thy glory fills the night;
Thy face and garments, like the sun, Shine with unborrowed light.”**

—*The Lutheran Hymnal, 135, v.1*

How I ached as a child to have witnessed the transfiguration. To see Jesus in His glory, to be an eyewitness of His beauty, filled me with a great longing. The Lord must have smiled at my childish wish but He has not forgotten it. No, I have never stood with Peter and James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. That would be a thing too great for this weak body to hold. But I have seen a glimmer, a trace of that glorious sight, and like the hymn writer and like Peter, I too “would hold the vision bright And make this hill my home” (TLH 135, v.4).

It is always with an inarticulate prayer that I watch the confirmands go forward, led by the pastor, as they walk the long aisle and take their places at the front of the church. I have to remind myself that this is not the final test, nor is this the finished product of their faith training. It is, however, one culmination of years of spiritual training. Into this day have gone hours of memory work, Bible stories, catechism class, and hymnology, devotions at home and at school, admonitions, and encouragements. Into this day have gone endless prayers for these children by faithful parents, teachers, and pastors.

As the twelve-year-old Jesus was found in the temple going about His Father’s business, so too these children have been about that same Father’s business. It is the Lord Himself who set the example of searching the Scriptures. It is the Lord Himself who instructed parents to bring up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. It is the Lord Himself who tells us that the Scriptures are to make us wise unto salvation.

These years that have gone before the rite of confirmation are not an exercise in memory work for memory work’s sake! It is a way to bind His words into their hearts, to imprint on them His spirit. The lessons themselves are not ancient history or a dead, dry doctrine. These are lessons for nourishment and growth. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These are the lessons of eternal life!

And so the youth have reached this point. They stand before us ready to testify of that training, ready to witness of the faith that began in their hearts at baptism. They speak, some more articulate than others, some shyly, some boldly, but witness they do—and the prayers of the congregation pour forth on their behalf. They make their vows, renew and acknowledge the love of their Savior, and the congregation responds and renews with them the vows they too once made. O blessed day! The glimmer of the glory of Christ’s transfiguration is here. “Fulfiller of the past, Promise of things to be”(v.3); Yes, confirmation embodies both of these things. The good work that the Lord began in these young people has continued, and their confessions speak of the promise that is before them. The Lord’s body and blood has been given for them also, and they partake of it in the Lord’s Supper. We rejoice, as do all the angels in heaven.

The fellowship of such a day is to be cherished. So we sit in the pews and bask in the glory of the Lord. The hymns uplift us, the choir expresses what we cannot, and the pastor lifts his arms in blessings over the confirmands and over us all. The organ swells with the last “Amen.” It is over. We start in consternation. This vision, this fellowship, this glory, we must *leave*? “We fain would hold the vision bright and make this hill our home.”

Like Peter, we want to stay in the safe place. We are tempted to keep these young people at this secure place in their lives also. But although confirmation is a culmination of their years of training it, in itself, is not the end. It is only a point in the process of their faith life as it was in ours. “’Tis good, Lord, to be here. Yet we may not remain; But since Thou bidst us leave the mount, come with us to the plain” (v.5). And there we have it. Our time and theirs for resting in bliss at the feet of the Lord’s glory is not yet. He has work for us to do and leave the mount we must.

Continue on next page

But leaving the mount is not as difficult a thing as we would think. For once Christ has begun this work within, He continues with it. He will “come with us to the plain.” And just where do we find Christ on that plain? Just where He has always been found: in His Word. He is in the words of the Bible passages that guide in a moment of confusion. He is in the examples from Bible Stories that light the path. He is in the snatches of a hymn that comforts. He is in the voice of the commandment that directs. Yes, we may look back at the mount and treasure the glimmers of Christ’s glory but we must never forget to see Him on the plain. The flowers from this day will fade. The gowns will be washed and pressed and put away and the days ahead may seem dull and ordinary as we trudge through the plain. But we and these young people must never lose sight of His promise, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The organ swells and the choir breathes the ending hymn. Our hearts overflow and the tears may spill from our eyes. The pastor leads the confirmands down the aisle and we have time for one last prayer:

“Yes, Lord, be with them on the plain.”

—Deborah Ude, *Messiah, Eau Claire, WI*

Scripture Search

Crack open those Bibles if you can’t answer these. Answers can be verified on page 22.

1. Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone about their vision of the transfiguration until what had happened?
2. Which disciple took the body of Jesus to be entombed?
3. When Peter went inside the empty tomb he found one linen cloth apart from the others. What was it and how was it described?
4. Who was Cleopas?
5. Name the Gospel writer and complete this passage: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written...”

—Questions and answers from *Women in Fellowship* issue 10, Spring 1990, written by Jackie Kesterson.

“One gem from that ocean is worth all the pebbles from earthly streams.”

—Robert McCheyne, 1813–1843, speaking about the Bible

Looking For My Funny Bone

Maybe you’ve caught the reference to “members of the body” already, but if not, read on. It seems that the more humorous ones of our Christian family are in hiding. If we’ve caught you red-handed, then get your pen out and make the rest of us laugh. Spin us a story, tell a tale, crack a joke, repeat a cute misunderstanding, or show us how embarrassed you’ve been. This is an elbow in your side to get writing! Send your witty humor—and the not-so-witty—to Abby Matzke at the address on page 24.



A Look Ahead

Bigger and better: those are the goals for *The Branches* in the upcoming subscription year, beginning this July. The issue you are holding now is a taste of that to come; you've hopefully noticed that there are an additional 8 pages in this one. You will be pleased to meet the new editor for the food page, Gail Mackensen. And, with a bit of encouragement, we will have a few more regular writers and many more first-time submitters. Jessica Schreyer is doing much work for the CLC Girls, and we're all excited about that section.

Speaking of articles and sections—keep those pens moving ladies! Great things are happening across the miles because of your participation. Give God the glory for that!

Seasons of a Woman's Life

Thanks go to Jackie Radichel for suggesting the ideas for the next series of themes. There are four installments to this series, and the themes will revolve around the "seasons" of a woman's walk in this world. We're keeping it easy and beginning with "Summer" in July. The remaining issues will correspond to the season it appears in your mailbox. Consider how each stage of development, both in body and spirit, may reflect the seasons of creation. For example, though summer has its joys, it also brings hardship of its own kind. A bit of reminiscing about past summers would be welcome also!

Notice that July's theme has had a slight adjustment to it since the January announcement. An appropriate subtopic to keep in mind as you write is: Liberty. How does this affect your life, in thought, word, work, worship, and faith? What stories in your life does the concept trigger in your mind?

The deadline for articles meant for the July issue is May 15th. This seems early, but it allows for compiling, editing, formatting, printing, and mailing. Please send articles of all types via regular mail to: Abby Matzke, P.O. Box 238, Stambaugh, MI 49964, or email to: abby_matzke@yahoo.com.

Creation Corner

Fearfully Made

DNA is your body's blueprint, and it does amazing stuff. We all start out life as a microscopic ball of cells that is smaller than the dot at the end of this sentence. How do you get from that to what you are now? It goes like this: each cell in our body has a nucleus. The nucleus contains chromosomes, chromosomes contain genes, genes contain a complicated little chemical we call DNA for short. Each gene has one thousand or more DNA units. At the beginning of your life, the DNA starts to divide so that you can grow. Each second it divides 1,000 times to do this. If DNA were any slower, if it divided one time per second, pregnancy would take 1,000 times longer. Nine months would turn into 9,000 months...about 750 years!

This didn't happen by accident. Thank the Almighty Creator (not lucky stars!) that we really are fearfully and wonderfully made, whether we know it or not.

—Carol Caroen, St. Peter's, Stambaugh, MI

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

—Psalm 139:14a

Women of Faith

I suppose there are a few diehard atheistic evolutionists here in Alaska where I now live, but for them it surely would be a struggle to hang onto their denial of God's creation after gazing around at all this majestic beauty and magnificent evidence of His wondrous handiwork! Mt. McKinley, moose, caribou, fjords, wolves, glaciers, bears, midnight sun, bald eagles, aurora borealis, and so much more—we have it all, and in immense proportions!

Like the scenery, the seasons, too, are incredibly dramatic. Our brief but brilliant summers and long daylight hours showcase the lush greenery (it's not all frozen tundra here!) of grassy landscapes and dense forests. With much daylight everything grows abundantly—vibrantly colored flowers and veggies of gigantic size flourish. Sunrise to sunset is over nineteen hours long and even nighttime is rather a soft twilight all night long. It is difficult to make yourself go to bed at night when it still is so light outside. To celebrate the summer solstice people often play midnight baseball and other outdoor games with no artificial light. Lest one become too carried away by summer's colorful loveliness, however, there are always the annoying and relentless dive-bomber mosquitoes, white flies, and no-see-ums to remind us that nothing's perfect in this world!

Summer fades into a brief and gorgeous fall—one of my favorite seasons here—warm, bright days and cooling nights. Plus, the crowding bustle of tourist season is over and our one main "highway" (a two-lane road) becomes more maneuverable again. Moose are everywhere along the roadsides, munching as much as they can before the long winter sets in. We never tire of watching these ungainly critters, so homely they're cute!

Other than the obvious change of climate, everything about winter is so absolutely opposite to summer. By the time of winter solstice we have barely five hours of daylight. Nights are pitch black by then. Some people become depressed by so much darkness, but this doesn't seem to affect me—for one thing I'm blessed, and very grateful, to have plenty of room in my home to clutter it up with various projects. Besides, it is kind of cozy and a good excuse to hunker down, stay home, and work on my stuff! Alaska's winter skies are amazing. Often on clear, cold nights, we can gaze entranced at the dazzling beauty of the aurora borealis dancing in mysterious silence across the northern sky. The daytime southern skies are awesome as well, with the sun arcing low, then disappearing all too quickly and leaving behind a gorgeous rosy-pink or orange-sherbet glow that rims the entire horizon. If there are morning clouds the sky shows off in a black-red drama of glowing coals. The winter landscape is covered with mounds of snow from late November to the end of April (a very long season!). I love it all, but also realize I'm speaking as one retired from the workaday world and not having to dig out every day to navigate the icy roads.

We really have no spring to speak of, as it is already mid-May by the time we experience the thrill of winter breakup, when the ice leaves the lakes and rivers, the snow melts, and greenery sprouts up almost overnight. What a quick change! Now it's time to transfer seedling flowers and veggies from the greenhouse to the outdoors, and with so much warm sun and daylight they'll grow amazingly large in just a few weeks.

Activities abound all year long. There's so much to do for both the adventuresome and the not-so adventuresome that I can't begin to recount it all and would bore you if I tried. Culture is surprisingly rich here on the Kenai Peninsula, both in art and music. My husband and I try to attend every concert and theater event we can, and find them all very enjoyable and exceptionally well-performed for so small an area from which to find a talent pool. Inexpensive, too—what a bonus! Last year we were completely spellbound watching a one-man performance of the entire Gospel of John! This amazing production tours all around the country; information about it can be found at: www.gospelofjohn.com.

What a wonderful place to live! Surrounded by such awesome beauty and spaciousness, and living at the edge of a sparkling blue lake seems like an idyllic life. Critters meander across our land—moose, porcupines, the occasional bear or coyote or lynx. We love hearing the lonesome call of the loons on the lake and watching the bald eagles soar overhead, screeching wildly. Every lake seems to be the summer home to at least one pair of trumpeter swans. I truly love it all (well, except maybe for the part about the bears!) and am mostly delighted with living in this wonderful place.

Continue on next page

Well, I did say “mostly delighted” because there is the very real problem of lonesomeness brought on by the many miles of separation from my family and our Christian fellowship. Other readers in our fellowship who face similar situations can readily understand the loneliness I feel at such a plight. In this huge land of 570,400 square miles and 644,000 people, or just under one square mile per person—the last frontier!—there are only two CLC churches. One of our newest is in Fairbanks (Grace Evangelical Lutheran) northward in the interior—and wasn’t that wonderful to see their story and pictures in the December Spokesman! The other is in Ketchikan, (Holy Truth Lutheran), down south near the bottom of the panhandle. I live in the south central region, many hundreds of miles away from either one. Several times a year a handful of CLC people from the Anchorage area gather together for a communion service in one of the member’s homes. I fly there—or drive the 3 1/2 hour trip—happy for the fellowship and grateful that Pastor Fuerstenau from Ketchikan makes the long trip up there to pastor us. After one of these services we have a Bible class with lively discussions followed by a fellowship meal. We make it all last as long as we can before we have to go our separate ways again. You can imagine what a blessing it was to find out about this fledgling fellowship in Anchorage, few and far between though our meetings might be. Far better and certainly more soul-satisfying than none at all!

A few times I visited a local church or two, sitting in the back and watching. There are lots and lots of churches on the Kenai Peninsula—mostly Baptist and non-denominational evangelical. There are a few Catholic churches and several Lutheran churches (sadly, of course, none of which are CLC). There’s even a Baha’i fellowship and a group of Hebrew Christians who meet on Saturday. Seemingly a little bit of everything. Although I greatly admire the warm spirit and outreach of some of the evangelical churches, their beliefs are all over the map, and likely to focus anywhere but on the central theme of Christ’s atoning death for our sins. Most of them don’t even like to talk about sin and our need for daily repentance and for the reassurance of our forgiveness in Christ. Seeing this just made me all the more thankful for what we have in the confessional faith we treasure so dearly. So I mostly stay home and follow the taped service I receive every week from my home church—St. Stephen Lutheran of Mountain View, California; read bigger chunks of my precious Bible than I ever gave myself time for in earlier days; try to commit lots of favorite verses to memory; do lots of praying. It is such sweet comfort to know that God loves hearing our supplications. And, oh, how beautiful is our Lord’s prayer! One can’t say it enough—can’t savor enough—each treasured word that He Himself taught us to pray.

When working around the house I often load up my CD player with ILC Tour Choir CDs and the wonderful Pocket Organist set of The Lutheran Hymnal that I received as a Christmas present—what a present! Surprising how many hymn verses one can sing from memory or sing along with the choir, and it cheers the very soul to have this cherished hymnody so readily accessible. So this lonesomeness has become in so many ways a blessing! Truly it has to be the Lord working this turn-around for me! How sweet it is to realize once again the faithful promise in God’s Holy Word that He will work out everything for good to those who love Him. Even in lonesomeness, the believer is, as the psalmist says, “surrounded with songs of deliverance.” Our Lord will never leave us nor forsake us.

On a practical note I take every opportunity to save up airline mileage and go visit family and Christian friends. The blessing is twofold—most of them live where there is a CLC church and we can worship there together while I’m enjoying the visit. Back home I try to stay busy with correspondence and would very much enjoy hearing from other women in our treasured fellowship. Please feel free to write me, either via email or snail mail and I will try to answer all! And wouldn’t a picture postcard exchange be fun?!

—Jackie Booth, St. Stephen Lutheran, Mountain View, California;
contact by mail: Jackie Booth, P.O. Box 7945, Nikiski, AK 99635,
or email: n1206e@gci.net

"Nature is the chart of God, mapping out all His attributes."

—Sir Charles Tupper, 1821-1915, Prime Minister of Canada

Comforts of Spring

Sounds of comfort

logs snapping in the wood stove
a Bach rondeau mixing pleasantly
with gentle snores from the couch-dozer
wails of the goose-pair nosing
among lake's edge cattails,
discussing the perfect spot for this year's nest

Visions of comfort

flames dancing to rondeau rhythm
ladybugs exploring windowpanes
rocking chair beckoning
outdoors beckoning
spring breezes pushing through pine branches,
still carrying leftover winter chill
violet and golden crocus peering above oak-leaf mats
birchbark peeling cleanly white
green pushing up warily
curious turtle rising through clear lake water,
hesitating at the surface long enough for
a momentary eye-to-eye, then slowly slipping away

Smells of comfort

fresh coffee, wood smoke, damp earth
tiny arbutus blossoms nestled among
leathery evergreen leaves,
their intense fragrance a well kept secret
from all but those who bend to investigate

O give thanks unto the Lord

for He is good,
for His mercy endures forever.

—Eunice Roehl, Messsiah, Eau Claire, WI



The Lesson the Lilies Teach

Behold the lilies of the field
In stately beauty grow,
They toil not, neither do they spin,
Nor do they reap or sow.
Yet Solomon in glory great
With pomp and fine display,
Though robed in costly silk and gems,
Was not arrayed as they.

Ah, then, if God so clothe the grass
That withers and decays,
Will He not give to you who ask
Sufficient for your days?
Oh, take no thought for raiment, then,
Nor what the morrow brings,
But trust the Father, for He knows
Your need of all these things.

And if His care is over all
His creatures great and small,
Will He not give much more to you,
Is, then, your faith so small?
Consider, then, the lilies fair,
The lesson they have taught:
Ask all, and all receive, and say,
"Behold, what God hath wrought!"

—Submitted by: Arthur Schulz,
Trinity, Millston, WI; Composed by:
Odelia H. Butenschoen of Portland;
Published in the Aug. 21, 1928,
issue of *The Lutheran Witness*.
Based on Matthew 6:28-34.
May be sung to the melody
of TLH 109.

Diakonia

Hello from Lynnwood, Washington! I am Jennifer Schaller, a new member of Redemption Lutheran Church. Redemption is a beautiful little church and school located just north of Seattle. I have assumed the new responsibility of “leading” the Redemption Lutheran Church ladies group, Diakonia, which is a Greek word meaning service, aid, support, or distribution. (I put *leading* in quotations because I have only been a member of Redemption since July 2005, so I am actually relying on the rest of the ladies to tell me what the president of Diakonia needs to do!)

Our past ladies group presidents have kept a nice big binder with minutes and information from the last five years. In looking through this binder I began to realize that although I have only been a member of three CLC congregations, it seems each ladies group has done things a little differently. This led me to guess that the CLC has a rich resource of knowledge, tips, insights, and activities available within our ladies groups, if only we knew how to bring it all together for use as our need requires! So at our February Diakonia meeting I asked the Redemption ladies to list the general and special tasks and events they have been involved in (see below) and I am asking you to do the same for us. I think it would be fun to share tips, ideas, and events with each other— spice up our routine, you might say!

Redemption Diakonia General Activities:

- Baby & Bridal Showers for members of the congregation
- Preparation and clean up for potlucks, funeral meals, anniversary celebrations, etc.
- Cradle Roll

What might be unique about Redemption Diakonia:

- Annual worship service and potluck at a local park.
- Easter Breakfast—headed up by a volunteer family, and we try to get the men to take over this one!
- Lenten Soup Suppers—Two families bring soups, beverages, and desserts; Diakonia provides rolls, cheese, PB&J, and butter. Supper begins at 5:30 p.m., so many people come straight from work because of long commutes. The service begins at 7:00 p.m. It’s been a huge hit!
- Care packages for member ILC students as well as members in the military. Some have told us that it is encouraging knowing that folks at home are thinking about them and keeping them in prayer while they are away.
- Treat bags for children on Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday—A little candy, but also small gifts from sources such as Oriental Trading and Autom catalogs.
- Mother/Daughter Tea—In 2003, Diakonia organized a very enjoyable Mother / Daughter tea which was catered. There was an opening welcome, prayer, and hymn. The luncheon was then followed by presentations and poems written by attendees, then closed with a hymn. The Tacoma women were invited to attend as well. (I hope to repeat this one, or do a variation of it so I can get in on the fun and fellowship!)

Well, that’s it from Lynnwood. Please feel free to send along your own events and ideas! Or, better yet, bring them in person—we love to have visitors!

—Jennifer Schaller, Redemption, Lynnwood, WA;
contact by mail: 20120 24th Ave W, Lynnwood, WA 98036,
or email: Jennifer.schaller@gmail.com, or phone: (425)775-2145

CLC Girls

A heart-to-heart between like-minded girls about Gossip

“Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.”

—Psalm 52:2

Gossip is talking about people behind their backs in a wrong way. I'm sure you've heard lots of stories about Hilary Duff or the Olsen Twins. Do you think all those stories are true? Do you think God likes when people tell lies about other people? I don't think so. Now put yourself in a situation like that. If your friends said you did something bad that you didn't, how would you feel? If you said someone else did something bad and they didn't, how would they feel? It's better to tell a truthful story than an exciting lie. And sometimes it's just better not to say anything at all. Some things you should just keep to yourself.

The Bible says to keep your tongue from evil and your lips shouldn't speak badly about people. The Eighth Commandment says that we should speak well of people and not try to damage their reputation. We should listen to what the Bible and the Catechism say.

—Jessica Schreyer, 11, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

Gossip is a dangerous thing. I think I can say that almost everybody has taken part in a gossip conversation at one time or another. Though it is wrong, it is still done. The Devil tempts us to do this and it becomes easy to fall into the trap.

I've attended ILC for a year and a half. I also live in the dorm. During that time, I've seen that even in a Christian environment, the Devil does his best to tempt us to sin. In the case of gossip, it's especially true. Each of us wants to hear the "latest info" about so-and-so. It's hard not to talk about others. It is also important for someone overhearing a piece of information that would tear another down to step in and point out the error.

It is my hope that as a result of talking with my friends about this subject, we will all make a conscious, prayerful effort to uphold each other in faith. The Lord tells us that if we say anything about a person, it should be of good report. And that is the best advice to be taken on this subject.

—Brittany Voit, 16, St. John's, Okabena, MN

Gossip is usually meant to be harsh to bring somebody and his or her reputation down. We obviously already know that gossip can spread quickly. People will gossip and intentionally or unintentionally hurt someone.

Why do people gossip? It is not so much to build up their personal self-esteem. They often want the other person to feel dumb because he or she did or said something that they didn't like. Or, they just didn't think the something would be bad to talk about.

Almost everyone has had someone speak harshly about them. True words or not—it hurts. Most likely, you also have gossiped about someone. You do it because you choose to, which is sinful. There are ways of preventing sin; but we don't take advantage of those ways because often we're lazy. It's easier to gossip than not to gossip; but wouldn't it really be best not to gossip at all? Let's try to think about this next time.

—Doris Payne, 15, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

July's Topic

What is your opinion about the types of music, TV, and movies girls should listen to and watch? Consider Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

Pen Pals

Get connected with girls across the CLC!

Tell us about you! My name is Allison Marie Stearns. I am 11, and attend church and school at Immanuel, Mankato, MN. I am in 6th grade. There are seven people in my family, my Dad, Mom, my sister Samantha, and my three brothers, Ryan, Kwentin, and Ian. We also have a cat named Joe.

Favorite Food: chicken

Color: blue

Class: phy-ed

Sport: basketball

Hobbies: basketball and skateboarding

Food you don't like: peppers

What do you want to be when you grow up? I want to work at a pet store.

Fun Fact: We have seven horses at our farm.

*Pen-Pals can write to you at: Allison Stearns, c/o Immanuel Lutheran School,
421 N. 2nd St., Mankato, MN 56001*

Tell us about you! My name is Ariel Lynn Peralta. I am 10 years old and in the fifth grade at Immanuel, Mankato, MN. My family is my mom and dad, brothers, and sisters, and we have a cat named Phoebe, a dog named Nacho, four fish named Rainbow, Fluffy, Swimmy and Speedy.

Favorite Food: pizza

Colors: pink, blue, and purple

Class: English and Art class

Sport: basketball, the Timberwolves

Hobbies: crocheting, sewing, swimming, gymnastics, reading

Food you don't like: cooked carrots and broccoli

What do you want to be when you grow up? A teacher or a singer

*Pen-Pals can write to you at: Ariel Peralta, c/o Immanuel Lutheran School,
421 N. 2nd St., Mankato, MN 56001*

Want to take part in CLC Girls Pen-pals?

First, write to the first two girls listed above! Then, write to Jessica Schreyer or Abby Matzke at the addresses below describing yourself. Please provide a P.O. Box address or your church address to receive pen-pal mail. Let your parents know that you are participating. Soon after, you should be getting mail from all over the country!

Reach Jessica Schreyer at: jessino21@aol.com, or
Abby Matzke at: mail: P.O. Box 238, Stambaugh, MI 49964,
or email: abby_matzke@yahoo.com.

Working Up Appetites

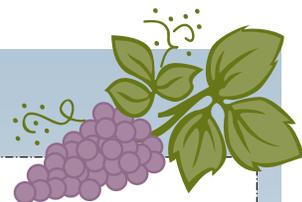
Hi. I am Gail Mackensen from Peace thru Christ Lutheran of Middleton, Wisconsin. I have been asked to put together the food page for *The Branches*. Cooking, baking, and creating my own recipes are some of my favorite things to do. In fact, I usually escape to the kitchen when I'm trying to avoid cleaning and laundry and any other seemingly mundane household tasks.

I am looking forward to doing lots of recipe testing. But, I need your help. If you have any recipes or cooking tips or ideas you'd like to share, please send them my way. For the next issue, we'll be looking for summer recipes; perhaps ideas to use the wonderful bounty from your gardens. Please keep the recipes fairly simple and avoid copying from a copyrighted cookbook. Recipes passed down from your family, gleaned from a church cookbook, or your own creations are welcome. For a possible future issue, if you've got an embarrassing cooking story to tell, I'd love to hear about it. My contact information is: email, gsmackensen@yahoo.com, or phone, (608)827-0159.

If you're like me, you often spend much time preparing the main entrée for Easter dinner and the side dishes are often hastily thrown together. In the Delicious Dishes section are a few tasty side dishes that can be prepared while your ham or roast rests. I have also included an idea you may enjoy for an Easter-themed decoration.

We're all looking forward to hearing from you!

—Gail Mackensen, Peace Thru Christ, Middleton, WI



Delicious Dishes

Oven Roasted Vegetables & Potatoes

- 1 lb. small potatoes, quartered
- 1 c. baby carrots
- 1 onion, cut into wedges
- 1/4 c. olive oil
- 3 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. oregano or rosemary
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1 red or yellow pepper, cut into wedges
- 2 med. zucchini, sliced

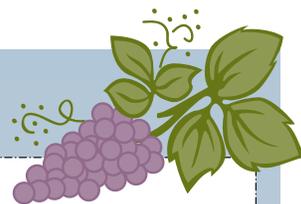
Combine potatoes, carrots, and onions in 13x9" baking pan. Combine olive oil and all seasonings. Drizzle over vegetables and toss to coat. Roast uncovered in 450° oven for 20 minutes. Remove from oven and add remaining vegetables. Toss to mix and roast another 10-15 minutes or until vegetables are tender and brown around the edges. Serves 6-8.

Green Beans with Balsamic Vinegar

- 2 lbs. fresh green beans
- 2 slices bacon
- 1/4 c. minced shallots
- 3 Tbsp. coarsely chopped almonds
- 2 Tbsp. brown sugar
- 1/4 c. white balsamic vinegar (or rice vinegar)

Cook green beans in water for 10-12 minutes till crisp tender. Drain and rinse under cold water. Fry bacon in skillet; remove and crumble. Sauté shallots in bacon grease for 1 minute. Add almonds and sauté for 1 minute more. Remove and cool. Add sugar and vinegar to skillet; cook on low and stir until sugar dissolves. Add bacon and other ingredients and pour over beans. Toss to coat. Serves 8.

Delicious Dishes



Easter Story Cookies

a.k.a. Empty Tomb Cookies

1 c. whole pecans	zipper baggie
1 tsp. vinegar	wooden spoon
3 egg whites	tape
Pinch of salt	Bible
1 c. sugar	

Preheat oven to 300° degrees. Place pecans in baggie and let children beat them with the wooden spoon to break into small pieces. Explain that after Jesus was arrested, he was beaten by the Roman soldiers. Read John 19:1-3. Let each child smell the vinegar. Put 1 tsp. vinegar in mixing bowl. Explain that when Jesus was thirsty on the cross, he was given vinegar to drink. Read John 19:28-30. Add egg whites to vinegar. Eggs represent life. Explain that Jesus gave His life to give us life. Read John 10:10-11. Sprinkle a little salt into each child's hand. Let them taste it and brush the rest into the bowl. Explain that this represents the salty tears shed by Jesus' followers, and the bitterness of our own sin. Read Luke 23:27. So far the ingredients are not very appetizing. Add 1 c. sugar. Explain that the sweetest part of the story is that Jesus died because he loves us. He wants us to know and belong to Him. Read Ps. 34:8 and John 3:16. Beat with mixer on high speed until stiff peaks form; this could take 12-15 minutes. Explain that the color white represents the purity in God's eyes of those whose sins have been cleansed by Jesus. Read Isa.1:18 and John 3:1-3. Fold in broken nuts. Drop by teaspoons onto wax paper covered cookie sheet. Explain that each mound represents the rocky tomb where Jesus' body was laid. Read Matt. 27:57-60. Put the cookie sheet in the oven, close the door and turn the oven off. Give each child a piece of tape and seal the oven door. Explain that Jesus' tomb was sealed. Read Matt. 27:65-66. Go to bed! Explain that they may feel sad to leave the cookies in the oven overnight. Jesus' followers were in despair when the tomb was sealed. Read John 16:20 and 22. On Easter morning, open the oven and give everyone a cookie. Notice the cracked surface and take a bite. The cookies are hollow! On the first Easter Jesus' followers were amazed to find the tomb open and empty. Read Matt. 28:1-9.

—Recipe suggested by Kathy Schaller, Mt. Zion, Detroit, MI

—Recipe provided by Gail Mackensen, Peace Thru Christ, Middleton, WI

Easter Egg Tree

For a fun way to hang all those colorful plastic eggs or those produced by your children at school, try creating this easy Easter Egg Tree. Cut 2 or 3 branches (18-24" in length) from any leaf bearing tree, preferably those with 2 or 3 smaller branches growing from them. Spray paint the branches white or silver and let dry. Select a heavier-weight ice bucket or short, squat vase for a container. Cut a piece of florist foam to fit the container, then poke the branches into the foam. Spread a layer of Easter grass over the foam to cover. Once securely in place, use thin ribbon to hang your egg creations from the branches. This looks festive placed on a foyer table or as a table centerpiece. We also used one of these in our Christian Day School to hang decorated eggs the children had made in Art class.

—Gail Mackensen, Peace Thru Christ, Middleton, WI

Feeding Our Faith

One of the wonderful lessons that our church body instills in our members is to always have an eye out for false teachers. It seems that many of today's Christian churches promote tolerance of unbiblical messages. As a synod and as individuals, our prayer is that the Lord gives us the wisdom, and the courage, to distinguish the truths about Him and rejoice in that truth.

One of the areas in which we can share love for the Lord, zeal for the truth, and care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, is that of passing along tools we have found to be Scripturally edifying. These are tools that will encourage, teach, make us hungry for more knowledge about Him, that will nurture our one-on-one relationship with our Lord and Savior, and that remind us that the Lord is the center of our lives...exactly where He should be.

We are blessed. We have the one and only tool that is needed: the inspired Word...the Holy Bible. I understand that many people can read Scripture and understand it well; it comes naturally for some, and requires more effort for others. The problem comes when we do not actively read the Scriptures. This problem is very prevalent among many Christians today.

I was never a fan of reading. My mother can attest to that. One Christmas, she gave me a book with money scattered throughout the pages and made me read through the whole thing to reap the monetary benefits found inside. I had a hard time reading Scripture, even all the way through college. I didn't see what others saw in it. When my high school or college teachers would explain passages or sections of Scripture, I would be amazed at what it meant to them, but reading alone, I was never able to come up with anything even close to what they understood Scripture to be saying. With good intentions, I would start reading Scripture daily, and within a few weeks or month, my new habit was no more. This process continued throughout high school and college. I wanted to understand, I wanted to want to read it, but it didn't happen. Many Christians experience this very same thing. Unfortunately, many of them also give up.

In 2003, at the age of 23, I was able to attend the CLC Women's Retreat in Trego, WI (participant), CLC Youth Camp in Eau Claire, WI (co-director), and CLC Youth Conference in Benton, TN (counselor). The Lord used these activities to change my life. Through them, He led me from what I consider to be a knowledgeable Christian (which I believe many confirmands also may be) to being an eager Christian. Our youth are well instructed, but there is always room to help them transform into mature Christians. I thank the Lord that He led me through this process, and continues to lead me. He obviously is the one that deserves all the credit for this change; but the beauty of it is that He used fellow Christians to do the job—younger, older, friends, members of the CLC, and other Christians. He gives us the seed and prepares us to sow it, but He creates the harvest. He has given us the talents, abilities, and tools to help our brothers and sisters go through this transformation.

My aim is to share with you some of the material that He used to help me gain a growing hunger for His Word and a deeper understanding of it. These tools of encouragement can be given as graduation, birthday, or Christmas gifts. My hope is that He will use you to sow His seed to those around you, both fellow Christians and unbelievers, so they will see Him working and come to hear about the one thing needful.

Books

When God Writes Your Love Story by Eric and Leslie Ludy

When Dreams Come True by Eric and Leslie Ludy

Authentic Beauty by Leslie Ludy

God's Gift to Women by Eric Ludy

This is an amazing Christian couple that shares their love story. *When Dreams Come True* tells that story. In *When God Writes Your Love Story*, they teach people about love—their first love, the Lord, and their second love, their spouse. *Authentic Beauty* and *God's Gift to Women* are written specifically to females and males about their relationship with their Lord and their relationship with the opposite sex. These books are perfect for students in high school and college, and even beyond. I recommend that if you are purchasing for a male, start with *God's Gift to Women*...most girls will like any of them.

Albums

Artist: Caedman's Call Album: Caedman's Call
Artist: Jeremy Camp Album: Restored
Artist: Reliant K Album: MMHMM

These are 3 of my favorite Christian albums so far. Caedman's Call is a little spiritually deeper than the other two; it is a softer CD, and my instinct is that girls will like it better. Jeremy Camp is versatile—a great CD, especially for someone who loves to pray. A lot of his songs are addressed specifically to God and are great for anyone who is building that personal relationship with Him. Reliant K is the most popular of the 3 groups, is a little harder sounding than the others, and is definitely a favorite of high school and college age Christians.

Devotional Books

NIV's One Year Bible

The GIFT for all People—Thoughts on God's Great Grace by Max Lucado

What Jesus Asks—Meditations on Questions in the Gospels

The NIV (also available in other translations) One Year Bible is perfect for high school and college students, and anyone else for that matter. It was perfect for me because I would always start in a book and get board with it. This layout is about 15-30 minutes of reading per day, and it gives you OT, NT, a Psalm, and a Proverb each day. Perfect to study on your own, perfect for a small Bible study between friends, perfect for a wedding gift!

The GIFT for all People is a great little book for short devotions for anyone—little tidbits of the Lord's grace to help you dwell on the love of the Lord throughout the day. Even better, you can buy a used copy online at amazon.com for only \$.01 plus shipping.

What Jesus Asks is my favorite devotion book so far. I recommend this for a slightly more mature Christian...possibly high school students and most college students; it would be great for pastors to use as a Bible class series. It might be a harder to find—I believe it is out of print, but I did purchase a few copies online. Keep an eye out, copies do float around!

—Alana Ahrens, Faith, St. Louis, MO

Editor's Note: Neither I nor the pastoral reviewer are familiar with the above material. Christians are warned to beware of false teachings (Mt 7:15, 1 Jn 4:1). Extra-Biblical sources need to be approached with caution because they may include teachings contrary to Scripture. Please review any material yourself and consult your pastor before gift-giving.

To Daffodils

Fair daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon:
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the Even-song;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or any thing.
We die,
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew
Ne'er to be found again.

—Robert Herrick, 1591-1674

Christian Allegory in Hollywood Films: The Lord of the Rings

A number of recent films employ Christian imagery and allegory as central themes. This is not a new trend. But these films prove to be popular among Christian and non-Christian audiences alike. As Christians, we can identify with some of the themes and also use the movies as an opportunity to share the Lord's message.

Since I'm a little behind in my movie-going habits, I have not yet seen "Chronicles of Narnia." However, I have watched the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy numerous times and these movies will be my focus here.

The "Lord of the Rings" films use Christian allegory, though in perhaps more subtle ways than "Chronicles." J.R.R. Tolkien—"Lord of the Rings" creator—was a staunch Catholic who wrote the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy with religious thoughts in mind.

Tolkien uses the popular literary theme of good versus evil. For centuries, this theme captured the imaginations of writers because it's a classic tale of conflict. Conflict engages us and draws us into a story.

"Lord of the Rings" represents this fight between good and evil in many ways. The ring that Frodo carries represents sin. Though just a small ring, it becomes heavy and it is evident the ring burdens Frodo. He's reluctant for others to carry the ring, in part because he doesn't trust them. More importantly, though, he recognizes it's his burden to carry alone, just as only Jesus could bear the weight of sin for the rest of us. Frodo's mission is to destroy the ring, just as Jesus destroyed sin.

The ring also tempts, just as sin tempts us. The ring tempts Frodo and he succumbs on many occasions. The ring allows him to become invisible in times of trouble, which initially seems helpful. But every time he dons the ring, he's easier for the evil Sauron and his henchmen to see. What initially seems like a good idea could eventually spell doom not only for Frodo, but for the entire world. In this world, sin tempts us because at the surface it looks appealing to our human flesh.

People around Frodo also are tempted to take the ring and use it for evil. Even the beautiful elf queen, Galadriel, who commits herself to a life of peace, envisions grandeur and rule over the world through the ring.

Each time I watch the trilogy's final installment, "Return of the King," I can't help but to think of Jesus' second coming. One of the last scenes shows Aragorn receiving the crown and taking his spot as king. He has helped defeat evil, and now it's his turn to rule Middle Earth in a time of peace.

Films such as "Lord of the Rings" have so much potential to reach varied audiences. Unlike Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," these films appeal to a wide audience. "Passion" audiences consisted largely of Christians, who already believe in the power of Christ.

The wide appeal of "Lord of the Rings" becomes a teaching opportunity for us. Perhaps we have friends and family who enjoy the film, but who are not church-goers. We can use the common appeal of the movie to spark conversation. We have the opportunity to speak the opinion that we believe the themes of Christianity and God stand out. Perhaps this will cause someone to view the movies and books—and God—in a new light.

In the next issue: Part 2, a discussion of allegory in the "Chronicles of Narnia" series.

—Rachael Hanel, Immanuel, Mankato, MN



Head 'Em Up, Move 'Em Out!

Or would "Wagons Ho" be more appropriate? Actually, *The Over 65 Bible Study Club* has been traveling and our "wagon master" usually says, "All aboard," as a brand new adventure begins here in Phoenix, AZ.

This Bible study group meets monthly, and besides the regular in-depth studying, sponsors a student through *Project Kinship*. When Don Ohlmann suggested we might like to see something of the State of Arizona, we jumped on the wagon, so to speak. (Don't let the name "Over 65" mislead you as quite a few in this group are not yet to that great age!)



*The Over 65 Bible Study Club,
Tortilla Flats, January 2006*

Ready for the first great adventure? On December 6, 2005, the group headed north from Phoenix, went west through Sedona, Prescott (elevation 5300), and Jerome, a quick stop at Montezuma's Castle and back to Phoenix. The trip took one day and covered nearly 360 miles. Fifteen people were on the trip. I was really sorry to have missed out on this trip but was determined to sign on for any that were on future schedules.

For the second trip, on January 18, 2006, 15 people (two vans) met for the trip to "The Apache Trail." This trail was an old stage coach trail and goes east from Phoenix, through the Superstition Mountains, passing by Canyon and Apache lakes before arriving at Tortilla Flat (stage station) where we stopped for lunch. We traveled about five miles of unpaved, one lane road, through some of the most beautiful mountains and deep valleys you can image. A stop at Roosevelt Dam to view the awesome wonders and take pictures and then we were looping around and back to Phoenix. The climb up through Miami has brought us to see the 7,812 foot Signal Peak. The loop was approximately 250 miles. Another great day with super fellowship and enough vistas to boggle the mind.

Next, a trip to visit the London Bridge. Yes, that's right, the *London Bridge*! The original bridge was built over the Thames River in England in 1831. It was bought by Robert McCulloch and brought piece by piece to Arizona in 1968. Since it's reconstruction in 1971, in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, it has been a popular tourist attraction. On the way to Havasu, we crossed over to the California side of the Colorado River and crossed back over on the Parker Dam. The water of the river and lakes was so blue as to look like a postcard. We stopped for dinner at the Golden Nugget in Wickenburg before heading home. An even dozen gathered for this trip and covered approximately 350 miles.

Everyone is looking forward to the next adventure on Arizona's trails.

—Kitty Wonderly, Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ

Bedtime Prayer

Dear Father in Heaven,
Look down from above;
Bless father and mother,
And all those that I love.
May angels guard over
My slumbers, and when
The morning is breaking,
Awake me. Amen.

—Tracy Ohlmann, Grace, Valentine, NE



News & Notes

A Note from the Printer

The printing colors in the January 2006 issue didn't come out very well. We apologize if anyone had trouble reading any part of the magazine.

A Related Note from the Business Manager

If there is any part of the publication process which you find less than excellent (e.g., subscriptions, mailing, color quality, or readability), do not hesitate to contact the business manager, who will work diligently to remedy any issues.

Circulation Statistics for 2005

In 2005 we saw the number of subscribers to *The Branches* rise 21% to 338. Subscriptions are sent to 24 U.S. states and one Canadian province. Ages of our subscribers range from 11 to 90 years and up. There were 59 gift subscriptions paid; up 48% from 2004.

Thank you to all for your encouragement and involvement!

Scripture Search

To the questions found on page 2, here are the answers:

1. He had risen from the dead. Matthew 17:9.
2. Joseph of Arimathea. Matthew 27:57.
3. The handkerchief around His head, folded together in a place by itself. John 20:6-7.
4. One of the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:13-18.
5. John... "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." John 20:30-31.

Book Review

George Macdonald: A Quiet Neighborhood (edited by Dan Hamilton, 1985)

In original form the title was: *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood*. This is an oldie but definitely a goodie for those looking for a more thoughtful read with a slight romantic subplot and lots of theology on top. I was weeding out my husband's dusty library when I saw that this one looked like it should go. It appeared to be an outdated, simplistic Christian romance, so I expected frivolity. But I recognized the author's name from elsewhere and so took a second look, started reading, and couldn't put it down.

The beautiful style and depth of subject contrasts sharply against most modern writing, which has little art or thought to it. Written in 1866 as a magazine serial (printed bit by bit over time), it came from Macdonald's own experience, acquaintances, and beliefs. The main character is a vicar, and from that perspective describes the complexities of people who live in his "quiet neighborhood." He uses situations to delve into very thoughtful conversations of faith, forgiveness, and redemption, even touching on hymns, sermon length, behavior, and pitfalls of sin.

George Macdonald, although a member of the Congregational Church in Scotland, includes very little, if any, Reformed theology as does so much modern Christian fiction.

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

Subscription Renewal Time!

2006-07 Subscriptions

Mark your calendars! July 2006-June 2007 subscriptions are due **July 1, 2006**. Rates will stay the same at **\$12.00** for 4 issues/year. Bulletin inserts, subscription forms, and reminders will go out in June to pastors and individual subscribers. Please keep in mind that subscriptions are not limited to women of the CLC. As always, please contact the business manager with any questions.

In addition, we would like to have the main contact people—those representing groups of subscribers—more firmly in place this year. Please consider connecting with the other women in your local area/church to establish who that main contact person is and forward the information to the business manager for the coming subscription year. Periodic emails to this group of main/local contacts may include: subscription updates, article needs/requests, answers to general questions, and other items of a timely nature. Thank you!

2006–2007 Subscription Form

The Branches annual subscription cost is **\$12.00** for quarterly magazines.

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Duplication of this form is permitted and encouraged.



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

***“The simpler our trust
in Christ for all things,
the surer our peace.”***

—William Adams, 1564–1620



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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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