

The Branches

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Seasons of Life: Winter

Often in wintertime, we are stuck indoors wondering what to do. Well, if we didn't have TV to numb our brains and spirits, we'd be getting more done. Try to tune in to the people who are—or should be—closest to you. Winter is a great time thank God for our Christian friends and enjoying fellowship with them. The fruits of the Spirit grow in us when we take time to study and share the Word.

Time fellowshiping doesn't mean time to complain amongst friends. God expects us to bolster one another up, encourage contentment, contemplate His handiwork, make correct choices, and concentrate on proper thoughts, words, and deeds. This is how faith works in us to give courage, integrity, wisdom, and all of the "fruits of the spirit."

Use this time to grow closer together by gathering around the cross. Share verses important to you, thoughts, stories, music, talents, singing, readings, and more. What a great way to weather out the season and pass along God's heritage of faith to younger generations too!

To change the subject a bit, in consideration for future needs of *The Branches*, we have temporarily downsized to 16 pages again. Please bear with us through this time of transition. We aim to be back up to the full 24 pages in July.

A heartfelt "Thank You!" goes out to all of our dedicated subscribers and writers for volunteering both time and talent. It is because of you that we receive notes telling of blessings brought through *The Branches* and reports of articles used as witnessing tools. Know that God is using each one of you to support many others and to spread the Word.

We can, together, reach a milestone that will lower our costs. The more subscriptions we print at one time, the less it costs per copy. This means more money to place elsewhere, such as: printing more pages, printing more often, reaching more people, getting more for your money! As of June 2006, we were less than 100 subscribers from our first milestone. Consider gifting a subscription to a friend or family member and encourage your friends who share with you to order a subscription for themselves. The more people who order paid subscriptions to *The Branches*, the less it costs each one of us to subscribe.

Thank you, to each one of you, for participating in *The Branches*. The more people who participate, the more people will be blessed!

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

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now."

—Philippians 1:3

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What Did You Eat Today?

I love the foods we eat in winter. Pot roast, twice-baked potatoes, potatoes and gravy, cherry pie, turkey and stuffing, roasted chicken, fresh-baked breads, cake, cookies—all foods that require the oven and all filled with starches and fats. They're my favorite foods, and I wait all summer for the weather to cool off so that I can run the oven for hours at a time. Sometimes I remind myself that these foods aren't very healthy, and so I mix it up with healthier foods, or throw in some salad or fruit.

You are what you eat. Do you have enough fingers and toes to count the number of times that you have heard this cliché phrase? If this is true, then I'm gravy. It's my favorite sauce, and I love it on meat, bread, potatoes, and vegetables. But if I eat too much gravy, I will gain weight and my arteries will clog. If I eat only gravy, I will never get the nutrition I need. So I try not to eat gravy too often. I care about what is good for me, especially when it comes to food. What I take into my body ultimately becomes a part of me.

What about my spiritual food? While we may attempt to "watch what we eat" in order to stay healthy or to lose weight, do we put the same thought into our daily spiritual nutrition? The foods we eat determine the quality and length of our lives, to a certain extent, but the spiritual foods that we ingest also affect our lives—and in a much more profound way. Jesus knew that we should be conscious of our spiritual food intake. While His disciples worried about physical food, Jesus told them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven" (John 6:32). And this bread from heaven does far more than sustain our physical lives in this world! "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). Life to the world—eternal life for all those who eat.

If we're going to live, we have to eat. But we also have to eat for the right reasons. Sometimes, we eat food because we are bored, or because it is the socially appropriate thing to do. This causes unhealthy and unwanted side effects. The same is true for spiritual food. We may take in a healthy dose of "the right stuff," but if we attend church only for social reasons or because our spouses or parents "make us," this food does not sustain us. We must eat the right spiritual food for the right reasons. And what could be better to take in than the Word of God, and His Body and Blood, in a humble and penitent manner? Our physical foods may give us life today, but it is only through our spiritual foods that we have everlasting life in heaven. That's far better than gravy!

As you eat your wonderful winter foods this year, consider your spiritual foods. You truly are what you eat. What are you eating today?

—Katie Sumei, Faith, St. Louis, MO



A Look Ahead

Upcoming Themes

The last issue in our Seasons series continues to consider correlations between the seasons of creation and the "seasons" of a life. April will appropriately be Spring. Our lives may reflect aspects of springtime. It is a time of growth, renewal, beginnings, promises fulfilled, a welcome and warming change from winter's harshness, and symbols of eternal life are everywhere. And there's so much more! We find spiritual lessons if we take time to meditate on God's creation.

July's theme will be "Where to Look for Joy." All of us fall into the trap of negativism. Remember to renew your subscriptions to join us for a look into how to combat and defeat this attitude problem!

The deadline for articles intended for the April issue is February 15th. The deadline for July is May 15th.

This allows time 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.

The Seasons of Life—Part 3

Winter

Winter snow at last is falling
Hibernation time is here.
Water freezing on the lake tops
Reflects light as off a mirror.
The earth grows cold,
And we are told,
Life is aging—death is near.

Retirement at last has come,
Though faster 'normal' moves us
We seem to take on much more work
Then energy behooves us.
Each day we pray
God's Word will stay
Our one and only focus.

Each Scripture verse that we have learned
With child-like faith believing,
Confirms the hope we have in Him
When from this earth we're leaving.
And death's dark door
Holds us no more,
His kingdom we're receiving.

Like all the Seasons of the year
Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter,
We go from birth to end of days
God's plan for us, the Master.
His Guiding love,
Sent from above,
Will keep us from disaster.

—Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace Lutheran, Fridley, MN

Immanuel Lutheran College Memories

Do you have some memories of ILC you would like to share?

A history is being compiled, and we would be happy to hear what you might have to add. Are you a past or present student, parent, pastor, teacher, visitor? ILC began in Mankato in 1959/60 and in a few years will be celebrating its 50th anniversary. The Lord has so richly blessed this school, and through the many pastors, teachers, and laypersons educated here, the entire CLC.

Please contact Eunice Roehl either by email, roehlee@uwec.edu
or by mail, 515 Ingram Drive, Eau Claire, WI 54701.



Consider the Sparrow

The yard is alive with motion. Where children once raced around an improvised ball diamond or drifted in slow circles on the rope swing, now wildlife of a different nature graces the area. Grass has filled in the worn spots and flowers grow freely, no longer trampled by little feet. Sounds of “You’re out!” and “Am not!” are replaced with a variety of chirps and whistles. A bold chickadee pops into the window feeder, grabs a sunflower seed, and carries it to a bare lilac branch. Holding the seed tightly against the branch, she jabs at it repeatedly until it opens to reveal her breakfast, then returns for another. An occasional seed drops unopened, to be scavenged later by a hungry squirrel. Nearby, a large pileated woodpecker hacks away at suet on the birch tree, warily checking his surroundings as he does so. Strange that the tiny chickadee should be more courageous than he, who seems so much better able to protect himself. With long beak and powerful neck, he attacks suet or bark with awesome force. I’d hate to be on the receiving end of that stab. His head is crested in brilliant red plumage. Spying me at the window, he’s off in a noisy flap of wings, while the tiny chickadee continues on undaunted.

Gone are the summer visitors. A pair of hummingbirds swooped in many times a day to take in nectar at the window feeder, but left in mid-August. Bluebirds raised two families in our birdhouse, and the entire group of offspring would splash around in the birdbath together while their mother supervised from a nearby perch. Rose-breasted grosbeaks, Baltimore orioles, thrashers, robins, and many others spent their summer with us. A few species appeared for only a day or two on their annual migration route. These fair-weather friends have all deserted to warmer climates, leaving only the more hardy to spend the winter.

Soon the yard fills with some of the other regulars. A showy cardinal preens at the biggest feeder while underneath several juncos vie with the squirrel for the leavings in the snow. Two tufted titmice, my favorite winter birds, join the chickadee at the window feeder. Their coloring is subtle, soft gray back and crest with pale orange under the wing. A raucous blue jay or two is sure to put in an appearance soon, along with several finch clad in their winter coats, no longer brilliant yellow and black, but a subdued brown and gray.

But speaking of subdued, what is that ordinary-looking bird on the ground under the maple tree? What could a common sparrow be doing among this select avian gathering? She seems to have no special beauty or sound to enrich the atmosphere. Doesn’t she realize she’s intruding on a rather elite group?

She makes no commotion, doesn’t try to chase others away, as some of the more audacious birds do. She just goes about her business of maintaining life, doing what she has been designed to do. Unlike the finch, her coat will retain its subdued color year-round. Very few of us will go out of our way to lure her into our yard.

Come to think of it, most of us are sparrows, aren’t we? Few of us would be picked out of a crowd as glamorous or world-renowned. We live in the circle into which God has placed us, carrying out our tasks, because that’s what we’ve been designed to do. Do we sometimes long to be among the more noticeable of our species? Just what does it take to make us content, as this little sparrow seems to be?

We are constantly bombarded with articles and ads promoting products which promise to change our lives, making us richer, more attractive, more desirable, happier. I have yet to see one urging us to be content with what we are and have. What does the Lord say about that? In 1 Timothy 6:6, He reminds us, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain.” How difficult it is, though, not to be enticed by the glitz and glamour the world offers.

We struggle to achieve that godliness with contentment, and fear we’re just not strong enough, wise enough, to persevere on our own. Fortunately, we’re not on our own. Our Father is with us every step of the way, guiding, protecting, keeping us from dangers of many kinds. In Matthew 10:29–31, He assures us, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Continued on next page

Consider the Sparrow—Continued

Later, in Luke 12:22–34, He directs us to look at another type of bird. “That is why I tell you,” He said to His disciples: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is *more* than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more *will He clothe you, O you* of little faith? And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Is it wrong, then, to try to better ourselves, to encourage higher education, to upgrade our professional status, to clothe ourselves well? The Lord would surely encourage us to use the gifts He has given us to the best advantage. How is one to know what is God-pleasing and what is not? Perhaps an examination of our motives would be the best gauge. Are we doing this for personal glorification or for the furtherance of His kingdom? It will not be easy to answer this honestly, for the old Adam in us loves to justify what we do, especially when we suspect it’s prompted by less than admirable motives.

The young are especially vulnerable, as they try to determine what to do with their lives. It would be well for them to keep in mind the above directive, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” A useful guideline would again be to assess what strengths the Lord has given and to use those strengths to serve Him.

A wife and mother will sometimes feel underappreciated, wondering if her talents are being wasted. And yet, in which other career can she be guaranteed to directly affect the life of another to such a great extent? Like the sparrow, she may seem to spend her days in endless, repetitive tasks, maintaining life, producing and feeding young, doing everything she’s called upon to do. She can see what the Lord says about a good wife in Proverbs 31, “... She is far more precious than jewels... She puts on strength like a garment... She dresses in strength and nobility and she smiles at the future... She speaks with wisdom, and on her tongue there is kindly instruction... Charm deceives, and beauty vanishes, but a woman who fears the Lord, she is to be praised” (translation unknown).

But what of the unmarried woman? Is she less worthy, less useful in His Kingdom? Of course not. To each of us is given a place, an opportunity to serve. Only the Lord knows the master plan and how each of us fits into it. It remains for us to find fulfillment in that place, praying for strength to use our gifts to the fullest, to reach out to those around us who may need our help, to carry on faithfully, to be content.

The sparrow has left the yard for the moment. That’s perhaps a signal for me to change a laundry load. Maybe I’ll be just a bit more content as I fold those clothes today.

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

*A contented heart is
an even sea in the midst of all storms.*

Are You REALLY Too Busy?

"I've been meaning to call you, but I'm just so busy."

"I really want to set up that coffee date with her, but I've been too busy lately."

Does this sound familiar to you? The odd thing for me is that this year, I can't say these words. This year, I am not busy. And that's perplexing. It's perplexing because it's very hard to find another excuse when "too busy" isn't true. I am forced to think about the real reasons I haven't accomplished certain tasks that I keep telling people I'd like to accomplish.

This year my girls are 2 and 4. I have no school responsibilities; I work only an hour or two a day from home. I schedule and lead my playgroup each Wednesday and have my church lady's group once a month and that's where my commitments end! Any other commitments I make are my choice. This is the life I was impatiently waiting for when I was working full time.

As the seasons and types of activities change there is one thing that stays the same. I can always make myself busy. And the bad thing is that the more we say the words "I'm so busy" the more we believe it's true. We get ourselves into a rushed state of mind and live there for weeks at a time! I have to challenge myself to stop and look at priorities. Do I really have to go to the grocery store now, when it's naptime in Nebraska and I can call my pregnant girlfriend to see how she's feeling? I could browse Craigslist for an hour, or I could switch over to my e-mail and send a "Thinking of you" note to my cousin who just lost his dad. It's easy to hang out in my own little busy world, but how about touching another life in a loving way today?

Will you join me this winter in taking the time to prioritize? It's easy to find time in the day to read the Bible or devotion book when that task is first on the list—because your whole day is available! Finding time to exercise, play with the kids, or visit with a loved one becomes easy to schedule on an open calendar before the rest of the day is filled in with cleaning, errands, and other miscellaneous activities. Today I dare you to quit using the phrase "I'm too busy"! If it's important, then make time. And if it isn't, you can feel secure knowing you're using your time wisely.

*Lord, as the new year begins and all around me resolutions are being made, here is mine:
Take first place in my life, Lord, and help me to settle the rest of my activities into
their proper place in line. Bless my busyness because I am busy
with things that you want me to be doing.
Amen.*

—Jennifer Schaller, Redemption, Lynnwood, WA

News & Notes

Trego Retreat: Change of Venue

The CLC Women's Retreat that in the past was held in Trego, Wisconsin, will be held at the Days Inn and Conference Center in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, April 20, 21, and 22, 2007. The theme for the weekend is 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were brought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (NIV). The retreat is sponsored by Immanuel, Mankato.

The advertising brochures were sent to your churches before Christmas, so ask your Pastor if you do not have them available, or e-mail Pastor Nolting at pnolting@hickorytech.net, or Laila Fleischer at leftleischer2@hotmail.com.

Bible Search

Mystery Women of the Bible

1. These are sisters of the Jewish royal family. Both were present (at separate times) at Paul's trial in Caesarea and both heard Paul speak. Each was married more than once and lived scandalous lives. Who are they?
2. These also are sisters with very similar names. They are not real women but used by Ezekiel as symbols of Samaria and Jerusalem. They illustrate the lewd and wicked behavior of these idolatrous cities. Who are they?
3. She was the only ruling queen of Judah, the wicked daughter of a foreign king. She nearly exterminated the house of David. Her corpse was trampled by horses. Who is she?
4. Her name is unknown to us though legend supplies a name. She has the distinction of being the only person to plead on Jesus' behalf during His trial, because of her dream of Him. Who is she?
5. This woman has two names—and two lives, being resurrected by Peter. She lived in Joppa and has had benevolent societies named for her. She is known for her handiwork. Who is she?
6. This companion of Jesus has been falsely and slanderously identified with the "sinful woman" of Luke 7. Seven demons were cast out of her. She was the first witness of the risen Savior. Who is she?
7. She is perhaps the most tragic mother in the Bible, a concubine of Saul and mother of two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth. They and 5 of her nephews were executed by David for unpunished crimes of Saul. They were left to the elements. She protected their bodies from birds and beasts for 5 months until the rains came and David relented and had the remains buried. Who is she?
8. This Persian Queen refused her husband's "invitation" to appear at a feast and entertain the guests. She was deposed and replaced. What is her name?
9. They were midwives in the land of Egypt who defied Pharaoh's wicked orders, thus sparing Moses and many others from early deaths. They were blessed by God for this courageous stand. Who are they?
10. This princess was the eldest daughter of Saul and was the "prize" offered to the one who would kill Goliath. She was, however, not married to David, but to another husband by whom she had 5 sons. Who is she?

Need help? Here are the Bible references:

1. Acts 24:24; Acts 25:13, 23, 26, 30
2. Ezekiel 23
3. 2 Chronicles 22, 23, 24
4. Matthew 27:19
5. Acts 9:36ff
6. Matthew 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1, 9; Luke 8:2; 24:10; John 19:25; 20:1, 11ff
7. 2 Samuel 3:7; chapter 21
8. Esther 1-2
9. Exodus 1:15
10. 1 Samuel 14:49; 18:17-19

Give Up? Double check your answers on page 14.

—Judy Hensel, *Redeemer, Cheyenne, Wy*; From our "Ladies of Our Redeemer" from April 14, 1994

Food Section

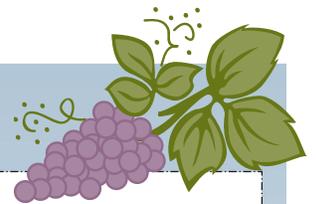
Now that the Christmas holidays have passed and we've partaken of all the special fellowship, worship, and food the season entails, many of us will focus on getting organized and making a few resolutions. In light of that, we'd like to devote this food page to eating in a healthy manner. Below, you'll find tasty and healthful dishes to enjoy. You won't miss fast food fries after trying the tasty Baked Fries. We're all pretty familiar with (and fond of!) that wonderful ramen salad. The Chinese Cabbage Salad recipe expands on that idea to make it more healthful and colorful. Also included are a few tips on how to lighten up some of your favorite recipes.

For the next issue, we'd like you to start thinking back to any favorite Easter memories you may have.

These could include any family traditions, favorite Bible verses, or childhood memories of celebrating Easter.

And, of course, continue sending those wonderful recipes to share with your fellow subscribers.

Please submit your memories and recipes to Gail Mackensen, gsmackensen@yahoo.com.



Delicious Dishes

Baked Fries

- 2 large baking potatoes
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper

Lightly spray 15" x 10" x 1" pan with nonstick cooking spray. Cut potatoes lengthwise into thin wedges. Place in a gallon-sized Ziploc bag. Spray wedges with cooking spray. Combine cheese, paprika, and pepper. Add to bag and shake well to coat potatoes. Arrange seasoned potatoes in a single layer on baking sheet. Bake at 425° for 30 minutes or until crisp and fork tender. Salt if desired.

—Lisa Lisak, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

***"Health and good humor
are to the human body
like sunshine to
vegetation."***

—Jean Baptiste Massillon, 1663-1742

Chinese Cabbage Salad

- 3/4 head small cabbage
- 2/3 cups leafy romaine lettuce
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 1-2 cups chopped broccoli
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes (opt.)
- 1 bunch scallions, green part only, chopped
- 1/2 cup sunflower seeds
- 1/2 cup almond slivers
- 2 packages Ramen noodles
- 1 package Ramen chicken seasoning
- 2 T. butter
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 2-3 T. soy sauce

Slice cabbage & lettuce. Chop spinach into bite-sized pieces. Halve cherry tomatoes. Mix oil, honey, vinegar, and soy sauce into container and blend well. Brown ramen noodles in butter. Mix vegetables and noodles into large bowl. Add seeds and nuts. Add dressing and mix well. Serve within 1 hour. If preparing in advance, reserve nuts and noodles till just before serving time.

—Originated by Jeannie Hoffman, Grace, Valentine, NE; Submitted by Ruth Ahrens, Grace, Valentine, NE

Healthful Cooking Tips

I use Bob's Red Mill Whole Wheat Pastry Flour in place of all purpose white flour in recipes at a 1:1 ratio. It's lighter than regular whole wheat and contains more fiber than all-purpose flour: 4g per 1/4 cup.

—Ruth Ahrens, Grace, Valentine, NE

I use soy crumbles in place of half of the ground beef or turkey in chili, spaghetti sauce, and Mexican dishes calling for ground beef. It doesn't need to be browned or cooked. Just add near the end of your cooking time to heat it thoroughly. You will greatly reduce the fat and calories in your recipe. This product can usually be found near the organic produce in most grocery stores.

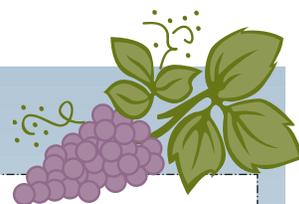
Substitute plain low-fat yogurt for half the sour cream called for in recipes. You won't be able to tell the difference.

—Gail Mackensen, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

In cake recipes, try substituting an equal amount of applesauce for 1/2 the butter or oil called for in a recipe. The result is a very moist cake with much less fat and fewer calories.

—Carol Sandeen, St. Paul, Lakewood, CO

Delicious Dishes



Vegetable Beef Soup

1 1/2 lbs. ground beef or turkey	1 medium onion, chopped
3 tsp. salt	2 bay leaves
1/4 tsp. marjoram	1/2 tsp. thyme
8 cups water & 3 chicken boullion cubes or 2 qts. Chicken broth	
1/2 tsp. each, ground nutmeg and ground mustard	
1 tsp. whole peppercorns & 3 whole cloves tied in cheesecloth sachet (to be removed later)	

Saute onion in 1 Tbsp. olive oil until soft. Add beef or turkey and brown well. Add remaining ingredients. Mix well and simmer for 2 hours. Then add:

3/4 cup medium barley	3–4 large carrots, cubed
2–3 cups frozen green beans	2 chopped tomatoes or 1 cup sliced okra (optional)
1 can corn or 1 1/2 cups frozen corn	2 cans tomato soup (undiluted)
2 tsp. basil	1 tsp. Italian seasoning
1 tsp. sugar	1/2 tsp. baking soda

Simmer 1 hour and taste for salt. Remove clove and peppercorn sachet. Good with parmesan cheese shaved on top.

—Deb Schmidt, Peace thru Christ, Middleton, WI;
This soup has a long list of ingredients, but it is worth the effort and freezes well. Start preparations earlier in the day.

Body Worlds: Insight Into Creation

Editor's Note: *There is a controversial exhibit called "Body Worlds" that our author attended recently. She, as many have, "found Body Worlds to be a good reminder of God's creation." Please be forewarned that this article, in discussing the exhibit, describes what many have found a gruesome use for the deceased humans who had donated their bodies to scientific study prior to death. This article is not recommended for more sensitive readers. Though the author recommends the exhibit to "anyone," I personally caution that parents should research into and consider the graphic nature of Body Worlds before attending it with children. A good place to start is the website: www.bodyworlds.com.*

My body is constantly working, even if I'm not consciously thinking about it. I sit here at the keyboard and fluidly type. My brain sends rapid-fire messages to my fingers. But do I ever think about how many muscles and tendons and transmitters are involved? Do any of us?

Later today I'll go for a walk, and then come back home to work. I'll eat lunch and supper and probably relax tonight by watching television. Then I'll go to bed, all the while my heart will be pumping and lungs expanding and contracting to make sure my body stays full of life. And will I stop to think about this remarkable process? Before July, my answer would have been "no." But since I attended the Body Worlds exhibit at the Science Museum of Minnesota, I'm more aware of my body and the great gift from God that it is.

Body Worlds was created by Gunther von Hagens, a German doctor. He uses a process called plastination to preserve bodies, essentially halting decomposition. The result is a display of human bodies in ways never seen before. Von Hagens and his employees pose the bodies in a variety of ways. Some of the bodies showcase the musculature, while others feature the circulatory system, organs, bones, the brain, and more.

One display, titled "Running Man," especially piqued my interest. I enjoy running, and as I pound the pavement, I often give thanks to God that every part of my body works in synchronization. I'm grateful for the ability to do something that keeps me healthy and in good spirits. In the "Running Man," muscles are displayed in a way that allows observers to see all muscles in the arms and legs. Who would think more than a dozen muscles attach to the ankle and wrist? I realized how complicated the act of running is. Yet God put all the pieces together in a masterful, all-knowing way.

Going through the exhibit, it occurred to me how hard it is to believe that our bodies could be created by "accident," as some evolutionists would have us believe. How could every part of our systems—our muscles, our infinitely complicated vascular system, our digestion, our organs, our skin—come together in a random way to work perfectly? Every part of our body has a purpose.

I also saw the many ways in which our bodies are designed for protection. The larger organs are located under the ribs. And if one part of the body starts to fail, another part can take up the slack. For example, we have two kidneys and also have several valves in our hearts. If one starts to give out, it doesn't necessarily spell doom. Our skin is flexible and porous, yet it manages to keep out germs. How can that be an accident? Only one with infinite wisdom could put something like our bodies together.

As the exhibit deals with human bodies, you can imagine that controversy follows von Hagens wherever he goes. While some admire his effort at education, others decry his use of bodies in this manner. Von Hagens says that all bodies come to him through a donation process; indeed, if you go through the Body Worlds exhibit you can take a donation form. So far, all accounts reveal that American audiences have been more receptive to Body Worlds than audiences in Europe. Churches seem to be receptive to the exhibit and in some cases have even helped to create educational components that are used in conjunction with the exhibit. At Immanuel in Mankato, a trip to Body Worlds was organized in mid-November. Pastor Wayne Eichstadt says he heard the exhibit shows the human body in a dramatic and real-life way.

Continued on next page

Body Worlds—Continued

“There are so many ways in which that truth is evident all around us and in us, but to see it so vividly and in ways that most of us have never seen before, really makes it a unique opportunity. After all, it’s not every day we can see the internal marvels of the human body,” he says.

Pastor Eichstadt also reminded me of verses from Psalm 139:13–16:

**“Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother’s womb.
I thank you, High God—you’re breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
I worship in adoration—what a creation!
You know me inside and out,
you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
before I’d even lived one day.” (The Message)**

The Science Museum of Minnesota show ended in early December, but shows are coming up in Dallas, Chicago, and Phoenix. I found Body Worlds to be a good reminder of God’s creation and recommend the exhibit to anyone.

—Rachael Hanel, Immanuel, Mankato, MN

**Intricate, perfect
Tiny and white
Snowflakes
On my hand
On my mitten
Tonight**

**Streaming from darkness
That stretches above
Fluttering
Floating
Falling
Onto my glove**

**Exquisite, but lonely
Captured by light
Angels’ song
Shining star
Gift from heaven
Tonight**

—Katie Sumey, Faith, St. Louis, MO

Dealing with Isolation

Isolated? What does that mean?
To be separated from others; to be alone.

We all know people who are isolated, and probably even more people who *feel* isolated for one reason or another. You have probably had feelings of isolation yourself. Maybe you feel that way right now. We don’t have to be alone to feel isolated. The circumstances of isolation can be varied.

Did the people of God ever feel isolated? Think back to all the different stories we learned about the Old Testament believers... we can probably all think of several who might have experienced feelings of isolation.

Nothing happens in this world that God doesn’t have control over. Nothing happens to any of us that He doesn’t know about. Then, we may ask, why does God allow us to have these feelings of isolation? God uses our loneliness and isolation to bring us closer to Him.

Look for an in-depth article expounding upon these thoughts and more in the upcoming April 2007 issue. These paragraphs have been excerpted from Gloria Hanson’s speech at the Chadron Women’s Retreat West, 2006.

What is one thing that you wish you would have talked to your mom about but didn't feel as though you could? Or, What do you talk to your Mom about?

What do I talk to my Mom about you ask? What don't I talk to her about is the real question. I don't have any sisters, and I think that is the reason I'm so close to my mom. Most teenagers can't talk to their moms about boys and sex and things like that. I've been blessed with a good relationship with her in which I can discuss these types of things. When we had the sex talk, she checked out books from the library to help explain. I really appreciated that. She also told me that if I had any questions, to come to her because she wanted me to hear the truth from her. I'm really thankful that I can share or ask anything of her. It makes us so much closer. I feel badly for the people who can't talk the way my mom and I do. I just hope that one day I can be half the mom she is.

—Katie Bischoff, 16, Gethsemane, Spokane Valley, WA

What do I talk to my mom about? Well, first I have to say that during grade school I didn't really talk to my mom that much. But now that I'm in high school I've really realized how important a "mother-daughter" relationship is. I know that my mom is always going to be there for me. No matter what problem I'm having or what question I have, I know she will give me the answer that will benefit me the most. High school definitely has its ups and downs, which I'm sure you all are aware of, and I am thankful that the Lord has blessed me with such a great mom that I know I can always turn to her.

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

Starting off, I want to make it clear that I love my mother, and we have an amazing relationship—a relationship which I only pray I have with my own children. I respect her for the amazing woman she is and I strive to be the outstanding Christian role model she has always been. I have always felt this way, but to this day—I think because of the level of esteem I have for her—I still don't talk to my mother about everything I should. Notice, I didn't say "can't" talk to my mother, I just don't talk to my mother about the trials I am facing. Sure, I know she is always there for me if I need someone, but to be quite honest, I like to keep things inside where she can't see them. I should open up to her, I know I should, but there are a lot of things I don't want her to know. Part of me feels as though if she did know everything that went on inside of my head and behind closed doors, she would be disappointed in me. Its almost as if I keep tally marks in my head—everything I do wrong, whether it is gossiping behind people's backs, getting too physical in a relationship, or even speeding on my way to school gets added to the list of "Reasons Why I Can Never Live Up to My Mom." It's strange... I can accept the forgiveness I receive through the grace of Christ, but its hard for me to imagine my mother being able to forgive me of the stupidity I have practiced religiously throughout the majority of my life up to this point. To the moms out there reading this article, I urge you everyday to share with your children your own faults as well as theirs. Tell them what mistakes you have made or about a moment when your judgment faltered—give them specific examples. But don't forget the best part—remind them of the net that was thrown over your sins. Tell them how that net captured each sin one by one, until they were locked away forever. Remind them of the power of their Savior—the same power which saves both mothers and daughters with the same redemption.

—Anonymous



Encouragements

**“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for
and certain of what we do not see.”**

—Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Several years ago, I read a book called “The Ark on Ararat.” It was interesting, filled with stories passed down for generations from the native people that live at the base of Mount Ararat. It included stories of little boys going on quests with their fathers and grandfathers to a very large wooden ark high up on the mountain. They believe that the ark on that mountain is Noah’s ark. I would say that it is a very good possibility. However, I do not think that it will ever be found by scientists. One part of the book I found especially ironic is that whenever a team of scientists planned to go in search of it, the weather would not cooperate—or the snow and ice was too thick on the mountain for it to be seen. The Shroud of Tourin, and several other “mysteries,” are similar in that it is difficult to prove that they are authentic.

In Biblical times, great miracles were seen by many. God gave them grand, obvious signs that He was all powerful, and in charge. How many of us have seen the sea parted? Ate manna for breakfast lately? During Jesus’ time, He was known far and wide for His miracles, and still there were unbelievers among those who had direct contact with Him. We Christians have been given a precious gift in our Faith. We don’t need to see the ark to know that it really did happen and that God spared Noah and his family. We don’t need the Shroud of Tourin to be “real” in order to believe that Jesus truly died and rose again. In fact, we are called to lean on the faith that has been given to us, and not need signs. “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, NIV). There will never be enough signs to convince the doubters, simply because it is not by signs that we believe. I think God deliberately hides the obvious and strengthens our faith and spiritual muscles with more subtle and sometimes nearly imperceptible things. He has shown me miracles within my own life, yet they have all been things that one who does not believe could call coincidence or luck. I know better, and yet sometimes I do not realize it as a sign of God’s working in my life until I look back from a later date.

I think it would be difficult to describe to an unbeliever *why* I believe—what my reason is. I just know that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, I do. I am sure of Heaven, of my salvation through Jesus Christ, and of His love for me. I don’t need to see a wooden ark, or the Holy Grail, or slivers from the cross of Christ—however awesome they would be. God be with all of you!

—Julie Schopp, St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD; Julie has recently launched a website for her Encouragements. Visit the site at: www.encouragements-byjulie.com. Email Julie at: encouragements@sdplainswb.com.

About Those Wise Men

**We really are not positive
About ancient wise men
Who came to worship their new King
How many came, and when.**

**They found the house—no problem there—
Herod’s scribes name the town,
Bethlehem, which Micah had foretold—
Besides, the star shone down.**

**Their gifts were precious, there’s no doubt,
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh,
And for each one a use was found,
Gifts for the Child and her.**

**But they would never know the rage
And hatred of the king.
On Bethlehem’s hills voices were stilled
Which never learned to sing.**

—Ruth Sydow, *Messiah, Eau Claire, WI*

Leaving Home

Every year our family plans our summer vacation. Everyone chooses a destination. We discuss the feasibility of traveling to each location and make our choice. After that, time is spent determining the best route and making hotel reservations for overnight stays.

Similar planning has gone into other “trips” that have been taken. Since our children were small, they have participated in devotions, learned hymns, been in Sunday School, Christian Day School, and Confirmation. Each of these helped lay the foundation for their future. On a regular basis, trips were made to the Immanuel Lutheran College campus in Eau Claire. The purpose was to familiarize them with the surroundings that would be their home during their high school years.

No matter how hard we tried, there was no way that my husband and I could prepare Nathan for every aspect of his life at ILC. We couldn’t be there on a daily basis to help him adjust to dorm life, class schedules, teachers, new friends, or home sickness. At home, the road was difficult, too. None of us were ready for the emptiness that was felt in our home when he moved or the changes that came as a result.

Since then, we have traveled down that road twice more. Brittany went to ILC two years later, and Christopher two years after that. They had each had the opportunity of being the “oldest” child at home, had more responsibilities, more trips to ILC, were more familiar with the campus, and had established friendships with people who would be fellow students.

Throughout all of the examples cited above, we had the opportunity to plan routes and the destinations of our journey. Remember Abraham? When he was 75 years old, the Lord told him it was time to leave his father’s house, his relatives, and his country—all that was familiar to him—and travel to the land of Canaan. God promised Abraham and Sarah a child, despite their age. He promised to make Abraham a great nation. And best of all, the Lord promised that the Savior would come from Abraham’s family. Abraham walked by faith, not by sight. The Lord guided every step of his trip, brought him safely to his destination, and kept every promise.

Oftentimes, we, in our sinful nature, think that we are in control of our daily lives and our destinations. Despite that sinfulness, the Lord graciously blesses our every effort. He knows our joys and sorrows, our fears and frustrations, and our successes and failures. He guides our steps and brings us through each day.

As we continue through our earthly journey, may we be ever mindful of our ultimate destination—heaven. Our Savior Jesus has cleared the path for us by leading a perfect life, suffering and dying for our sins, rising from the dead, and ascending to heaven to prepare a place for us. Walk by faith, not by sight, knowing that you will spend eternity with Him!

“A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.”

—Proverbs 16:9

—Jan Voit, St. John’s, Okabena, MN

Bible Search Answers

1. Drusilla and Bernice
2. Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem)
3. Athaliah
4. Pilate’s wife
5. Tabitha and Dorcas
6. Mary Magdela
7. Rizpah
8. Queen Vashti
9. Shiphrah and Puah
10. Merab

Feeding Our Faith

As we jump into 2007, it is common that we make resolutions for the year ahead. Let us all make an important resolution to spend more time learning from and communicating with our LORD! Use the Prayer List as a bookmark in your Bible, to remind you of the many things that we can take to our Father. Cut out the passages below and place them in strategic spots around the house, as suggested in October's article!

—Alana Ahrens, Faith, St. Louis, MO

Prayer List

Thanks

- His Love and Mercy
- His Word
- Community
- Congregation/Synod
- Music
- Nature
- Time

Ask

- Closer Relationship with Him
- Opportunity to Share the Gospel
- That He is Always #1 in All We Do, Think, Say...
- Challenges
- Support / Guidance
- Wisdom
- Strength

People

- Fellow CLC Congregations
- Pastors
- Elders
- Government/Community Officials
- President
- Homeless
- Enemies of His Work



“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

—Romans 8:38-39

“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

“The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

—Exodus 14:14

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened,
That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy,
That it cannot hear.”

—Isaiah 59:1

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.”

—Proverbs 3:5-6

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.”

—Philippians 4:8

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish
but have everlasting life.

—John 3:16



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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

***“While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease.”***

—Genesis 8:22



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