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

***Lindy, Nebraska***

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**The Rod and Staff**



**May and June 2021**

**Churches, Churches, and More Churches!**

***The Lutherans: Getting to Know Ourselves***

In the last newsletter, I began by writing about the many kinds of Christian churches out there. It can be confusing trying to make sense of where they all come from and what makes them distinct. Over the next several months, I will be writing about these different denominational groups among Christians. But I figured that writing about our own tradition would be a good place to start. It never hurts to know ourselves more deeply.

**Faith “Personality Types”**

Some of us have had the experience of taking the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory. It asks us questions about our preferences and habits. And it gives us a four letter “personality type.” I come down as an “INTJ” on the scale, meaning that my personality preferences are for “introversion,” “intuition,” “thinking,” and “judging.” My opposite would be ESFP, standing for “extraversion,” “sensing,” “feeling,” and “perception.” Like all such inventories, it’s best not to place ourselves in hard categories, but I will say that the inventory has helped me understand myself better, how I relate to others, and how others relate to me. In a similar way, knowing more about ourselves as Lutherans can help us see how we relate to other kinds of churches.

**Lutheran History**

Today, Lutherans are found all over the world, though they are more numerous in some countries than in others. What began in Europe in the 1500s spread to North America in the 1600s. From both of those locations, Lutherans spread the Christian message all over the world in the centuries that followed. As one who teaches an entire seminary course about Lutheran history, summing it up in a brief newsletter article is tough to do. But I will nonetheless give here a brief overview about the Lutheran movement and how Lutherans understand themselves and their place in the broader Christian world. This overview will naturally be a bit simplistic, but it gives you a sense of where we came from.

On one level, Lutheranism can be said to have begun in the sixteenth century (1500s) in what we now call Germany. At the time, Germany was not a unified country like today; it was rather a patchwork of separate dutchies and kingdoms that were a part of the Holy Roman Empire. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German priest in the region of Saxony. In addition to being called as the town priest, he was appointed as a professor of biblical theology at the newly founded University of Wittenberg, a small town on the Elbe River.

At the time, Christianity in Western Europe (as opposed to Eastern Europe) saw the city of Rome (in Italy) as its sacred headquarters. The legend was that the Apostles Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome, which gave it a special spiritual status. The Pope, understood to be the successor of the Apostle Peter (Jesus’ chief disciple), ruled from Rome. He was considered the chief bishop of the Church.

One of the things that led to Martin Luther’s movement for Reformation of the Church had to do with the relationship between Rome and Germany. As the years went on in medieval Europe, many Germans came to resent the Church’s leadership in Rome. There arose a rivalry of sorts. There also came to be a perception that the Church leadership in Rome and elsewhere was more focused on worldly power and wealth than it was on preaching the good news of Jesus Christ and feeding people spiritually. As a representative of his Augustinian order of friars, Martin Luther himself took a journey to Rome by foot in the year 1510. He was shocked at what he saw. He expected the holy city of Rome to be filled with pious Christians hard at prayer. Instead, it was filled with drunkenness and immorality. Even many of the priests made use of the network of prostitution in the city.

Some years later, the Pope at the time authorized the sale of indulgences throughout Germany. These pieces of paper signed by the Pope promised Christians who purchased them reduction of time spent in Purgatory after death before reaching the presence of God. Such indulgences could also be bought on behalf of someone who had already died. Many well-meaning Christians did so to help their deceased loved ones. The revenue from this sale was to go toward the construction of a large church in Rome: St. Peter’s Basilica.

Many people in Germany questioned this. If their money was being used for constructing a church building, why couldn’t such a church be built in Germany instead of Rome? There were famous saints that were from Germany, after all, and a church could be built in their honor. But Martin Luther had a deeper concern. The way he read the Bible, he could find no reason to believe that such a teaching about Purgatory and indulgences was correct. Martin Luther had himself struggled with the question of his salvation. He knew his own weakness, and he knew that on his own power, nothing he did could live up to God’s righteous demands.

A few years later, things became clear for him. It is true that nothing he did could live up to God’s standards. But that is precisely why God the Father send his Son Jesus to be our savior. Unable to save ourselves, we are rescued by God’s mercy. Martin Luther believed that Christians are saved by grace through faith. God’s mercy in Christ is given to people through his proclaimed Word and his sacraments that were commanded by Christ: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In turn, God the Holy Spirit calls us to faith: trust in God and God’s promises.

Martin Luther and his colleagues never intended to start a new church organization. They desired to *reform* the Christian Church in Europe, and they understood their work of *Reformation* in that way. The Lutherans (as they came to be called, against Luther’s own objection!) did not do away with everything of the past. They only got rid of something when they believed it stood directly against the teachings of the Bible.

**The Lutheran Confessional Writings**

Over time, Lutherans developed documents that explained their faith, which they believed were faithful expressions of the teachings of the Bible. The earliest and most significant of these was known as the “Augsburg Confession” of 1530, written by Luther’s co-worker Philipp Melanchthon (a lay theologian). These documents are known as the Lutheran Confessional Writings. Written at different times for different reasons, these documents were compiled into a single book in the year 1580, known as *The Book of Concord*. To this day, Lutheran pastors pledge to teach and preach in accordance with the teachings of *The Book of Concord*.

But what were the first things that the Lutherans put in *The Book of Concord*? It surprises people to know that the opening pages of this book contain the three ancient creeds of the Christian Church: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These creeds (statements of faith) developed in the early centuries of the Christian Church. The Lutherans put them in *The Book of Concord* as a matter of primary importance to demonstrate that their faith was not an innovation. It wasn’t something they just made up. The Lutherans viewed their faith as standing firmly within the Christian tradition of the past.

So, on another level, one can say that Lutheranism began much earlier than the 1500s. The Lutheran emphasis on being saved by grace through faith is something that goes back all the way to the beginning, when Jesus stepped out of the tomb and revealed himself to his disciples.

**Lutheran Expansion**

The Lutheran tradition spread around Europe during and after the time of Martin Luther. This is largely because students from various places in Europe studied under Martin Luther at the University of Wittenberg, and they carried what they had learned to their home countries. That, combined with various political factors, led Lutheranism to become the majority religious tradition in the following lands: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and the Baltic states. Germany became divided, with the northern part strongly Lutheran and the southern part strongly connected to the Church of Rome (what became known as the Roman Catholic Church). Minorities of Lutherans became active in other places, such as the Netherlands, what is today Poland, Bohemia (Czech Republic and Slovakia), Austria, and Hungary.

To complicate things even further, not all Lutherans came to agree with each other. In addition to different ethnic and national backgrounds, there arose over time differences in theological emphasis and liturgy (style of worship). Within the Lutheran church organizations in various countries, there came to be rival traditions. For example, at one time there were as many as six different groups of Norwegian Lutherans in America! Over time, most of these groups merged, but some remained on their own. Because of this kind of rivalry, there remains a variety in the Lutheran world.

Like many so-called “mainline” church traditions in North America and Europe, Lutheranism is declining in numbers, which has been happening since the 1960s. One big factor in this is that birthrates in America among “mainline” Protestant groups have dropped significantly over the last few decades. Yet, surprisingly, Lutheran churches in other parts of the world are growing. The largest Lutheran church organization in the world today is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (in east Africa) with around 6.3 million members.

**A Lutheran Way of Thinking**

How do Lutherans think about their faith, their relationship with God? One thing you notice in most Lutheran churches is that there is no “altar call.” In some other types of churches, at the end of worship or at other times, people are invited forward to the front of the sanctuary (where the altar is located) to “give their life to Jesus,” “surrender their life to Jesus,” and “make a decision for Christ” by praying “the sinner’s prayer.” The goal behind these “altar calls” is to emphasize the importance of personal commitment in our faith. This point of view emphasizes our responsibility, what we do, how we respond.

There is some truth to this. Faith does produce in us personal commitment, and it needs to. But Lutherans begin by asking a different question. Instead of asking people, “Have you surrendered your life to Christ?” Lutherans ask, “Has Christ surrendered his life for you?” Instead of asking, “Have you given your heart to Jesus?" Lutherans ask, “Has Jesus given his heart for us?” Instead of asking, “Have you prayed and accepted Jesus into your heart?” Lutherans ask, “Has Jesus prayed for you and accepted you?” And Lutherans affirm that the answer to these questions is “yes.” That is cause for rejoicing. That is the gospel, good news, that changes our life.

Can you hear the difference in these questions? The one way forces us to rely on ourselves and our response. But Martin Luther knew that human beings are weak and sinful. In his own life, Martin Luther realized that trusting in himself and his commitment was a foundation built on sand. As long as he trusted in himself, he could never find peace with God. He knew that he had no choice but to rely on the rock of God’s grace, which God gives to us, helpless as we are.

Much of American Christianity is rooted in the first way of thinking. And so, we sometimes face an uphill climb trying to emphasize a Lutheran way of thinking. But it is worth it in the long run. The fact that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has sought me out, carried me, a helpless sheep, home, is pure and precious good news. I didn’t find God. God found me.

Everything I do: how I teach, how I preach, how I pray, is informed by my Lutheran background. It is ingrained in me, and I treasure it. Even so, I recognize that many things about “being Lutheran” are not found exclusively in Lutheran churches. As I wrote last time, I believe there to be much truth in many other types of churches. If I lived in a community where the local Lutheran church was not faithful, I would gladly attend a Reformed, Presbyterian, or Methodist church that was focused on salvation by grace through faith in Christ. I might not agree with every aspect of their tradition, but I rejoice that we are able to find much common ground in providing a witness to Jesus Christ.

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Commemoration of the Saints**

Lutherans do not 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. They form a “great cloud of witnesses” as we remain pilgrims and strangers on earth (Hebrews 12:1).



For May and June of 2021, we remember **Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria**, commemorated on May 2.

Athanasius was born in Alexandria in Egypt, around 295 A.D. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. while still a deacon, he defended the divinity of Christ, the belief that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is “of the same substance as the Father.” This is the foundation of our belief in the Holy Trinity, that we have one God who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

From that time on, he championed Christian orthodoxy (right belief) against Arianism, which believed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was created by the Father and therefore less than God the Father. Consecrated as the bishop of Alexandria in 328 A.D., his forty five-year tenure as bishop was one of turmoil caused by civil authorities and heretical churchmen. He was exiled numerous times by his opponents. By his tireless defense of the faith, he earned the title “Father of Orthodoxy.” The third of our three creeds (the Apostles’ and Nicene being the first two) in our church, the Athanasian Creed, is named for him, though Athanasius himself did not write it.

*Uphold your Church, O God of truth, as you upheld your servant Athanasius, to maintain and proclaim boldly the catholic faith against all opposition, trusting solely in the grace of your eternal Word, who took upon himself our humanity that we might share his divinity; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.* (prayer from justus.anglican.org)

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

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

**The Ten Commandments**

***The Fourth Commandment***

*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.*

***What does this mean?***

*We should fear and love God so that we do not show contempt for our parents and others in authority, nor provoke them to anger, but respect, obey, serve, love, and honor them.*

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Dear members of Good Shepherd,

The church Calf Committee has had several offers for donations from people who would like to be involved with the Calf Project but are not able to house or care for the livestock. Unfortunately, some of these offers to pay for vet supplies and other care items have had to be declined because they have already been taken care of.

As a way of making the project open to participation by everyone, we have come up with an idea for a “Sponsor a Calf Program.” This program would allow anyone who would like to be involved in the project be involved. There have been suggestions to expand the project, but with an aging population, there are fewer homes for the calves. By sponsoring a calf with your donations, these funds will go directly into the Calf Fund, thereby expanding the project without having to deal with the daily chores of livestock. Even with these donations, the Calf Project will remain ongoing as it functions today.

If you would like to sponsor a calf, simply mark your donation along in your weekly envelope or send it to the church. There are no set amounts required to sponsor a calf, just a free will donation. Whether it be monthly or yearly, whatever you are comfortable contributing is appreciated. This way, it keeps the project fun and available to everyone.

The calf project has evolved over many years from a single donated calf to a current 35 head. The money raised from this project helps the church pay for larger expenses and, from time-

to-time, daily expenses and upkeep. This has been an important part of keeping Good Shepherd Lutheran Church a vibrant place to worship in our community.

Sincerely,

The Calf Project Committee and Church Council

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**Shepherd’s Garden**

The Shepherd’s Garden began a number of years ago and has been supported by the dedication of many church members in that time. Though the garden has been cleaned up for the winter, we include this reminder that the Shepherd’s Garden, located behind the church building, is available in the spring, summer, and autumn for anyone, church member or not, desiring a quiet place for prayer and reflection. In the Bible, gardens appear at significant points. It is our hope that the Shepherd’s Garden can be of service to our world in encouraging people to pray and listen to God.



**Featured Hymn for May and June**

***Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain***

*Lutheran Hymnal for Church and Home, 135*

Come, you faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness! God has brought His Israel into joy from sadness. Loosed from Pharoah's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and daughters, led them with unmoistened foot through the Red Sea waters.

'Tis the spring of souls today: Christ hath burst His prison, and from three days' sleep in death as a sun has risen; all the winter of our sins, long and dark, is flying from His light, to whom is giv'n laud and praise undying.

Now the queen of seasons, bright with the day of splendor, with the royal feast of feasts, comes its joy to render; comes to gladden faithful hearts which with true affection welcomes in unwearied strains Jesus' resurrection!

For today among His own Christ appeared, bestowing His deep peace, which evermore passes human knowing. Neither could the gates of death nor the tomb's dark portal nor the watchers nor the seal hold Him as a mortal.

Alleluia! Now we cry to our King immortal, who, triumphant, burst the bars of the tomb's dark portal. Come, you faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness! God has brought His Israel into joy from sadness!

* John of Damascus (696-754 A.D.)
* Trans. John Mason Neale (1818-1866 A.D.)

*Note: Translated by John Mason Neale, who loved the hymns of the early Church, this hymn was originally in Greek. John of Damascus is said to have written it for the festival of St. Thomas. It is based on the book of Exodus.*

**Monthly Watchword for May**

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.”

* Proverbs 31:8 ESV

**Ushers for May and June:**

* Head Ushers (May):
  + Beth and Jeff Barger
* Ushers:
  + Lacey Barger
  + Brad and Cindy Sage
  + Margo Poppe
  + Red Branstiter
* Head Ushers (June)
  + Ed and Tina Sage
* Ushers:
  + Richard and Phyllis Beckmann
  + Jerry and Sandy Ziegler
  + Dennis and Judy Friedrichsen
  + Trenton Guenther
  + Makenna Guenther

**Website:** The web address is as follows:

* **www.gselclindy.weebly.com**

**Martin Luther’s Morning Prayer**

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I ask you to protect me this day also from sin and every evil, that in all I do today I may please you. For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all that is mine. Let you holy angel watch over me, that the wicked foe have no power over me. Amen.

**Birthdays for May and June**

*Note: This list of birthdays is a work in progress, as we are currently trying to gather membership information from the old congregational record into an electronic form. If your name is not listed in the appropriate month, please let pastor know your birthday so that it can be added in the future. If you would not like your name to be listed, simply let pastor know. The birthdays are provided here as a way of giving thanks for the lives of members of the congregation. Happy birthday to all!*

* May 2: Jamie Doerr; May 3: Jacob Stewart; May 10: Hope Stewart; May 13: Venita Sage
* May 20: Mark McManigal; May 23: Rydder Eckmann; June 16: Makenna Guenther
* June 24: Christine Eisenhauer; June 26: Gary Ermels; June 28: Bonnie Paulsen

**Baptismal Anniversaries for May and June**

*Note: Just as it is important to acknowledge the beginning of our earthly lives with our birthdays, it is even more important for us as Christians to remember the day when God has given us a new birthday, “a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Lutherans confess that baptism is the means by which God gives us as a part of sinful humanity a new relationship with him, a promise that our faith can look to all our lives. In turn, we are called to a life of repentance and faith that trusts in Christ as our salvation. As with the birthdays, this list is a work in progress. Blessed baptismal anniversaries to everyone!*

* May 4: Jeff Hanson; May 8: Jamie Olson; May 9: Jerrick Graber; May 11: Trenton Guenther
* May 14: Randy Hanson; May 19: Patience Teboe; May 20: Leah Poppe; June 4: Roger Guenther
* June 12: Sherri Ermels; June 15: Alice Carlow; June 19: Dennis Friedrichsen
* June 21: LaVonne Koltermann; June 25: Donna Nielsen

**Weekly Watchwords**

Note: These “watchwords” for each week can be considered “theme verses” on which to reflect for the week.

**The Fifth Sunday of Easter (5/2/21):** *Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!* - Psalm 98:1 ESV

**The Sixth Sunday of Easter (5/9/21):** *Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!* – Psalm 66:20 ESV

**The Seventh Sunday of Easter (5/16/21):** *Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* – John 12:32 ESV

**The Day of Pentecost (5/23/21):** *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.* – Zechariah 4:6 ESV

**The Sunday of the Holy Trinity (5/30/21):** *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!* – Isaiah 6:3 ESV

**The Second Sunday after Pentecost (6/6/21):** *Jesus says, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”* – Luke 10:16ESV

**The Third Sunday after Pentecost (6/13/21):** *Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* – Matthew 11:28 ESV

**The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (6/20/21):** *Jesus says, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* – Luke 19:10 ESV

**The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (6/27/21):** *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* – Galatians 6:2 ESV

**Important Announcements**

* We will continue having a time of coffee and fellowship before worship each Sunday, beginning at 9:30.
* Pr. Tom has begun the practice of recording short devotions of around fifteen minutes each, usually every other week. These recorded devotions involve a time of morning, evening, or afternoon prayer, a Bible reading and brief comment on it, as well as a hymn. These devotions may be accessed on the church Facebook page as well as on the church website: gselclindy.weebly.com
* The final confirmation class for this school year will be on May 19.
* The Rite of Confirmation for Kora Poppe is scheduled for June 6.
* Please take note of the announcement in this newsletter regarding “Adopt a Calf” as a way for people to make contributions to the church’s Calf Project if they are unable to participate in the traditional way involving donating and caring for calves.
* Many thanks to those who contributed to the North American Lutheran Church Disaster Response “Stuff the Truck” event at our joint ESD/Minkota NALC Mission District convocation in Brookings, SD. That event was a great success, and we along with many other congregations contributed significantly to it.
* As we began at the beginning of the school year, we will continue using a different set of Bible readings (lectionary) on Sunday mornings. This “Narrative Lectionary” includes a single main preaching text along with an accompanying reading. It is an opportunity to become more familiar with the Holy Scriptures, hearing the stories of the Bible in chronological order, beginning with the book of Genesis. The regular cycle concludes at the end of the school year. In the early part of the summer, there is a series on the Psalms, and the latter part of the summer will focus on the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

**May 2021**

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| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
| 2  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship with Holy Communion, 10:30  White | 3 | 4 | 5  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Confirmation class, 5:15-6:45 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 9  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship, Service of the Word, 10:30  White | 10 | 11 | 12  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Confirmation class,  5:15-6:45  Church council, 7:00 | 13  The Ascension of our Lord | 14 | 15 |
| 16  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship with Holy Communion, 10:30  White | 17 | 18 | 19  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Women’s meeting, 10:00  Confirmation class, 5:15-6:45 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| 23  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship, Service of the Word, 10:30 Rev. Jerry Merkouris preaching  Day of Pentecost  Red  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  30  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship, Service of the Word, 10:30  The Holy Trinity  White | 24  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  31 | 25  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | 26 27 28 29  Pr. Tom in Lindy  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | |

**June 2021**

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| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  |  | 1 | 2    Pr. Tom in Lindy | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship with Holy Communion, 10:30  Rite of Confirmation  Green | 7 | 8 | 9  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Church council, 7:00 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship, Service of the Word, 10:30  Green | 14 | 15 | 16  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Women’s meeting, 10:00 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20  Coffee and fellowship, 9:30  Worship with Holy Communion, 10:30  Green | 21 | 22 | 23  Pr. Tom in Lindy | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27  Worship, Service of the Word, 10:30  Green | 28 | 29 | 30 | | | |
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Good Shepherd Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Lindy

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