



The Messenger
St. John Lutheran Church

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West Branch, Michigan 48661
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On Memorial Day
Remember
Those Who
Served



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May 2019

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PASTOR'S OFFICE HOURS

Monday and Thursday: 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Tuesday and Wednesday: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

No appointment is necessary – just stop by! Please call the office and make an appointment if these times are not convenient (345-0120).

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Last month, my newsletter article referred to the wonderful, and true understanding of salvation, by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. Being Lutheran is wonderful**, since our doctrine declares that there are **no human actions** involved in being brought into God's kingdom – no works, no apprehension of faith – no strings of any kind. To many, when you tell them they **must believe in Christ**, they imagine that **they must apprehend this thing called 'faith'**, so that they can believe in Jesus, and therefore are seen by God as righteous – worthy of heaven.

The error mentioned above is the treating of 'faith' like it's some kind of substance or knowledge learned. People imagine that they can **feel** 'faith' deep inside themselves, and then they become despondent when the feeling disappears. Some Christians believe that faith is some **knowledge** that you can store in your brain, and as long as you know the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, you've got 'saving faith'. Both are very wrong – and these wrongs can be deadly to our souls.

Please bear with me as I try to explain the 'faith' that saves. I'll begin by quoting one of our greatest theologians, Johann Gerhard (b. AD 1582, d. AD 1637):

"It is one thing to be justified **on account of faith** and another to be justified **by faith**. In the former case, faith is the **meritorious cause** [some good thing we earned or have secured for ourselves, so that we believe in Jesus]; in the latter, it is the **instrumental cause** [something God uses in us so that we believe in Jesus Christ]." (bracketed comments by Pastor Travis). "We are **not** justified on account of faith as a merit, but **by faith, which lays hold of the merit of Christ.**" ⁽¹⁾

God graciously gives us a tool (or instrument) so that we can receive **the merits of Christ as a gift**.

I know this is a little tricky, so let me give you an analogy. In the olden days of television, everyone had an antenna on their roof (or if you lived in a big city, a "rabbit ear" antenna that sat on top of the TV), so that one could receive the broadcast signals of ABC, CBS, or NBC. Without an antenna, you could forget watching TV. Faith is like a *God-provided antenna* that allows you to receive Christ and His meritorious works, for your benefit. Notice that **faith does not focus on the antenna**; that's like unplugging the TV and staring at the rabbit ears above the TV. Not helpful. Instead, **faith always points you to the "signal."** The "signal" is simply **the cross and the empty tomb, all accomplished for your salvation and eternal life (the Gospel)**. You "look" upon the cross, and the empty tomb (because faith allows you to "see" it spiritually), and you *know* that Jesus carried your sins upon Himself on Good Friday; you know that Jesus exited the tomb so that you can walk out of your grave one day, and live with Him forever. Faith is the necessary instrument that allows you to believe.

It is God who prompts sinners to **receive the "signal," via the "antenna" of faith** (see Ephesians 2:4-9), after God has prepared them for the Gospel by means of the Law. The Law creates the conditions that are necessary for the Gospel to be received by us (when an infant is brought into God's kingdom through Baptism, the baby is unable to resist the work of the Spirit, that comes from the application of God's word and water). Of course, God cannot prompt a

person who continues, and is determined to continue, in his sinful life and thus makes a mockery of God's Word (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We call this the "fall from grace" - a continued life of unrepentance (living in willful sin) that leads to the "antenna being lost," and the "signal disappearing."

You may remember having one of those TV antennas that could be pointed at the broadcast tower. You could rotate the antenna so that you got the clearest signal. Walking away from worship by coming only once a month (or less) is like allowing the wind to blow the antenna so that it's no longer pointed at God's broadcast. The "signal" becomes fuzzy, difficult to receive. However, Bible study, devotions, and weekly worship attendance focuses the "antenna of faith" at the Broadcaster (God). The signal is strong, and you can rely on that signal to provide you with all that you need, even in the worst of storms.

No analogy is perfect, and neither is this one. If this concept of 'faith' is still a little fuzzy for you, don't be discouraged. It's a challenge for seminary students the first time they are exposed to it. So why teach it?

We said earlier, that some people look inside themselves for faith, as if this "feeling" assures them that they are saved. That makes **keeping that feeling alive inside of you the most important thing in life**. This turns salvation into **work** – *you* must keep the feeling alive. Wrong (and deadly, for all those who trust in their own works for righteousness will surely die – see Romans 3:27-28).

The **other error** makes 'faith' simply an **item of knowledge** that is stored in a person's brain cells. But what happens if you suffer from severe dementia and can no longer remember Jesus? Do you die spiritually? Of course not! God is the one providing the antenna, and broadcasting the signal. You simply receive it (even if your mental state prevents you from communicating this to others). God is faithful.

Finally, **we are called to simply believe in the Gospel**. Childlike 'faith' is the greatest faith on earth (see Matthew 18:1-4). It simply trusts, and does not question how or why! We "see" the cross for what it is. We "see" the empty tomb for what it is. We confess Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3), and we are equipped with spiritual gifts that enable us to carry out the good works that God has prepared for us to accomplish (Galatians 5:22, 23, Ephesians 2:10). And each day is a celebration of new life in Jesus – a life that will never end! Happy Easter!

Pastor Travis

⁽¹⁾ Gerhard, J., *Locus de justificatione*, paragraph 179.

SOCIAL MINISTRIES

FOOD TRUCK – We wish to thank all the people who help make the food give-a-ways a great success. We are collecting donations of personal hygiene items and cleaning products to distribute at the Food Truck give-a-ways. Individuals in-need cannot purchase items such as shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, or household cleaners with their Bridge cards even though they are needed. A collection basket will be in the fellowship hall for donations. We very much appreciate

the support we get from all of you! Very blessed to be a part of this church family! Questions can be made to Lisa or Bev.

Mothers day brunch on May 5th.

May blood drive is set for May, 23 2019 running 12-6pm at the West Branch Knights of Columbus hall. We will need volunteers for set-up (11:15am) and to work the door and serve food.

Caring Pregnancy Center will have the "bottle drive" from May 5th to June 9th.

PRAYER MINISTRIES

Prayer Warriors are always needed!

Prayer Warriors – Please keep your students in your prayers and drop them a note to let them know you're praying for them.

Praying for you... Have you received a postcard in the mail recently that said, "The Congregation has prayed for you"? As part of the ongoing prayer ministry here at St. John, we pray for the spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our members. We also lift up the ministries and outreach of this congregation on a daily basis. If you are interested in praying for these concerns, May Prayer Sheets are available in the Narthex on the cart next to the Portals of Prayer.

LADIES AID

MEETING – The May meeting will begin with lunch at the China Inn at 11:30 A.M. on May 14th with the meeting to follow at the church at approximately 1:00 P.M. We would welcome any and all ladies of the church to come join us!!!

LWML RALLY - The Timberline Zone Spring Rally will be held at Zion Lutheran Church in Tawas City on Saturday, May 4th, beginning at 10:00 A.M. We will gather at our church at 8:00 A. M. and travel together to the Rally. We welcome any and all ladies to join us at this Rally. Attending this Rally is especially important because St. John Ladies Aid will host the Timberline Zone Rally here at St. John in the Spring of 2020. The address for the Rally is 720 Second St., Tawas City.

LWML PRAYER DAY - The 2019 Timberline Zone LWML Prayer Day Service will be held at Faith Lutheran Church in Prescott on Thursday, May 16th at 10:00 A.M. Registration begins at 9:15 A.M. and Lunch will follow the service. Both MEN and Women are invited. The address is 5315 Henderson Lake Rd. We will meet at our church at 9:15 and travel together.

COFFEE HOUR – Just a reminder to all Coffee Hour hostesses that you will need to pick up the donuts on Sunday before the church service from the Colonial Village Bakery. If you feel that you will not need donuts that Sunday, please notify Marge Mozak by Thursday of that week, so she can cancel the donut order.

FAMILY FARE "Direct Your Dollars" - As of April 6th we have collected 48,772 dollars in receipts. Remember, you must use your "Yes Rewards" card or give them your phone number for the purchase to count as a "Direct Your Dollars" receipt.

GARAGE SALE- the Ladies Aid Garage Sale will be held Friday, May 31st from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. and Saturday, June 1st from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. We will begin working in the garage after May 1st for 2-hour intervals (10A.M. to 12 P.M.) on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Now is the time to gather the items that you no longer need or use and bring them to the church. If you bring them on Mondays between noon and 2:00 P.M., or at the times listed above, we will help you get them into the garage. We are not accepting TV's, computers or Christmas trees at this time.

SECOND HAND CHRISTMAS AND MORE- We will be having a sale of Christmas items, including gently used Christmas decorations and/or crafts on November 15th of this year. Be thinking of us as you are cleaning out and giving away Christmas decorations that you don't use anymore. We will get ready for those donations later in the summer. This sale will also include a cookie sale. Look for more information at a later date.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Tired of milk and junk food?

Looking for solid food?

**Check out the opportunities below
and come join us we dig into God's Word!**

Sunday Mornings

8:30 a.m. - A Longer Look at the Lessons – Prepare for worship by taking a closer look at the Bible readings for that Sunday's service.

Monday Mornings

10:00 a.m. - We are taking an in-depth look at the book of **2 Samuel**.

Tuesday Evenings

7:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study at Jane Tennant's home. A deeper look at Law and Gospel through the Lutheran Difference Bible Study series.

7:00 p.m. - Men's Bible Study on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday. They continue to dig into God's Word, and are using the "Great Miracles of the Bible - New Testament" series.

Wednesday Mornings

9:00 a.m. – Men's Breakfast and Devotional – 4th Wednesday at the church.

Sunday School Happenings

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

John 3:5

As Martin Luther would say, "Remember your Baptism!" We begin the month with the true story from God's Word about Nicodemus and His late-night visit. As you know, he was very confused about being born again of water and the Spirit. And yet, we know that through the waters of Holy Baptism we are united with Jesus' death and resurrection, born again to new life. It is definitely not something that can be reasoned out, but the Holy Spirit gives us faith to believe. And, through our Baptism, we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. For that we give thanks!

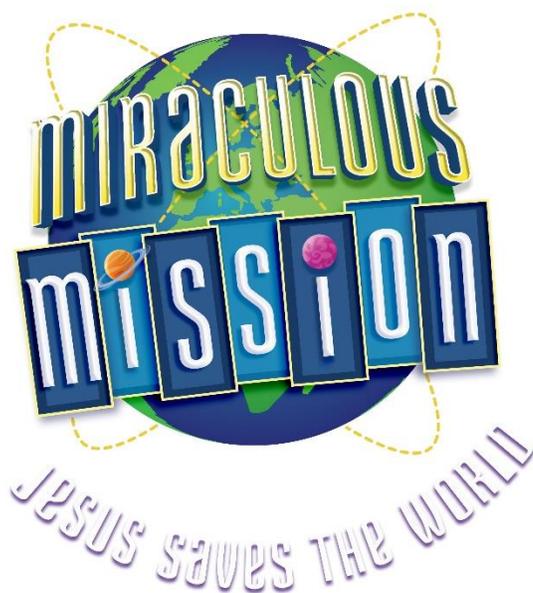
We continue the month with the true story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and the living water only Jesus has to offer. Once again, Baptism comes to mind! We know that Jesus, the fountain of living water, gives us the Holy Spirit who cleanses us from sin and unrighteousness in the waters of Holy Baptism and gives us new life in Christ. Ordinary water leaves us thirsting for more. However, the living water found in God's Word and Holy Baptism quenches our spiritual thirst forever.

This week we will see how Jesus is rejected in His home town of Nazareth. Remember how Jesus had been teaching and healing in Galilee, and went home for a visit. While there, Jesus was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read on the Sabbath in the Synagogue. Isaiah 61 described exactly the kingdom of the coming Messiah, Jesus. And referring to Isaiah, Jesus said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Do you remember how this account ended? The crowd got angry and drove Jesus out of town, to the very edge of a cliff. With great hatred, they intended to throw Him to His death. Instead, we read, "Passing through their midst, He went away." As we all know, sin separates us from our Lord. Continuing to live in sin (refusing to repent) will lead to the Holy Spirit departing from us. But our faithful Lord continues to lead us to repentance and life. Working through His Word and Baptism, God gives us faith to see and believe in Jesus as our Savior.

We end the month with Jesus calls His disciples. Jesus was preaching, teaching, and healing. Because of sin, all mankind dwells in darkness and in the shadow of death. But into this darkness shines the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He scattered the darkness of sin, death, and the power of the devil by preaching and teaching, and He called His disciples to do the same. He has given us Pastors and church workers as instruments of healing – healing that comes through His Means of Grace. And, He calls us to follow His voice (His Word) and He equips us to tell others about His life saving work on the cross. Just as Jesus said...

"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19



*Summer is coming!
And, so is VBS!*

July 14th-18th

Interested in helping this year?
Come join us for our "Get
Ready" meetings at 6:45 PM:

May 22, June 5, 12, 26, and July 10

EVANGELISM / OUTREACH

Facebook is up to date. Prayer cards are being sent. There is sign- up sheets on the bulletin board if you would be willing to change the sign outside or be Lector. I will try to get picture of our Sunday School kids soon and post them as well as putting new pictures up in the education wing of some of the things they are doing. I will be replacing some of the educational booklets we have very soon. Please don't forget to encourage others to worship with us. Have a wonderful month and remember warm weather will soon spring upon us. God bless. There are plenty of car window decals still available. Check with Dennis if you are interested and would like one or two.

Singing in Community

by: Jeffery Biersch

CHRIST'S CHURCH SINGS. It has been so from the beginning of time (Job 38:7) and will remain so unto the end of time (Revelation 5:9-10). The Lord Himself *is* our song (Exodus 15:2), and the Church sings because God sings with us (Zephaniah 3:14-17).

It has been shown time and again that singing and making music benefit humankind physically, mentally and emotionally. Singing is also a tremendous tool for teaching, one which Luther himself used to teach the faith. But singing *together* offers another, perhaps even more valuable, benefit to the Church: It allows us to create community by blending our individual voices and experiences into one harmonious expression.

Singing is perhaps the most profoundly personal form of music making, because the sound emerges deep from within oneself. Yet while there is certainly benefit to solo singing as a means of self-expression, the act of singing together as with one voice allows us to rejoice with those

who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). That moment when many breaths are taken in unison with one another reminds us that we are not alone on our journey — that others are joining with us in our celebrations, hopes, trials and fears. That moment when many vocal cords emit a collective sound helps us see and hear ourselves as part of the larger community of our shared humanity and faith.

This is admittedly a very different kind of singing than is prominent in our current culture. In an age that has given us easy access to prerecorded music with the click of a button, we have become content to let others make music for us rather than making it ourselves. In a world that showers solo artists with fame and fortune, we have lost our ability to appreciate music making where no one person is the star.

In an era when any recorded performance can be manipulated with effects processors and auto-tune, we have become intolerant of music that is less than perfect.

But community singing is not intended to be perfect. It isn't about money or personal glory. Some community singing will be better, some worse. But the product in every instance is real, genuine music, made by ordinary people, born out of common experiences. As composer Charles Ives once quipped: "Don't pay too much attention to the notes. If you do, you may miss the music."

When Christ's Church sings, whether it be as a congregation or in a choir, whether it be musically subpar or of a professional caliber, our community proclaims the reason for our song, the tie that binds us together as one — our shared salvation in Christ. But even more glorious is that community which is experienced weekly in the Eucharist as we join our voices "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven," singing their unending hymn of praise. The communion of saints is the ultimate choir, one in which everyone has perfect pitch and Christ Himself is the conductor. Now that is a joyful community!

Dr. Jeffrey Blerch is professor of music at Concordia University, Nebraska, Seward, Neb., and director of music at Pacific Hills Lutheran Church, Omaha, Neb.

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When Jesus Comes Inside His Christians – In What Sense is He Present?

Knowing that God chose "*the foolish things of the world to shame the wise*" (1 Corinthians 1:27), Martin Luther spoke harshly about using your **human reason** to make sense of the things God says to you in His Bible. "Reason is the devil's prostitute," Luther warned, "and can do nothing but blaspheme and defile everything God speaks" (*What Luther Says*, #3717). Reason is God's gift, but the devil constantly tries to tempt people to misuse it - to try to get people to doubt God's Word!

As you listen to God's amazing message that **Christ is in you**, you must guard yourself! Be sure that the devil does not use your reason to seduce you into misunderstanding what it means that **Christ is in you**.

God's gift of Holy Communion is one of the ways He protects you from Satan's continual attempts to "defile everything God speaks." The picture on this page focuses on a key battle between what God clearly states and what the devil, by misusing reason, tempts many to doubt. In serving Communion, the pastor quotes Jesus saying: "This is My body ... This is My blood" (Matthew 26:26, 28). This means Christ is actually coming into you through Holy Communion.

However, when you hear about **Christ in you** in the Holy Supper, the devil tricks your reason into responding in protest: "This cannot be true!" (pages 30-31). When this protest fails because of the clear words of the Bible (Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27), your reason will then attempt to make sense of this amazing mystery. Seductively, it will suggest to you that Christ may be inside you, but only as an IDEA, a MEMORY, or in Spirit.

NO! God's gift of Holy Communion makes it very clear that, when Christ comes inside you, the WHOLE CHRIST enters into you bodily - that is, the same Christ who once sat on His mother's knee and who was crucified and raised to life.

WHERE CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD ARE, THERE HE IS

When Jesus gave His disciples bread to chew and swallow, He said. "This is My body" (Matthew 26:26). He said a similar thing about the cup of wine He gave them to drink: "This is My blood" (Matthew 26:28). With these words, Jesus indicated that when you take Holy Communion, you do not receive a mere representation of Christ, or a memory of Him, or an idea concerning Him. Rather, when you receive Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion, you receive CHRIST HIMSELF - THE WHOLE CHRIST.

For this reason, Martin Luther could write: "Christ is truly present in the sacrament with His flesh and blood as it was born of Mary and hung on the holy cross" (*Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 36, p. 275). Then Luther added: "I must always confess that Christ is present when His body and blood are present. His words do not lie to me, and **He is not separated from His body** and blood . . . He is present in the sacrament and in the hearts of believers" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 36, p. 294).

The debate over *how* Christ is present in Holy Communion is not a minor matter, nor is it unimportant to the Christian faith. If you reject Christ's clear teaching, you also reject Him. The true body and blood of Jesus **is the Gospel**, the power of God unto salvation (*Luther's Works*, vol. 36, p. 289).

WHEN YOU COME TO THE LORD'S SUPPER, TELL YOUR REASON TO REMAIN SILENT!

In an attempt to *make sense* of this divine mystery of Christ coming into you in His Supper, never permit your God-given reason to be misused by the devil. Instead, when you come to the Lord's Supper, force your reason to remain silent (2 Corinthians 10:5), and using God's gift of faith, simply trust your Lord's loving words: "This is My body ... This is My blood." Then you will be able to confess with Martin Luther:

Just as little as you are able to say how it comes about that Christ is in so many thousands of hearts and dwells in them ... SO ALSO HERE IN THE SACRAMENT, IT IS IN-COMPREHENSIBLE HOW THIS COMES ABOUT. But this I do know, that the Word is there: "Take, eat, this is My body, given for you, this do in remembrance of Me" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 36, p. 341).

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You miraculously come and dwell inside me through Your Word and Your gift of Holy Communion. By Your Holy Spirit, enable me to silence my reason and logic that they may not lead me into false belief. Enable me by the same Spirit to listen to Your Word and promises with the ears of faith. Amen.

Reprinted from Good News Magazine, Concordia Mission Society, St. Louis, Issue 22, c. 2005.

CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

2019 FLOWER CHART — A new flower chart for 2019 is posted. There are many opportunities to sponsor flowers for the altar. Please take a few moments to sign up for a special date. Remember, flowers are \$15.00 and the Ladies Aid would like them paid for when you sign up.

DECALS — Been noticing St. John window decals in the cars in the parking lot or around town? Want one for your vehicle/vehicles? There is no charge . . . just ask Patty Rohman or stop by the church office to get one.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT — St. John Lutheran has entered into an agreement with AuSable Valley Community Mental Health that allows them to use our facility for certain activities during the week. Part of this agreement is that our congregational members will keep confidential the names of people that are using our facility. Please observe this agreement by never mentioning the names of people that you may have seen. Also, remind others of this agreement if you hear of a visitor's name being mentioned. Thank you for your cooperation. Executive Council.

Reminder: There is a box in the Narthex for giving to the **Ogemaw County Clergy Association**. This money is collected hygiene items, for the purchase of food, personal home heating fuels, and funeral expenses for people in Ogemaw Country that are unable to afford these necessities. Make checks payable to Ogemaw County Clergy Assoc. Thank you!

EMERGENCY PRAYER REQUESTS — St. John has developed a system that allows us to rapidly contact all members when a life threatening situation develops, requiring immediate prayers. We are requesting cell phone numbers (for text messaging) or e-mail addresses for all members. For those who don't use e-mails or text messaging, phone calls will be made. Please request a salmon-colored form the office and return it when completed. Thank you.
