

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM - Divine Service 10:30 AM

Responses to the Pandemic, the Lockdowns, and More

The following articles were written by me and published in the April-May and June-July 2020 Te Deum. I am republishing them because I think I was spot on in them. I will add one thought I think I shared with a Bible class. I know this is not the crisis news media have attempted to make it, because of our response. When people go through a crisis they are traumatized, and Christians when coming out of them quite freely thank the grace of God for delivering them. This is not happening from what I hear even from myself. I new two brothers from a German-speaking home who fought in WW II against the Germans. I can't remember if they were drafted or not. These men were brusque country men. They would say some blunt things. When they got to telling stories about their experience – and many of them were harrowing – and someone would blurt out: "How did you ever make it home from that?" Both men, I heard them do this separately, did and said the exact same thing. A faraway look stole into their eyes, and they looked away, and said, "Only by the grace of God" in a softer voice. When my wife got Covid and I did not. I didn't have symptoms, so I didn't take a test. People would remark that because I walk so much I get plenty of Vitamin D. I walk at night Cheryl walks in the day. Or, I am in good shape. Or, I drink Kefir everyday. On and on the explanations were offered. Truth be told but for the grace of God go I whether it be Covid, or colds, or cancer. And get this, even if it goes the other way like it did for St. Paul and his thorn in the flesh, the proper response is still: thanks be to the grace of God.

What's More Dangerous Than A Pandemic Virus?

(Reprinted from April/May 2020)

A viral panic. It's in the Bible: Deuteronomy 20:8, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too." One fleeing soldier can lead to a whole line fleeing. It has happened many times. Going about our normal lives we would be much less susceptible to this sort of "contagious fear", but government restrictions make that difficult. A few things to remember.

It is disconcerting but not surprising that our government doesn't consider church to be essential service. What about all those who claim to be Christians and even church

members but don't consider it essential to attend service when there are no quarantines or lockdowns preventing them?

Since the First Gulf War, I've advised women with husbands, finances, or boyfriends, to not watch, read, or

listen to news about the war. It can't help but trouble you. This is true today. These reports seemed designed to gin up fear in us, but that is the way of news according to the old adage. Dog bites man is not news; man bites dog is, and if it bleeds, it leads. Knowing this, check out one source daily. I don't say this by command of the Lord. I'm just saying if you can't handle the news – I know I can't – you don't have to. You have One who never sleeps watching it and you.

"There is no fear of God before the eyes of the ungodly." That's what David says in Psalm 36:1; Paul quotes this in Romans 3:18. Fallen man has this sense that he ought to be afraid but since he does not fear God, he casts about for something to fear. Climate change, unhealthy foods, tobacco, and now COVID-19 are all acceptable substitutes, so unfallen man fears these with a religious fervor. Well, this ain't us. The fear of God is before our eyes. Remember we are the one whose "national anthem" is based on Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ... Therefore, will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. ... Be still, and know that I am God:". Read Luke 12. Jesus says if you want to talk about who to fear, God is the only proper subject not man, not disease, not devil. Then He says, "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Jesus basically says, "Fear only God," and then He says, "Don't be afraid."

Also, know that the people of God have more to 'fear' from good times than they do 'bad.' Luther, and I believe he's just quoting a run of the mill German proverb, says, "You need strong legs to stand up in good times." I've found this to be true. The vine climbing the tree that is exposed to the strongest winds clings closest to the trunk. Self-imposed afflictions like monks or zealots use are of no help. Those from God are meet, right, and salutary. As we pray in one of our Collects, they are used by God to "enable us to so pass through things temporal that we lose not things eternal."

Finally, after a hurricane came through doing what I thought was minor damage, I gave a prayer of thanks in my Louisiana congregation. The president told me after service that a large tree had come down on his house doing tens of

thousands of dollars in damage. There will be some now who suffer more than others. This too is not in our hands. Who would want it? The One who sends the rain and sun on the just and unjust knows how much for each serves His loving purposes.

I Repent

(Reprinted from June/July 2020)

I repent all those Sundays I didn't look forward to gathering with God's people. I repent of all those times I did something else or nothing else rather than attend Divine Service. I repent of thinking the assembling of ourselves was a burden (Hebrews 10:25). I repent of not making it my custom (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2) to be in the Lord's House each service day. I repent of taking it for granted that I could decide whenever I wanted to go to hear God's Word and receive His Sacrament. I repent of thinking I was a member of the Body of Christ when in reality I was deciding each Sunday whether or not I actually was. [More on this in another newsletter.]

But can you believe it? Can you believe the Government is telling me in what numbers I can go to church? Can you believe they are telling me how many there can be in this building? Why this is governmental overreach! This is one step away from jackbooted stormtroopers goose-stepping me off to concentration camps! No, this is how it has always been. Trinity has a maximum capacity assigned by the government – as do all buildings where the public gathers – which it cannot exceed. That's called the Maximum Occupancy. You see it posted in bars, theaters, auditoriums. The fire department could post ours. Anytime we exceeded our sanctuary Maximum Capacity, which is 225, be it at a wedding, funeral, or the holiest of all Divine Services, the Holy Communion, the government could come in and stop us under the fire code.

The public health code is not as specific. The government has broad, ill-defined powers when it comes to public health. It has determined that riding in a two-ton motor vehicle everyone must wear a seatbelt for protection, but if you want to ride a 400-pound motorcycle without a helmet have at it. They make you put your children in safety seats that look like the inside of a NASCAR and in helmets when they ride bikes on the street in front of your house. You want to work in a restaurant? You are going to be screened for TB. Not HIV mind you which is more contagious. The government requires you to buy lawnmowers that have automatic cut-off switches; to install in your home ground fault circuit interrupters within 6 feet of water. The government has limits as to how many layers of roofing you may have, the depth of tread on your tires, and the condition of your windshield wipers all in the name of public safety.

Government is always portrayed as some type of monstrous beast in Scripture. Read Daniel and Revelation. Yet, Paul maintains Christians be subject to the governing

authorities and that there is no authority except that which God has established (Romans 13:1-2). And if you think our government is bad, read about Rome's during the time Paul is telling the Romans they must submit to it. Can a government use a pandemic, or spookier still the 'threat' of one, as an excuse to overreach and even intrude on the church? Of course. The governor who mandated that only individually sealed bread and grape juice containers could be used to celebrate 'Holy Communion' is an example. We certainly couldn't do that for it would change our Lord's instituting His Meal with wine not grape juice. I have an even more difficult question of casuistry for you (Go ahead I'll give you time to Google casuistry).In the First Gulf War the military issued us chaplains field chaplain kits complete with paraments, sacred vessels, a missal, candle, unleavened bread, and *powdered* wine. The later was because Saudi Arabia wouldn't allow wine in their country. What did I do? I never got orders to go. What should I have done?

Twelve years ago, I regularly listened to the homily of the Mass at the Austin Catholic diocese. One day the priest speaking mentioned he had been in the ministry 25 years. That caught my ear because I was in my 25th year as well. He said, "You know when I first became a priest 25 years ago, I thought the majority of people would come to me wanting to know what the Bible said about this or that. It turns out that the majority come to me telling me what they think the Bible says and expect me to agree with them." That has been my experience too, and the more turbulent the issue, the more uncertain the situation, the more this happens. People come to you telling you what has to be done where and when based on their view of God's Word and/or your office. They seem to be unaware that even the pastor of a small church like ours has literally dozens of people with varying situations, fears, facts, questions, and consciences (hence the need to look up the word 'casuistry'). The Words of God certainly apply to all of them. One of us has been called and ordained to feed not just the Lord's sheep, but His lambs, and old goats too. That's me, not you. One of us is going to have to give an account for each one of your souls; again that's me, not you.

Throughout this 'crisis', whether real or manmade, a cartoon from 30 plus years ago keeps coming to mind. A mom, dad, and son are at the dinner table. The newspaper the man is holding has the headline "Prayer Banned in School." The father pounds the table saying, "My son has a right to pray to God in school." The balloon over the boy's head says, "Who's God?" I think there are bigger and more fundamental issues attacking the Church in our day than how many people can gather at a time. Things like the government reaching into the womb and into marriage. These issues are so generally accepted as to be passé, as they were in Sodom, Gomorrah, and Gibeah.

Finally, once things are normalized, I will thank our Lord Jesus that the only one who can limit my ability to study, to hear God's Word, and to receive His Sacrament is

me. And so, as I began, I end: I repent of my poor stewardship of His precious gifts.

Sermon by Dr. Nagel, Concordia Seminary Professor, 1984-2006 The Kingdom of the Left and The King

(This 1990 sermon was sent to me by a brother pastor. I titled it after reading it. Folks have been asking, 'sharing, opining on the kingdom of the left these days. This is a better answer than any I have given. Prh)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the traditional Epistle for Trinity Sunday, and it furnishes now the Gradual for the middle third of the season, and so for most of our fall quarter, our studying theology, "What we can say about God." Our time locatedness in the Church Year is risky to come unstuck from. Without locatedness, we may float off into talking about "timeless ideas" and "abstract inscrutabilities."

Our Old Testament lesson is specifically time-located. It tells of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and His promises to them. We heard of Moses' assessment of how the Lord was handling things: "Why hast thou done evil to this people?" Things were not working out the way Moses had figured out that they should. Paul wrestled with the same problem in Romans 9-11, where the final section begins, "Lest you be wise in your own conceits." And ends with the doxology, our mid-Pentecost season Gradual. The Gradual for the first part of the season spoke of the Lord's wonderful works and of His great deeds. We know of them because He put His words to them. Our Gradual now speaks of His judgments and His ways, His paths. They all happened at a certain time and a certain place. The previous Gradual spoke of what "no man can fathom." Our Gradual now speaks of "unsearchable and beyond tracing out." So, as we heed these Graduals, we will not try to do that.

"Leave that to Me," says the Lord to Moses, to Paul, to you, and to me.

There is an unbelieving way of saying, "Okay, Lord. You're the boss." "Nothing to do but knuckle under." "If you can't fight City Hall, there's not much chance of fighting God," by whatever name He might be called. The Large Catechism speaks of Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, and Mammon. Power, War, Sex, Money. Whatever it is that shapes and shoves our lives around, there's nothing to do but accept it.

Resignation is the final stage for Goethe's *Faust*, for Horatio Nelson, Islamic Kismet. Fatalism accepts what comes. "That's the way the cookie crumbles." Fatalism can be confessed cowardly, heroically, or religiously. How pious it sounds to "bow before the inscrutability of the gods."

"Presume not God to scan" (Alexander Pope). The gods can make or break us, so best, "Go with the flow."

Sophocles has Hercules in the agony of his death say to his son, "You see how little compassion the gods have shown in all that's happened, and there is nothing here that is not Zeus."

No man can withstand the power of the gods; whoever attempts it, is destroyed.

Strong on fatalism were the Stoics. They thought of the gods, forces or powers, all within nature. Much like the dominant religion nowadays confessed by the media—Mother Nature controls the weather, and the animals. Their behavior is clue to our own, and to accept the way of nature is the way of nature. The sin that destroys is to upset the balance of Nature.

The beneficence of nature was confessed by Marcus Aurelius with words derived from the Stoics. They talked a lot about "Providence." To Nature, *physis*, outside of which nothing exists, Marcus Aurelius says, "From you are all things; in you are all things; and to you are all things." Does the Apostle do other, or better, than that? What do we need the Apostle for if we can get it from the Noble Heathen, Marcus Aurelius?

In contradiction to the foregoing, the attempt to read the gods out of what goes on around or within us—and so, man's fate—against all that, the Apostle turns his back. "Lest you be wise in your own conceits." He had not been philosophizing with ideas, concepts, insights, and fatalistic pieties. He faced what happened to Jesus, born of the history and promises to Israel, of which there could be no greater contradiction than the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. For facing that, there is no other recourse than the Lord God Himself, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who brought His people up out of the bondage of Egypt and gave them the piece of land, according to His promise.

Was it their land, or was it "the land that the Lord gave according to the promise?" The Lord won't let them have it other than as a gift. Otherwise, as the Apostle says, "Grace would no longer be grace." Not grace, then not the Lord.

Man's referencing things to himself to show how the Lord must treat him, the Apostle calls "the way of works." That has been demolished in Romans chapters 1-3, and then 3:21—"But now the righteousness of God has been manifest; all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

"So you Gentiles, don't you imagine that you can work God as some of them tried, and failed." Grace is the only option with the Lord. As grace, as gift, it is rejectable, and the alternative is the reward of works, which is then unrejectable.

For the Lord to give up on going at it all in the way of grace would be for Him to give up on being the God He is. Even the stunning fact of Jesus' rejection by so many of Israel is turned by Him as occasion of grace to the Gentiles.

Those who are His are His only by grace, by mercy; only thus are all of them—all Israel—saved. How come you are saved? There is no other answer for anyone than, “By grace alone.” How come there’s grace? “By the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” Calvary is Fact #1. Every other fact is a smaller one than that, and every other fact is graced for us by connection with That Fact.

We get disconnected from That by supposing That was not enough. The problem does not lie in the fact that we cannot figure God out, but in our unwillingness to let Him be such a Savior. So we’ll give Him some help in pulling it all off. Fill in the blanks. Give explanations. Or at least attempt some excuses for Him. Then we talk as if He might have got the idea from us, what our text calls, “Being His counselor.”

There is here a temptation to which the clergy are particularly prone. We are called and ordained to speak His words in His place, and are much tempted to put in a few of our own, without making clear the difference. Without His telling us, we have figured out His problems for Him and then dished that out to His people. And this can come off as faithless fatalism. “You can’t change it.” “Must accept it.” “Could’ve been worse.” “He had a good life.” “We all got to go sooner or later.” People expect us to explain God and we are only too ready to oblige with pious, fatalistic fatuities.

Or, we attempt to do it on the grand scale and identify what it is that God is doing in history. *Deus Vult*, slay the infidels. The armies that go at the likes of Saddam Hussein must have God on their side, whatever names the gods may have: Jupiter, Mars, Power, War, Oil. Democracy and Freedom do, in this morning’s *Doodlesbury*, do not fit in very well; but then with idols, you always need to have a few in reserve.

Dorothy Sayers has somebody say in one of her plays, “It is one thing to speak of the finger of God in history, and quite another to say which way it is pointing.” Or Swann and Flanders, “If God had wanted us to fly, He would not have given us the railways.”¹

When clergy depart their office to make pronouncements in the kingdom of the left hand, they usually make great asses of themselves. But then, how else better to get into the media? St. Media, the invocation of whom clears the way for all sorts of tosh.

We can say no more of God than He has given us to say. The repentance and faith—repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in His name in all nations, beginning from Jerusalem—that is where it happened, under Pontius Pilate.

What is really inscrutable about God is not that He is inscrutable, but that He should regard you—you so often eager to be rid of Him—you to be worth bothering about. If you can swallow that, you can give up on inscrutabilities. The One in whose hands your life is held, is the One who went through Calvary for you.

Everything you receive as a gift from His hand, He blesses you with, beyond with what you can figure out and beyond the limits of your own conceits. And so, we give up

talking as if we were His counselor, and as if we did something that put Him in our debt. We are completely at His mercy, and He turns out to be merciful beyond anything we could ask or think. That is “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.”

“For there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we live, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). “Through”, *dia*, He is the one who is doing it with us. And this is not just some pleasant thought floating around that might make us feel good; it’s from Calvary. That was all His doing, and ours only as gift. Thus gifted we are then into the life of faith, of receiving everything as gift from His hands, and so, as blessing: this morning’s breakfast, this day’s specifics, and our last day. The things we can’t figure out, what we cannot recognize as for our good, we know that He knows what is for our good better than we can figure out, for He went to Calvary for us.

When we are battered down and everything contradicts that God cares, Luther speaks of “crawling to Calvary.” It is from there that we can swing into the doxology of our Gradual [Romans 11:33, 36] on this day, at Concordia Seminary, Thursday of Pentecost 14. Amen.

The Slow Train (Flanders and Swann) In the preamble to live performance, Michael Flanders used to say "if God had meant us to fly, he would never have given us the railways" <http://www.rodge.force9.co.uk/faq/arts.html> Date cited: 28 February 2008

From Fox News - Thousands of churches raise alarm about scope of new Canadian 'conversion therapy' ban

The above was the title of an email recently sent to me. Here is my response below. If you attend Bible Class, and the sender of this email does, you've heard my answer to this many, many times.

Well, most Christian churches, including Lutheran and Confessional ones, needed no law to stop them from preaching first about divorce, then about abortion, then about living together, then about homosexuality, then about gay marriage, and finally about transgenderism. They were silent all by themselves. In all these issues, the Reformed approach is wrong and is not helpful. On all these matters we don't expect the government to do what is Biblically correct but what Natural Law says; to recognize there is a higher law that must norm laws men make up. Without this concept, the Nuremberg war criminals couldn't have been prosecuted because they were following the laws of their government at the time.

Luther said a people get the government they deserve. Our silence, our being co-opted in all these matters by friends, neighbors, and relatives and our own sinfulness in these things are now reaping what we have sowed.

Here are the two flashpoints: As I said in the case of the Colorado cake people, what shut their business was not homosexuals, but the former customers who didn't want to cross the protests. This is what will happen here. When Stop Patriarchy Now, an Austin group finally finds my website, or, one of the many LGBTQ groups find one of my newsletter articles or sermons on the above topics. they will be outside picketing. I have witnessed how men in particular actually cower in the face of a shrill, screaming woman. You watch how many choose confessing over staying away.

The second flash point is going to be lit by guys like John MacArthur. In the First Gulf War, the active Army chaplains preached our certain victory in this religious crusade for Christianity. That was no different than the Imam's preaching jihad or their holy war. The truth is all of God's enemies were defeated on the cross. The truth is, men can start war, famine, pestilence, and anarchy, but they can stop none of them. Enflaming people religiously will lead to anarchy.

In many ways, this is exactly how the Reform deal with prayer in public schools. They want it. Confessional Lutherans never have. We don't want the State in charge of praying. If we argue the above issues on Biblical grounds with those who do not recognize the Bible as an authority, they will haul out their holy books - there is after all a Church of Satan, the Metropolitan Church, and Liberal churches - who will have their sources saying we're wrong.

So we will continue to hold those in Christ to the only rule and authority, Holy Scripture and preach and teach accordingly. We will tell civil authorities that going against Natural Law is neither safe nor wise. The one thing we won't do is stop preaching the truth about these issues.

Blighted Thinking

February 2, 2022, <https://lutheransforlife.org/article/blighted-thinking/> by Rev. Paul R. Harris

(The genesis of this article was me asking the director of Lutheran's for Life to write an article about this. I waited 2 years. None was forthcoming. I emailed again and said I could almost write an article based on his email. He said, "Why don't you write it." I said, "Fine but you won't publish it as is." Well, he did, though it's only online. It didn't make the printed edition of LifeDates, their quarterly journal. Prh)

Killing the unborn isn't new. I am not talking about ancient societies that had potions and procedures for killing the unborn. I am not talking about the word translated "sorcery" in Galatians 5:20, *pharmakeia*, which was the word used for abortifacients in ancient Greek-speaking lands. (The clearest link between this word and abortion, *phthora*, is found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria: Christians do not "take away human nature, which is generated from the providence of God, by hastening abortions [*phthora*] and applying abortifacient drugs [*phthoriois pharmakeois*]."[1])

All this shows is that chemical abortions are not new but incredibly old. What is new is the way the medical community has blighted our thinking about the unborn.

Marvin Olasky in the article, "The Bones Cry Out," references a 1945 poem by Gwendolyn Brooks. In it the mother is painfully clear about what she has done and her pain: "I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children." [2]

Again, what is new are the mental gymnastics the medical community is willing to adopt to deny that the life growing in a mother from the moment of conception on is a person.

This thought did not come from me. It came from an OB-GYN connected to Christian Life Resources whom I wrote to ask about what many doctors call "blighted ovum." Here's one scenario: A woman has a positive pregnancy test and all the signs her body is giving her indicate she is pregnant, but her doctor tells her she is not and in fact never was. She has a blighted ovum. The woman is mourning the loss of a child, but her doctor is telling her she never had a child to begin with. This is because the medical community, at least the pro-abortion part, has blighted their thinking toward the unborn. First, by agreeing that the new definition of pregnancy is implantation. It is only a "fertilized egg" till then. Second, even if it does implant and begin to grow, it's not a baby growing there till they say so. "You silly woman, it's just a gestational sac. We'll let you know when it's a baby." I have had three cases of blighted ova in recent years. Each time the woman has called, thinking she is crazy. I assured them they were really pregnant, but truthfully the literature online is confusing.

Dr. Donna Harrison, who serves as executive director of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists, in an email to Rev. Michael Salemink, executive director of mission and ministry for Lutherans For Life, stated "blighted ovum" is in fact a medical term for early miscarriage. She strongly urged us to avoid the term "fertilized egg" as it does not refer to a scientific reality: at fertilization, the egg ceases to exist because an embryo begins to exist. She explains about blighted ova, "For some reason, of the thousands of things that have to happen during our lifetime to continue to live, some of those things didn't happen. So, the body of the embryo itself only grew to a certain point, and then died. However, the placenta kept growing. So, yes, they were pregnant. Yes, they do have a child who died, and it is appropriate to grieve that death."

"Blighted ovum" is one more example of how abortion brutalizes women even when they haven't had one. Another is when the miscarriages are recorded in medical records as "abortions." The pro-abortion people have succeeded in redefining terms to fit their agenda. But this new way, this "blighted ovum" way, of looking at pregnancy is contrary to the facts of biology and what a woman's own body tells her. That is bad enough, but to let her leave a clinic confused and feeling guilty for grieving a baby her doctor has just told her was no baby is hardly good medicine, and better not

be “the standard of care,” for it is most certainly devoid of caring.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 (NASB) says, “Just as you do not know the path of the wind, and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes everything.” Through meteorology we think we know the first. Through embryology, we think we know the second, which means we also think we do know the work of God. For some, that gives the “freedom” to say: “This is a baby; this isn’t. This baby lives; this baby dies.” That is blighted thinking.

[1]This is the way the word was used in early Christian literature outside the New Testament. For example, The Didache says, “You shall not make magic. You shall not practice *pharmakeia*. You shall not slay a child by abortions [*phthora*]...” It is revealing that *pharmakeia* is mentioned right before *phthora* which is the technical term for abortion in Greek. The fact the ban on *pharmakeia* comes right after magic makes little sense if *pharmakeia* is sorcery. It would forbid the same thing twice. *Pharmakeia* and *phthora* are two different things. *Pharmakeia* refers to the act of the abortionists. And *phthora* refers to the decision of the woman (Sommer, Carl. *We Look for a Kingdom*. Ignatius Press, 2007, pp. 314-15).[2] Olasky, Marvin. “The Bones Cry Out.” *WORLD*, God’s World Publications, Oct. 2, 2021. Vol. 36, No. 10, p.26.

Living in Fear of Dr. Seuss

Posted on [March 8, 2022](#) by [Rev. Paul R. Harris](#)

The other day my gastroenterologist called me up and asked me how my stomach was doing. About two weeks ago my GP called to check on me. The week before that I heard from my chiropractor and dentist. Can you believe that? Of course you can’t, because only salesmen make sales calls. Professionals don’t “reach out to you”; you do to them when you need them. Makes sense. Best use of their time, right? This is true for all the above but not pastors. For them the paradigm is upside-down.

In the first decade or so of my ministry, there was a move to correct this. You regularly came across newsletter articles like this: RECALL NOTICE: It has come to our attention that we shipped a defective pastor to you. He does not have the ability to read your mind. He does not know when you could use a call, a visit, a consultation with him. Return him to the factory, so we can fix him.

Why on earth, would members think the paradigm should be different for pastors than for doctors, lawyers, dentists, and even plumbers for that matter? It’s not this way among all Lutherans. Those coming out of a pietistic background have a lower view of the office. The pastor was expected to make the first move. Those with a higher view of the office held that a pastor should not go unless he is requested by the person needing care or if on their deathbed by a spouse or child. In fact, they viewed it as poor pastoral practice to visit without being asked to.

The LCMS, from a pietistic background, made the pastor responsible for making calls rather than the member who

needed the care. However, in 1855 it was decided that “making house calls the chief means of exercising pastoral care cannot be recognized by the Synod as the correct procedure” (*Moving Frontiers*, 245). But read the fine print. Within the resolution it said when it came to the pastor’s knowledge that you need a visit he was to go. Here the expectation of pastor as mind reader was born. The convention tried to temper this by going on to say that the proper setting for pastoral care is when the person comes to see the pastor to announce for communion or for private confession, i.e. when the person is there to ask for his care. Well, by the time I reached seminary (1979), those two things had disappeared from LCMS churches. For the most part, they’re still gone. So, there is no regularized event where sheep come to shepherds for care.

How do you think conversations go where either the pastor or a friend determines a person needs pastoral care? You know how. You have all experienced someone calling you on the phone and then acting like you’re the one who called them. I know when someone needs pastoral care, counsel, advice when they tell me. I can’t read minds, and I can’t go by yours because you can’t either. Furthermore, the only way you can convince someone that they need pastoral care is to preach the law to them. How would you like me to call you up and say: “Friend, you aren’t in Bible Class. Why are you spiritually dieting?” “Friend, I think you have need of my ministrations. How about we start with a general confession, or if you like a specific one, of your sins?”

So where’s the Dr. Seuss angle? In the most famous Dr. Seuss book not authored by him, *Are You My Mother?*, a baby bird having fallen from its nest wanders the countryside pathetically asking a kitten, a hen, a dog, a cow, a boat, a plane, and finally a steam shovel, “Are you my mother?” My fear is of becoming the pastor who wanders around pathetically asking, “Do you need my ministry?” If any of the professionals, I mentioned above did that, they would take a step down in most people’s eyes. So why would people want their pastor to do that? Hmmm.

Breathing

A 9-Part Advent-Lent Sermon Series on the 3rd Chief Part of Luther’s Small Catechism
The Lord’s Prayer

Our 2021 Vacation Catechetical School had the theme “Breathe,” which was a collaboration between myself and three volunteers. This sermon series is an extension of that. Both themes grew out of this line from the hymn *Prayer is the Soul’s Sincere Desire*: “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, the Christian’s native air,” (TLH 454:5). As usual, the Wednesday services start at 7:30 PM. With the exception of Ash Wednesday, you can be heading to the parking lot by 8:30.

Dec. 01	A Deep Breath	Introduction
Dec. 08	A Breath of Holiness	1 st Petition
Dec. 15	Guest Pastor	
Mar. 02	Breathed Into	2 nd Petition
Mar. 09	Controlling Breathing	3 rd Petition
Mar. 16	Breathhtaking	4 th Petition
Mar. 23	Holding Your Breath	5 th Petition
Mar. 30	Catching Your Breath	6 th Petition
Apr. 06	Breathe Your Last	7 th Petition

If it doesn't stem its decline, mainline Protestantism has just 23 Easters left

(This thought provoking article was shared we me recently. N.B. Now there are only 17 Easters left. Prh)

By Ed Stetzer, April 28, 2017

Christians recently celebrated Easter, a Sunday where many churches are robust and full. But, if current trends continue, mainline Protestantism has about 23 Easters left.

The news of mainline Protestantism's decline is hardly new. Yet the trend lines are showing a trajectory toward zero in both those who attend a mainline church regularly and those who identify with a mainline denomination 23 years from now.

While the sky isn't falling, the floor is dropping out.

The trajectory, which has been a discussion among researchers for years, is partly related to demographics. Mainline Protestants, which has been the tradition of several U.S. presidents, aren't "multiplying" with children as rapidly as evangelicals or others of differing faiths. And geography matters. Places where Protestants live are now in socio-economic decline, and parts of the country like the Sun Belt are becoming more evangelical with every passing winter.

Christianity faces sharp decline as Americans are becoming even less affiliated with religion

And as Episcopal researcher Kirk Hadaway explained in 1998, "nontraditional groups, including once-marginal Protestant churches, smaller sects and non-Western religions, have increased. At the same time, a growing number of people have shed their particular religious affiliations, saying they are just 'religious, spiritual' or have no religion at all."

But I think something deeper is going on.

The data of decline

Recently released data from the General Social Survey, sorted by what is called the RelTrad, shows that mainline Protestants are in the midst of a decades-long decline, and it has intensified in its most recent survey.

The top line shows mainline Protestant identification, and fewer say they go to churches affiliated with mainline denominations. The bottom line shows attendance, and now less than one of 33 people you meet on the street regularly attends a mainline Protestant church.

Both markers, self-identification and regular attendance, are imperfect, as are the GSS and the RelTrad, but these are among the most widely cited and trusted tool researchers use to measure religious trends. Those trend lines into the future gives us a glimpse of what could happen if patterns don't change.

If the data continues along the same pattern, mainline Protestants have an expiration date when both trend lines cross zero in 2039. If the trend line continues, they have 23 Easters left.

It's not the whole story, but here's an argument for at least part of what has happened. Over the past few decades, some mainline Protestants have abandoned central doctrines that were deemed "offensive" to the surrounding culture: Jesus literally died for our sins and rose from the dead, the view of the authority of the Bible, the need for personal conversion and more.

Some of mainline Protestants leaders rejected or minimized these beliefs — beliefs that made the "protest" in Protestantism 500 years ago — as an invitation for more people to join a more culturally relevant and socially acceptable church. But if the mainline Protestant expression isn't different enough from mainstream culture, people turn to other answers.

Why I think there's hope

I'm an evangelical (which, I assure you, has its own set of problems). However, I became a Christian in the (very mainline) Episcopal Church. I take no delight in mainline Protestantism's decline and am hoping and praying for a reversal. And I know many in the mainline Protestant tradition seek to follow Jesus and are working to change the trend line of decline.

And, ultimately, mainline Protestants likely do have many more than 23 Easters left. Churches will be restarted and revitalized and there will be advancement initiatives. Mainline Protestants won't cease to exist completely in 23 years because the trend will probably slow, but the data does not give us good hope for their future.

My personal hope is that mainline Protestantism will experience a resurrection of sorts, something Christians tend to have faith in. However, such a move won't come from following the trajectory it has been following.

The future of mainline Protestantism is connected to Christianity's essential past, where the resurrection can be proclaimed again unabashedly. Jesus is not just a good person who suffered unjustly. Jesus's death and resurrection makes our dead souls alive again.

Belief within the mainline

In the 1970s, Dean Kelly wrote an often-cited book on why conservative churches are growing, stating that even amid hostility toward organized religion, conservative churches seemed to grow.

Is part of the answer for mainline Protestantism to grow more conservative?

It depends on how you define “conservative.” For some, they hear a call to become Trump supporters, deny climate change science or support huge tax cuts. That’s not what I’m talking about.

But a recent study published in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, based upon a Canadian sample, goes into the theology of the mainline. As David Haskell explained in The Washington Post, “[W]e found 93 percent of clergy members and 83 percent of worshipers from growing churches agreed with the statement ‘Jesus rose from the dead with a real flesh-and-blood body leaving behind an empty tomb.’ This compared with 67 percent of worshipers and 56 percent of clergy members from declining churches.”

Of course, you can’t say, “Mainliners all believe this or that,” but the numbers above suggest a theological gap, even on something as basic as what Easter means, and that gap has both theological and statistical implications.

If mainline Protestantism has a future, it will need to engage more deeply with the past — not the past of an idealized 1950s, but one that is 2,000 years old. The early Christians saw a savior risen from the dead, heard a message that said he was the only way and read scriptures that teach truths out of step with culture, both then and now.

I imagine that many mainline Protestants would agree, and perhaps the supernatural message of Easter, believed and shared widely, could bring the resurrection that mainline Protestantism needs.

And 2039 is just not that far away.

Ed Stetzer holds the Billy Graham Distinguished Chair at Wheaton College and is the executive director of the Billy Graham Center there.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/28/if-it-doesnt-stem-its-decline-mainline-protestantism-has-just-23-easters-left/>

Es macht nichts.

Hi fellow worshipers,

It seems like there has been some confusion over when to stand for a doxology. I checked with Pastor and the organist and several of the elders to see what their opinions were of “how we do things.” Then I asked permission to write this article. It turns out that the answer is easy, but I’m going to get to it in the manner of Billy from Family Circus coming “straight home from school.” If you prefer, you can just skip to the last paragraph.

My grandma had a number of “Germanisms” in her speech. These were little phrases from German translated, directly (and sometimes correctly), into English. When something didn’t matter, she’d say “It makes not.” When we say “it’s appropriate” to make the sign of the Cross at this point of the service, we’re not saying “you should.” We’re just saying, “here’s a good time to do it” but it “makes not” if you don’t. I don’t look around to see how many people

make the sign of the Cross at the invocation, so I don’t know what the majority of worshipers are doing. I don’t think anyone does. That means we can’t even say what’s “normal” practice in our congregation. Some people do it and some don’t and it makes not.

We really have only one “rule” for worship: Don’t disrupt the service. When everyone else is standing or kneeling, it’s not wrong for you to stay seated for whatever reason. You’re holding a baby, your knees hurt, or you just don’t want to. There are times in the service when it’s “appropriate” to bow or make the sign of the Cross, and again, you can bow or not bow, make the sign of the Cross or not as you please. Whatever “normal” is, we’re each allowed to vary from “normal” as we see fit.

Now about doxologies. Google will not tell you exactly what constitutes a doxology. At least it won’t tell me. Experts argue about whether this or that verse is a doxology. That seems like an enormous waste of time and energy for something that really makes not. But here’s an example: The last verse of TLH 375 runs like this:

My guilt, O Father, Thou hast laid
On Christ, Thy Son, my Savior.
Lord Jesus, Thou my debt hast paid
And gained for me God's favor.
O Holy Ghost, Thou Fount of grace,
The good in me to Thee I trace;
In faith do Thou preserve me.

The working definition of “doxology” is that it is an ascription of praise to each Person of the Trinity. And in this verse, each Person is mentioned. However, there’s not a clear ascription of praise, so many experts don’t consider this verse a doxology. It’s a verse about what the Trinity has done, not so much a verse praising the Trinity. Other experts do consider it to be a doxology. So how do we know whether we’re supposed to stand for it?

I wanted to write this article, not because I wanted to set the norm for our practice and argue that my way was the correct way, but because I think there has been confusion. Most people just want to know when to stand and when not too. I don’t have a “way”; I just want to do what everyone else is doing. This is not an article for people with strong opinions about what our practice should be. It’s an article for people like me that just want to know what everyone else is going to do so that they can do it too. The people with their own ways are free to practice as they please.

So I did ask Pastor, the organist and the elders what they thought Trinity’s practice was. There was remarkable agreement. There are two things. One is that we don’t stand for doxologies in Communion hymns. This is just a practical matter. If you’re standing, then it’s harder for someone to get in and out of a pew if they’re going up to or coming back from the Altar. You are welcome to stand if you want to, but most people don’t. Second, who decides for Trinity whether this verse is a doxology or not? Answer:

The organist. The organist's main function is to lead congregational singing and this question is part of those duties. When the organist decides that the last verse of a hymn is a doxology, she signals it by playing a little "modulation" (or "fanfare", as some call it.)

(If you're curious: Kristin's criteria is that the verse should mention each person of the Trinity and have the word "praise" or a synonym in it. Usually it's clear, but if it's not, she consults with Pastor and they decide one way or the other.)

We're finally to the TL;DR part: **If the organist plays a modulation, then stand. Otherwise don't.** You are free to not follow this rule for whatever reason; it makes not. But it's what Pastor, the organist and the elders think is "our practice," and I thought the congregation might want to know that.

PS: While I have your attention, I'd like to thank the congregation for putting up with my fumbling attempts to be Assistant Organist. It's been a fun but scary ride for me and I appreciate all the forgiveness (and support) you've been shoveling my way. *Bart Goddard*

Good fear, bad fear

Fear takes many forms, and it can be really subtle (*This article was in the February 12, 2022 issue of the Reformed magazine, WORLD. I thought it a good summary of my view of the news particularly for the last two years or so. Opinions may vary. Prh*)

The wall thermostat of our forced air heating system works on the principle that when the temperature dips below a certain level the furnace kicks on again.

Our city newspaper works on the same principle: It cranks out scary headlines by some calculated mechanism lest COVID fear dip below an unacceptable level. I don't know how they do it, really. How many ways can you recombine the words deaths, hospitals, surge, vaccine, and intensity in a headline every day?

Are ruinous inflation, trillions in debt, China buying up our farmland, rats overtaking New York City, and Putin on the Ukraine border threatening to steal the limelight? The Committee for Scary Headlines in Suite 300 on Market Street of Philadelphia is undaunted: You will find them busy at their task. And on days when real news is thin, they borrow fear from the future. Consider the last three days' offerings: "Omicron deaths expected to spike," "It might not get easier after omicron," "And next, we have the 'flurona'" (flu-COVID marriage, presumably).

It is perversely possible to choose fear preemptively when you are in the best of times. But God is against it. So now we're down to the "might nots" and "expecteds." Some journalism.

Any fearful thing you are made to focus on day after day will become hyper-magnified in your mind. There are 6 million car accidents a year in this country, and 90 people a day die in them. If the Market Street boys wanted to get us to stop driving, they could feature a car crash death a day on the front page. Just saying. The news is what they want the news to be, and it is well to keep that in mind.

Fear has many uses, some good, some bad. Fear can be life-saving: "Don't tickle the lion in its cage." Fear can be laziness in disguise: "A sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!'" (Proverbs 26:13). Fear can be paranoia from a guilty conscience: "The wicked flee when no one pursues" (Proverbs 28:1). Fear can be self-fulfilling: "The thing I feared has overtaken me" (Job 3:25), so we should not give fear a foothold.

Some fear is forbidden by God. Do not fear people who would do us harm, but trust in God instead (1 Peter 3:13-15). Do not fear people's dirty looks but keep on speaking what you know from God is true (Jeremiah 1:8). Do not fear the devil because his power over you is limited: He can only kill you (Matthew 10:28).

Some fear is enjoined. The second half of Matthew 10:28 above discloses a worse fate than being killed. Do you want to be afraid of something? Be afraid of the One who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.

This fear thing gets really subtle. I was once at a retreat on the topic of suffering, where women were sharing heartbreaking stories. One pretty young woman named Maggie raised her hand and said that she is really healthy, has a husband who loves her, and two healthy children—and that she cannot enjoy any of it because she keeps waiting for the other shoe to drop.

That's pretty bad when fear no longer attaches to reality but to hypotheticals. It is fear as self-protection, and it works like this: If I maintain a certain level of fear, then I'll be safe. If I stop for one moment being afraid, disaster will catch me off guard and pounce from the shadows.

So there you have it. It is perversely possible to choose fear preemptively when you are in the best of times. But God is against it. "The fear of the Lord is pure" (Psalm 19:9). "This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

"Now all has been heard: here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Andrée Seu Peterson WORLD Magazine. Issue Date: February 12, 2022

<https://wng.org/articles/good-fear-bad-fear-1643252370>

APRIL 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3 ADULT CLASS 12:15 PM	4 JR. CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	5	6 LENTEN VESPERS 7:30 PM	7	8	9
10 NOON CRAWFISH BOIL ADULT CLASS 12:15	11 JR. CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	12	13	14 MAUNDY THURSDAY COMMUNION W/ STRIPPING OF THE ALTAR 7:30 PM	15 GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE OF DARKNESS W/ COMMUNION 7:30 PM	16
17 NO ADULT CLASS	18 JR. CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM	19 PASTOR	20 ON	21 VACATION	22	23 CHURCH WORK DAY 8:00 – NOON
24	25 PASTOR	26 ON	27 VACATION	28	29	30

MAY 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 CONFIRMATION ADULT CLASS 12:15 PM	2	3 ELDERS 6:30	4 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	5	6	7
8 ADULT CLASS 12:15 PM	9	10	11 HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM	12	13	14
15	16 COUPLES	17 TRIP	18 PORT	19 ARANSAS	20	21

22	23	24	25	26	27	28
SPEAKER SERIES #2 LUNCHEON 12:15 NO ADULT CLASS			HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY 7:15 PM			
29	30	31				
ADULT CLASS 12:15 PM ASCENSION DINNER 2:30 PM						

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