**The Monthly Newsletter of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**Lindy, Nebraska**

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**The Rod and Staff**



**July 2016**

**Laying on of Hands**

*You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.*

* Psalm 139:5 NRSV

Summertime, more so than other times of the year, is a time of exploration. Especially in this part of the world, summer brings with it the promise of warmth and an opportunity to get out and do things that would otherwise be impossible. Whether it is in a car, on a bike, or on foot, people are more active this time of year. I myself just got back from a week of hiking on the North Shore of Lake Superior in Minnesota. This is a special place for me, and it is wonderful to visit, but the real purpose of vacation, as I’ve discovered, is to help one appreciate home all the more!

Because people are more active this time of year, it should come as no surprise that people get into more trouble this time of year. I’m not referring to juvenile delinquency; rather, I’m referring to accidents that people are involved in during their summer activities. News reports of traffic accidents, missing persons, and lost hikers seem to be an everyday occurrence.

As I enjoy wilderness hiking, I have gotten myself lost in the woods more than once. Sometimes the trail isn’t clearly marked. Sometimes spur trails intersect with the main trail, and it isn’t clear which direction to go. It reminds me of this verse from Psalm 139. Psalm 139 reflects and marvels at the inescapability of God. No matter how far one goes, you can’t escape the presence of God. It is comforting to believe that even though you may be lost, you cannot ultimately be lost from God.

In the Church, the practice of laying on of hands is a universal sign of blessing, and I have a hunch that this originates from passages like this one for July: *You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.* In the Church, we use the action of laying on of hands by the minister during ordinations, baptisms, confirmations, individual confession and absolution, and when a Christian nears death. I lay my hands on the heads of people during these times in order to remind them of the presence of God in their lives, not to impart some special power to them. When we do laying on of hands in the Church, what we are hoping to accomplish is to remind them that their lives are ultimately held in God’s hands no matter where they are or what stage of life they are in. We are what we are as Christians by God’s grace, and we put our trust in the promise that the Lord has laid his hand on us as we have been baptized. And we believe that the hand of the Lord continues to lead us through life and even through death, “into paths of righteousness” (Psalm 23).

Have a blessed and safe rest of the summer, and grace and peace in Christ,

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Commemoration of the Saints**

As you probably know, Lutherans do not venerate (pray to) special people called “saints.” Our Lutheran confessional documents speak against that practice. However, those same documents that prohibit the veneration of saints encourage Christian people to look to the lives of significant Christians of the past as a source of encouragement for our lives in the present.



For July of 2016, the person is a Bohemian (Czech) priest named Jan Hus (ca. 1369 – 1415 AD). He is often commemorated on July 6.

Jan Hus was a controversial figure in his era, as he challenged the church of his time, rebuking the corruption he saw within the hierarchy of the church. He spoke against theological errors that he felt had crept into the life of the church concerning the Lord’s Supper. He also insisted that the true Christian Church on earth is found wherever the faithful gather around God’s word, independent of the hierarchy of the Roman Church. Hus was called to the Council of Constance in 1415 to explain himself, but his safe passage was revoked, and he was condemned and burned at the stake for his views, which were judged by the council to be heretical.

The Czech word “Hus” means “goose.” The legend says that Jan Hus said to his executioners before his death, “If you kill this goose, a hundred years later, God will raise up a swan.” Almost a hundred years after Hus’ death, Martin Luther began his public work in Germany, and many people considered Luther to be the fulfillment of Hus’ statement. Many of Luther’s insights were identical to those of Hus, and so Hus is often considered a forerunner of the Lutheran Reformation. This is why many Lutherans in Germany have images of swans on their church buildings.

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Monthly Watchword for July**

And [God] said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name ‘The Lord’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

* Exodus 33:19 NRSV

**What is a “Watchword”?**

The Moravian Church (a close cousin to Lutherans) began the practice in 1731 of selecting daily texts (Bible verses) for prayer and reflection, which continues to this day. Many Christians around the world use these Daily Texts as a part of their prayer life.

In addition to this, they began to select a theme verse for each week, called a “watchword.” You will notice in the bulletins for worship on Sunday mornings that I include that watchword for each week and begin worship by speaking that verse out loud, setting the tone for worship with that word from God.

The Moravian Church also selects theme verses for each month as well as for each year. For your own reflection, I will include the monthly watchword in the newsletter each month.

**Featured Hymn for July**

***Go Forth, My Heart, This Summer Day***

*Lutheran Hymnal for Church and Home, 264*

1. Go forth, my heart, this summer day, go forth and seek your joy today with thanks for all these pleasures! See all around the earth is new, God has adorned the world for you, with wonderful green treasures, with wonderful green treasures.
2. I cannot keep my own heart still when I see all that God has willed to waken all my senses. So I can sing with all who sing. Let all the highest good now ring which in my heart is dancing, which in my heart is dancing.
3. I think how great my blessings are which you so lovingly impart upon your great creation. And how much greater blessings wait above in heaven’s rich estate. Where golden streets await us, where golden streets await us.
4. O Holy Spirit, dwell in me so I become a living tree with roots so deeply grounded. O grant that I will sing your praise and bear rich fruit through all my days by all your love surrounded, by all your love surrounded.
* Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676

*Note: Written by the famous hymn writer Paul Gerhardt, this hymn remains a favorite in Germany today. The season of summer becomes an image of what heaven will be like.*

**From Martin Luther’s Small Catechism:**

**The Lord’s Prayer: The Fourth Petition**

***Give us this day our daily bread.***

*What does this mean?*

*God indeed gives daily bread to all, even unbelievers, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that he would help us to recognize this so that we would receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.*

*What is meant by daily bread?*

*Daily bread includes everything required to meet our earthly needs, such as food, drink, clothing, home, property, employment, necessities; devout parents, children, and communities; honest and faithful authorities, good government, seasonable weather, peace, health, an orderly society, a good reputation, true friends and neighbors, and the like.*

**Ushers for July:**

**Head Usher: Ushers:**

Carsten Barger Melvin and Sandra Barger

Darci Barger Brandon Barger

Ernie Eckmann

Stella Branstiter

Roger Guenther

**For Further Information on LCMC and the NALC:** You can download and read the newsletters of both organizations at the following addresses: **http://www.lcmc.net/newsletters** and **http://thenalc.org/newsletter/**

**Website:** The web address is as follows: **www.gselclindy.weebly.com**

***Connections Magazine:*** A part of the Lenten offering from this year will go toward subscriptions for *Connections Magazine* for each household in the congregation. Printed six times a year, this magazine includes informative and devotional articles for LCMC and NALC congregations. After the first year, we can remove names from the subscription list if anyone decides they would no longer like to receive it. This announcement is simply to make you aware that you will be receiving this in the mail at some point in the near future.

**Schedule for Holy Communion:** The Lord’s Supper will continue to be offered on the first and the third Sundays of each month unless otherwise noted. The first Sunday of the month, the Sacrament of the Altar will be received by kneeling (as you are able), and the third Sunday will be offered in a continuous line by intinction (dipping the wafer into the chalice of wine).

**Birthdays, Anniversaries, and Email Addresses:** Pr. Tom is compiling a list of email addresses for the congregation, and if you haven’t already done so, feel free to send him a message so that you can be included in announcements about congregational life, such as weather cancellations. Also, he is compiling a list of birthdays and anniversaries of members, so feel free to send any of this to his email: tjacobson001@luthersem.edu

**Ice Cream Social:** This will be held on Sunday, July 24 this year.

**Watchwords for Sundays in July:**

* **Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (July 3):** “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right.” – Galatians 6:9 NRSV

Color: Green

* **Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (July 10):** “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.” – Psalm 25:4 NRSV

Color: Green

* **Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (July 17):** “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” – Genesis 18:14 NRSV

Color: Green

* **Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (July 24):** “Lord, teach us to pray.” – Luke 11:1 NRSV

Color: Green

* **Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (July 31):** “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” – Colossians 3:2 NRSV

Color: Green

**“Why does your church baptize babies?”**

**By Pr. Clifton Hanson, Faith Lutheran Church, Isanti, Minnesota**

**Note: A colleague and friend of mine wrote this fine article last year, describing why Lutherans baptize infants. I thought it was too good not to share. Enjoy! – Pr. Tom Jacobson**

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” - Mark 10:13-14 NRSV*

We’ve all been in that conversation: a Baptist or Pentecostal or non-denominational friend asks you, “So why does your church baptize infants? You know that’s not in the Bible, right?” We’re immediately on the defensive, trying to explain our faith, feeling very judged and very judgmental, too! In order to understand our own tradition and to help others understand it, we need to follow two easy steps: 1) Use the Bible. Lutherans have a wonderful theological tradition, but we often forget to talk about its biblical basis; 2) Repeat step one. We actually don’t need to go outside the Bible to talk about this. We just have to let the Bible tell its story.

The practice of adult-only baptism draws a line and claims that under a certain age you don’t really need Jesus (or that Jesus covers you without your knowledge)—you’re innocent by virtue of ignorance and therefore Jesus’ forgiveness and healing aren’t necessary—not yet, anyway. When you become aware of your own sin, any coverage you might have had from Jesus or your own innocent ignorance lapses and you need to go and consciously get yourself saved. This is what’s commonly referred to as the “age of accountability.” This division-by-age is a concept utterly foreign to the Bible.

In the Bible, from the first time God spoke to Abraham, God’s work and promise weren’t age-dependent. Abraham was circumcised as an old man, but Israelite boys after him were marked with the sign of God’s promise at eight days old. John the Baptist was already preaching Christ in his mother’s womb (see Luke 1:44). When God became flesh, he came as a newborn baby. This is why the command of Jesus to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them…” is so broad—all nations is about as inclusive a group as there is, and last I checked, most nations include babies.

God’s work could not operate otherwise, because sin, death, and devil do not discriminate based on age—Pharaoh ordered Israelite babies murdered; Herod sent out his soldiers to kill infant boys in order to protect his throne; you, I’m sure, can think of a dozen more examples of little ones being victimized or treated as expendable—the powers of evil do not discriminate in dealing death, so our Lord does not put up walls when giving his promise. Infancy is no barrier to God’s work. So it’s no surprise that Jesus is indignant when the disciples try to keep the little ones from him.

Other Christians also claim that because no babies were baptized in the book of Acts, we have no command from God to do so now. There are three reasons that this is a bit misleading and, finally, simply untrue.

First, Acts recounts a very brief period of church history and tells only a handful of baptism stories. To claim that we can’t baptize babies because there’s no specific story about it in the Bible is just an argument from silence. No Swedes or Norwegians or Germans were baptized in the Bible either, and yet, here you all are.

Second, the criteria for baptism are set out clearly at the beginning of the book and kiddos are included: “Get up and be baptized, every one of you…this promise is for you and your children…” (Acts 2:38-39). Peter, who speaks this sentence, seems to be assuming, as the Old Testament does, that children were just as much a part of God’s people as adults. So even if we have no stories of specific babies being baptized in Acts, the book itself includes the children of Christians as eligible to receive the promises given in baptism.

Third, we actually do have some stories of children being baptized in Acts; there are three instances where an entire “house” is baptized. In the world of Acts, a “house” included all members of the family and their children, and all household slaves and their children. The most remarkable thing about these stories is that the only people who demonstrate faith in them are the heads of the households—they have faith and are baptized, but the rest of the members of the household (some of whom are presumably children) are baptized with nothing said about their belief or lack thereof. They are simply baptized—washed in a promise that they could not ask for, but which they receive because God only gives his promises to those who need them so badly they could never ask for them.

That brings us to the final point: the go-to argument for those who baptize only adults is that a baby or young child is unable to choose Jesus for themselves (and therefore unable to choose to be baptized). So even if God has always included infants in his work, he can’t include them in this. And even if Acts says stuff about whole families being baptized and about baptism being for “children”, it couldn’t possibly mean babies. Why? Because babies can’t choose anything.

For these Christians, baptism is something the believer does to demonstrate their faith, but a baby can’t demonstrate much of anything…except displeasure and adorableness. But, again, this doesn’t follow scripture. The Bible never talks about baptism as something that *I DO* for God or anyone else. And it never talks about baptism as a mere demonstration of something else that happened already. Every single time the Bible talks about baptism it is said to be *GOD’S* work—a work that he does to bind a person to Jesus in his death and resurrection. Humans *RECEIVE* baptism passively, the same way a baby boy receives circumcision—we sit back and take it, not necessarily by our own choice! In fact, Paul even compares baptism to circumcision in Colossians 2:11-12. Elsewhere, he says that baptism is being “buried with Christ” (Rom. 6:1-6), and that it is a “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5-8). Peter says that “baptism now saves you” (1 Pet. 3:21). Ephesians 5:26 says that Jesus has cleansed us by the “washing of water with the word,” so that the word of God’s promise comes to us in the waters of baptism and speaks—preaches even! These are all rather strong statements about the power of God working in the waters of baptism. They certainly give the impression that the baptism God gives is much more wonderful than a mere “outward sign.”

That’s what it comes down to in the end: Baptism is not something that *I DO*; at least the Bible says it’s not. Baptism is something that *GOD DOES TO ME*. So for a Lutheran, baptism is not a sign of my faith; it is God giving me his promise in and through a thing (water), the same as he gives his promise to me in and through the mouth of a preacher, and in and through bread and wine. Baptism isn’t made good by my commitment, it’s made good by God’s promise. So instead of using baptism like a flag that I wave to show which team I’m cheering for, I use baptism like a hat rack, and I hang my faith on it, because God made me a promise there, and when God makes a promise, I can count on it.

Baptizing a baby is about proclaiming God’s promise to someone who can do nothing to earn that promise (in this way all baptisms, whether given to babies or octogenarians, are really infant baptisms). So we don’t baptize a baby because it’s just so darn cute, and we don’t do it as “fire insurance”; we do it because our little ones also need a promise from God to hang onto. They need something to which they can cling all the days of their life—something to which their parents and pastors can point and to which they can return when they’ve gone wayward for a time. They need something that can hold them through whatever life may throw their way. This is what God gives in baptism. It’s not my work. It’s not magic. It’s a promise for you and for your children. Amen.

**July 2016**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 2 |
| 3Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion at altar railGreen | 4 | 5 | 6Pr. Tom in Lindy | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10Worship, 10:30Green | 11 | 12Pr. Tom in Lindy | 13 Church council, 7:00  | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion, continuous lineGreen | 18 | 19 | 20Pr. Tom in Lindy | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24Worship, 10:30Ice cream social in eveningGreen | 25 | 26 | 27 28 29 30Pr. Tom gone |
| 31Worship, 10:30 AMPr. Bill Nelson-Loefke preaching |  |  |  |

Good Shepherd Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Lindy

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