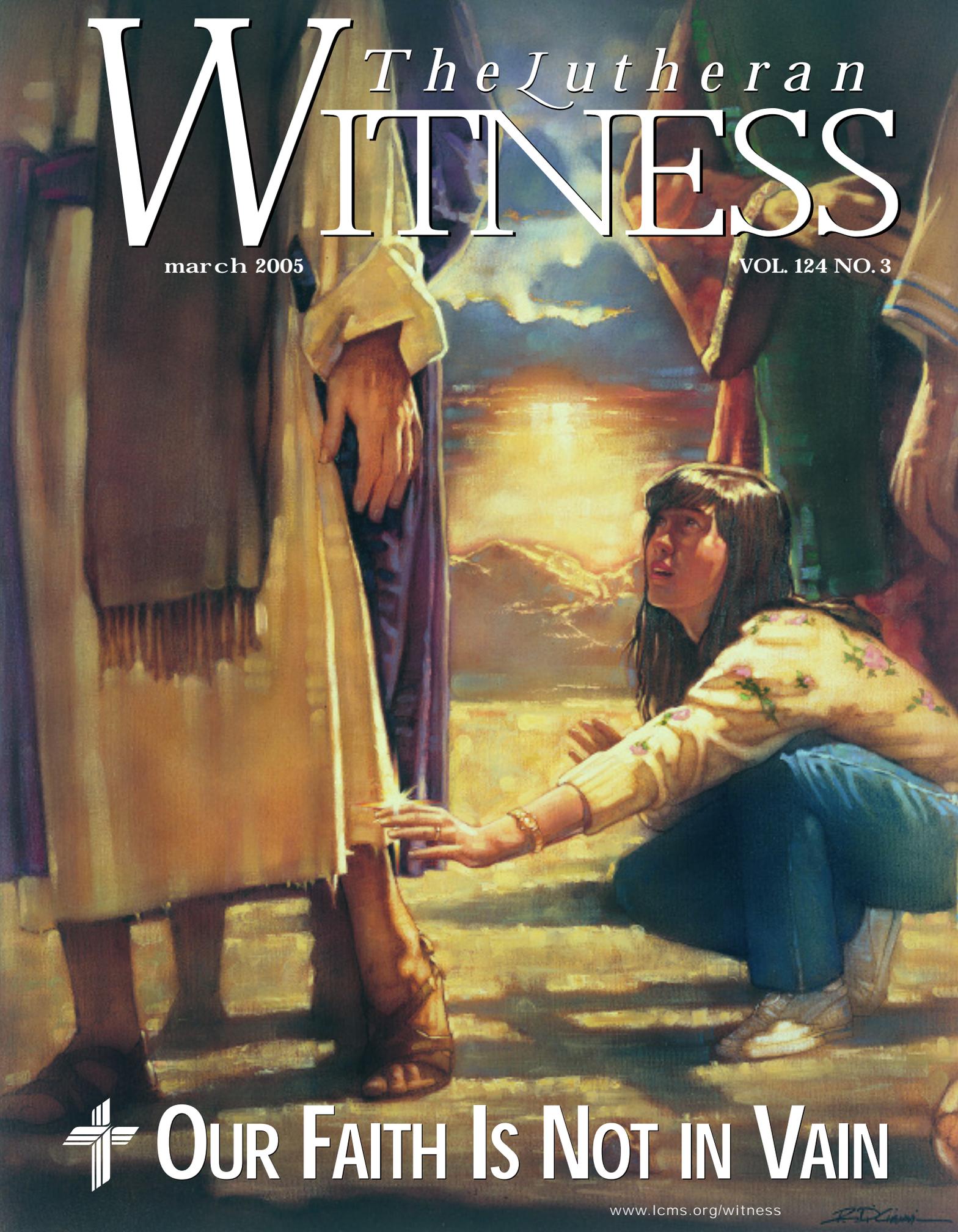


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OUR FAITH IS NOT IN VAIN



The Lutheran WITNESS

A Magazine for the laypeople of the Lutheran church — missouri synod

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March 2005

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God and science

The world is full of the miraculous wonders of God. But we can't possibly explain all of God's mysteries.

*Woody Keim
Baton Rouge, La.*

I COMMEND DR. JOHN GAULT FOR HIS article, which sticks to God's Word as the version of events for creation ("Science and God's Wondrous Works," Jan. '05). However, age-dating methods used for dating of more than several thousand years old are not "good science," because they do not follow the scientific method—they are not repeatable, observable science. Ask a scientist to prove a rock is a billion years old, then ask him to prove gravity exists by dropping the rock. Which follows the scientific method?

Look at the recent (and tragic) tsunami disaster, where islands moved 100 feet and water depths changed radically in one day. Weren't changes like that supposed to take millions of years?

*Mark Moe
Mounds View, Minn.*

THANK YOU FOR THE ARTICLE ON SCIENCE; I enjoyed the perspective. The discussion of "age" was insightful, but because limited space doesn't allow everything to be explained, it was incomplete. Missing was an explanation of what water does to the apparent ages of rocks.

Large quantities of water can dissolve the radioactive salts in the rocks that geologists use to determine the age of the rock, so they appear much older than they really are. This was demonstrated when dating rocks that formed when Mount Saint Helens erupted. If you take into account a worldwide flood, we should expect the rocks to appear, by modern dating methods, significantly older than they really are. But as Dr. Gault points

out, Holy Scripture is unchanging truth.

*Rev. Dale Critchley
Delaware, Iowa*

DR. GAULT SAYS THAT "ONE OF THE most fundamental laws of physics states that the physical laws do not change in time." I would add, not by themselves, but our omnipotent God can intervene any way He wants, if it is His purpose. I recall a couple of interventions—in Joshua 10 and 2 Kings 20.

*Cy Firgens
San Antonio, Texas*

SCIENCE WAS FOUNDED ON CHRISTIAN theology, but contemporary science and natural history have shifted to the shaky foundation of naturalism. It says God does not exist, that the position and motion of matter and energy is the cause of everything.

But we have the Word of God. Our constructions of history should not conflict with His witness. Most fossils were probably formed during Noah's flood.

*Denise Ewing
Bixby, Okla.*

GOD HAS TAKEN EXQUISITE CARE TO reveal Himself to us. And one of the revelatory categories is that He is a God of truth. He speaks the truth, and in His Son, He is the Truth—and the Way and the Life. Why then would God, who cannot, according to His own nature, deceive, deceive us by making an earth that seems one thing as regards its age but is another? That kind of "trickery" seems "out of character" for God.

*Rev. David Boyd
Fallbrook, Calif.*

THANK YOU TO DR. GAULT FOR PUTTING into words the belief that I have always had about God's marvelous creation. A loving God who can send to us His incarnate eternal Son through a virgin birth could surely make a mountain appear to be millions of years old. He could put in all of its layers of matter to bless us with all sorts of resources. He could also make a tree that appears to be 10 years old, a plant bearing seed as a one-year-old, and an adult animal capable of producing offspring.

As Psalm 150 states: "Praise him for his acts of power, Praise him for his surpassing greatness Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord."

*Elaine Nelson
Albert Lea, Minn.*

BEING A SCIENTIST (ENTOMOLOGY), I read with interest Dr. Gault's article. The article stated that God is indeed the Creator, but at times it sounded somewhat apologetic. Some comments:

Creation fits very nicely in my mind! If the idea of creation can't fit the mind of man, how in the world can the idea of God becoming man and suffering, dying, and rising again for the sins of all mankind possibly fit into the simple mind of man? The Holy Spirit, coming to us through Word and Sacrament, works this faith in us. Faith—it's all about faith!

"There is no scientific theory of creation," the article notes. Neither is there a scientific theory of evolution beginning with some kind of explosive event. Not one of the "theories" of origins is worthy of theory status—they are, at best, hypotheses. As Dr. Gault said, "The method of science can only function after all the 'stuff' of the universe has been created and the laws that govern it have been established." The scientific method cannot be applied to past events.

Any ideas involving past events are merely interpretations of what limited data is available to scientists. Some interpret such data from a naturalistic philosophy, while others, like myself, interpret data involving the past from a biblical/Christian philosophy. Again, I say, it's faith—it's all about faith.

*Dr. Ronnie Rivers
Winfield, Kan.*

Praying to saints

THE ANSWER IN THE JANUARY "Q&A" regarding prayer to the saints is puzzling to me. How can it be that if I ask my brother here on earth to pray for me, I do a good and appropriate thing, but if I ask my brother who is in heaven to pray for me, I "reduce the role of Jesus" and act "contrary to Christ's office as the sole mediator between God and man"?

*R. John Speckhard
Houston, Texas*

See the note following the next letter.—Ed.

"Q&A" CORRECTLY POINTED OUT THAT Christ—not any saint in heaven—is our only Intercessor. However, our Lutheran Confessions do acknowledge that the saints above (and angels) *on their own accord* continue to pray for us (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXI). This too often, it seems to me, is left out of the discussion.

*Rev. Robert Gentet
San Antonio, Texas*

The Apology adds, "Even if the saints do pray fervently for the church, it does not follow that they should be invoked. But our Confession affirms only this much, that Scripture does not teach us to invoke the saints or to ask their help. Neither a command nor a promise nor an example can be shown from Scripture for the invocation of the saints; from this it follows that consciences cannot be sure about such invocation."—Ed.

OUR FAITH IS NOT IN VAIN

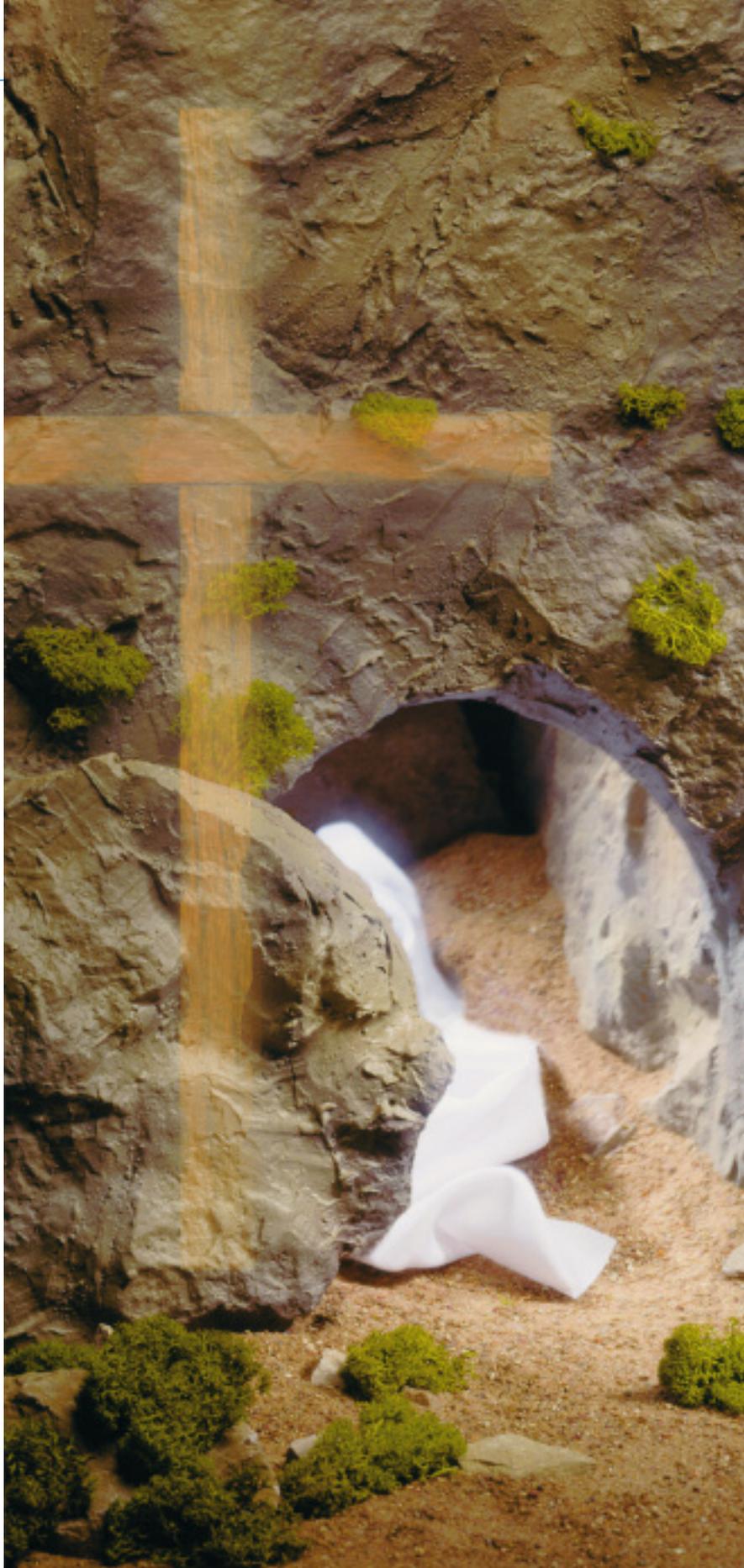
Easter assures us that our faith in Jesus Christ has substance and content; it is not futile. It is focused on God who has saved us—indeed, the only God who can save us.

by Andrew H. Bartelt

After 27 years working for the same company, Lillie Greene of Enfield, N.C., took her retirement and began investing it with a man she trusted. Today, more than \$100,000 of her money appears to be gone. And the man with whom she invested it is under investigation.

“I thought he had my best interest at heart,” Greene told her local newspaper. “He said it was safe.”

It appears that Lillie Greene is yet another victim of misplaced confidence. How quickly our lives can turn from fair-weathered security to frantic insecurity to futile helplessness while we were seeking peace and joy.



Can it be that sometimes also our faith can turn futile? Can our faith be misplaced, so that all the trust in the world may still turn out to be false and foolish? What do lives of faith—even before the true God—matter when disease and disaster suddenly wreak destruction?

The early Christians at Corinth might have thought they had it all together, safe and secure. Even Paul noted that they were “not lacking in any spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:7). Yet everything was coming apart. Divisions and quarrels divided them. Jealousy, strife, and even grievous sins of immorality had made their faith appear futile.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul seeks to bring focus out of this futility. He begins to focus on that which is most important, suggesting that the Christians there should not have come to believe “in vain”—or, said another way, “with no good cause and with no good purpose or effect.”

So what is the basis of our faith? And what is the purpose, the outcome, of our faith? Paul suggests an answer in verse 10, affirming that God’s grace toward him has not been “in vain.”

Purely out of God’s undeserved love, Paul had been brought face to face with the risen Christ. By grace, Paul had been commissioned by Christ Himself to be an apostle. By grace, Paul had “worked harder” for the mission of Christ. It was by grace that Paul was who he was.

No futility here! Paul’s life of faith had a solid basis, focused purpose, and brought forth results that were determined by the power of God.

In verse 12, Paul turns to the resurrection of the dead. He notes that “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (v. 14). Without the resurrection, his proclamation would have been useless, without basis,

and perhaps even untrue. And there would be no basis or content to our faith, either.

To be sure, Christ’s work of redemption was announced as “finished” through His atoning death on the cross, but it was the *resurrection* by which God announced absolution upon all sinners. Paul put it this way, that Christ was “delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

Content of our faith

The victory over death that is proclaimed on Easter confirms the meaning, content, purpose, and even result of our faith, which is now firmly placed in the crucified and risen Christ. Because of Him, our faith will not be in vain. To Paul’s concern that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins,” he affirms, “but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!” (1 Cor. 15:17, 20).

So what does the resurrection

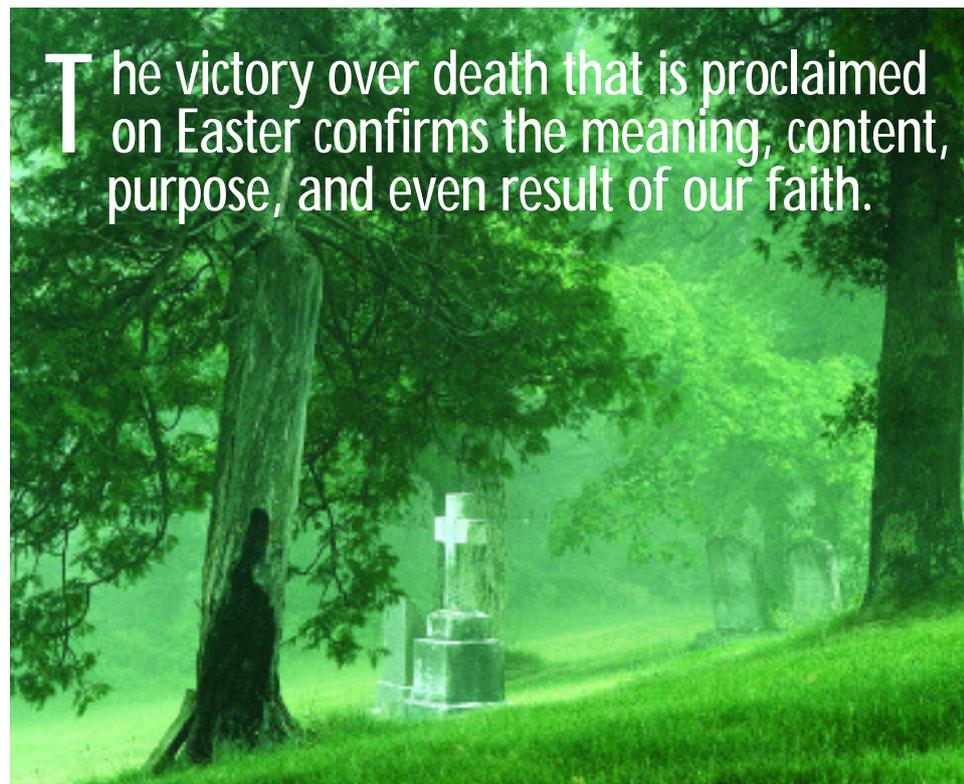
mean for *our* life of faith?

First, it means that our faith is focused on, and our trust is placed in the God who has truly saved us. This isn’t some bland or generic faith and hope in silver linings behind the clouds of darkness. This is a faith that is based on the very real life, death, and bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Son of God who has delivered on His promise and will stand behind our claim upon His work of redemption—His forgiveness and life—that is given to us by grace through faith.

There is content to our faith. It is focused on something real and true. It can be trusted, because Jesus can be trusted.

Only in Jesus

Second, not only is our faith rightly placed in the God of our salvation, it is focused on the *only* God who can actually save us. Faith, no matter how sincere, well-intentioned, or seemingly secure,



will prove to be futile if it is placed in anything other than the one true God. This is not a matter of choosing a good retirement strategy or investment broker, aware that some are better than others. This is a matter of trusting the *only* God who can save us. Indeed, He has already saved us!

Early sermons after Pentecost—we can read them in the book of Acts—almost always concluded with the exclusive claim that there is salvation only in Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified but risen. Peter asserted, for example, that a crippled man had been healed “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10). And then he goes on that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (v. 12).

The very mention of the resurrection was sure to bring controversy and questions. Indeed, the religious leaders were “much annoyed” at Peter and John, “because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead” (v. 2).

So also the Athenians responded to the proclamation of Paul at Mars Hill. “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘we want to hear you again on this subject’” (Acts 17:32). This claim, not only of the death of Jesus but especially of His resurrection, points to the unique and universal salvation in Jesus—and *only* in Jesus—for all humankind everywhere.

Within our culture of tolerance and pluralism, this claim often sounds exclusive and judgmental. But it is really a word of salvation and life, of faith and hope in the one God who is actually able to save. Indeed, no other god has ransomed and redeemed his people, saved them by grace, through faith, and

confirmed his salvation through Christ’s resurrection.

Unlike faith in any other god, our faith is not in vain.

What’s more, the resurrection is, as Paul also says in 1 Cor. 15:20, “the firstfruits of those who have died.” Because Christ is raised, so we too will be raised from the dead on the last day. The words of the burial rite are profound and powerful: “We now commit this body to its resting place, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of their resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But even now, those who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death and resurrection, already walking in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). This is much more profound than so-called “victorious living” that still focuses on the things of this world, as though God’s victory has to do with earthly success. Our Easter victory comes only after we have been joined by our sins to the shame of the cross, and having become dead to sin, we are made alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom.6:5–11).

New life; new focus

This doesn’t mean the rejection of all earthly blessings, but it does mean that we no longer put our faith and trust in them. It also means that the things of this world have been redeemed by Christ for the work of His kingdom. We are forgiven for misunderstanding and misusing our earthly “blessings,” and Paul reminds us that what is sown does not come to life unless it “dies” (1 Cor. 15:36). Our lives, our jobs, our family, our time, talents, and treasures—no matter how small or how great—are received in humble forgiveness and faith as we dedicate them to the new life in Christ Jesus.

The old life, and the world to which it seems so firmly

attached, will pass away. But in Christ, in whom we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), we have become new. God’s new age has come.

Our focus beyond the old way of life must certainly seem foolish to the wisdom of the world. But we can look past this old way of life with all of its attractions and attachments, and we can begin to live as those restored to God’s life and to God’s way of life. Whether we are touched by sadness or success, by failure or by fortune, our faith looks past it all, remaining firmly fixed on Jesus.

Paul wants to focus our lives on that which is most important. He didn’t naively look past the divisions and quarrels within the congregation at Corinth; in fact, he had some very hard and direct words to help sort things out. But this was not about any one faction, party, or position winning or losing; it was about the death and resurrection of Christ.

Other issues in our lives as God’s people are not unimportant, but sometimes we need to refocus on what is of *first* importance. Through Christ’s resurrection, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed ..., for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:51–56).

Because of Christ’s resurrection, our faith is not in vain!



Dr. Andrew H. Bartelt is professor of exegetical theology and vice president for academic affairs and executive assistant to the president at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

GOD IN THE MARKETPLACE

by Ben Eder

Consumers are faced with almost limitless choices in the marketplace. Years ago, there were only a few brands of toothpaste; today, each brand has an ever-growing number of options from which to choose. Some of us grew up with only three or four TV stations; now our families can choose from hundreds of channels from digital cable and satellite TV.

While Christianity is still the predominant faith in the United States, other choices compete with the saving message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: Islam, New Age cults, secularism, and other false faiths proliferate at an alarming rate.

How can we make Christ known in this age of “cafeteria-style” beliefs?

Let’s see what the apostle Paul did when faced with exactly the same scenario in Athens, the center of philosophy, the home of Pericles, Socrates, and Plato, where many religions were believed and many gods were worshipped.

First, read Acts 17:16–34. According to verse 16, what was Paul’s reaction when he saw the idols in the marketplace?

Rather than be angry or upset (as many of us would be), what did Paul choose to do (v. 17)?

How did some in the crowd respond to Paul’s words (v. 18)? Compare this verse with Jesus’ question to His disciples in Matt. 16:13–20. Who (or what) do people say Jesus is today?



Although some were skeptical about Jesus, others had an open mind and wanted to know more (v. 19–21). Do you feel comfortable discussing your faith with others? Why or why not?

Instead of openly denouncing false gods, Paul looks for common ground with his audience. How does he do this (v. 22–23)? How can you do this?

Although those in Athens with whom Paul was speaking express a desire to know and worship God, it is clear that they do not know Him. Read verses 25–30. What is the source of Paul’s testimony about God?

Having heard Paul’s Law and Gospel presentation, how did the crowd respond (v. 32)?

Paul’s proclamation was not without results. What were they (v. 34)?

We live in a time in which the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—remains unknown to so many, and not only in foreign lands, but in our neighborhoods and workplaces and families. The apostle Paul’s desire to find a way to make Christ known to those he met sets a good example for us to follow as well.



Rev. Ben Eder is pastor at Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kenmore, N.Y.



REMEMBER ^{THE} POOR

Almsgiving has always been part of the Christian life.

by Kenneth C. Wagener

Paul yearned to. The other apostles had asked him to. The Lord Himself had taught at some time during His earthly ministry, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Paul was eager to “remember the poor” (Gal. 2:10). Like others who had come to know the love and compassion of the Savior Jesus Christ, the man who once harbored deep hatred and bitterness in his heart now offered himself as a messenger of hope for the needy. Early Christians called this attitude and act of giving “alms.”

What are alms? The English word refers to money and other types of personal aid given to the poor as charity. In the early church, Christians who spoke Latin used the word *alimosina*, an altered form of the Greek word *eleemosune*, a gift or money given to the needy. (Our word “eleemosynary” today describes charity organizations or institutions that depend on charitable gifts.) The Lord Jesus used the word in His Sermon on the Mount: “When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do...” (Matt. 6:2–4). In describing the Roman centurion Cornelius, St. Luke notes “he gave generously to those in need” (Acts 10:2). Cornelius was a “devout man and God-fearing,” who prayed often and regularly contributed gifts to the poor (Acts 10:4).

Throughout the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament, the Lord and His disciples show genuine concern for the poor—those who have no money or resources to buy food or clothing and who often have no place to call home. In contrast to the larger society, which viewed the

underprivileged as “throwaways,” the church welcomed into fellowship and demonstrated care and compassion toward “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” (Luke 14:21).

Alms in the Bible

Giving to the poor has always characterized God’s faith-filled people. Because God had rescued Israel from slavery—extreme hardship and homelessness—in Egypt, He called His redeemed children to ease the burdens of poverty in their midst:

“If there is a poor man among

Throughout the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament, the Lord and His disciples show genuine concern for the poor.

your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs” (Deut. 15:7).

The Lord commands—and invites—His people to share His kindness and love with others, especially with the destitute. “Give generously to him,” Deuteronomy continues, “and do so without a grudging heart” (15:10).

For the Israelites, giving to the poor was a response of faith. God had saved them. God had provided for them. Now God was stirring their hearts to see the needs around them. And in His mercy, God promised to bless His people and prosper the work of their hands.

Over the years, however, the

The New Testament on Giving to Those in Need

Jesus:

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

Paul:

“If a man’s gift ... is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously... if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. ... Share with God’s people who are in need. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:8, 13, 21).

James:

“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good

seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical need, what good is it?” (James 2:1–4, 15–16).

John:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16–18).

—K. C. W.



Remember Zacchaeus?

Many Christians first learned the story of the “wee little man” from Jericho through the simple children’s song. Yet only St. Luke (in chapter 19) provides the Gospel truth about the conversion and new life of the wealthy and despised tax collector.

Zacchaeus made his living by intimidation and dishonesty. As a “chief tax collector,” Zacchaeus was likely a “mid-level” supervisor of tax revenues for Jericho and the surrounding region. He may have been a trusted official of the Jewish ruler or the Roman governor, responsible for collecting and remitting a variety of taxes, including the “head” or poll tax and land taxes. Perhaps he advanced up the ranks to attain his position. Two things are certain: he gained his wealth on the backs of the common people, and he was widely regarded in his community as a “sinner”—an outsider and unbeliever.

But when he met Jesus, Zacchaeus was changed. Such love and compassion for the lost—for Zacchaeus personally—moved the hardened tax collector to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. To demonstrate his faith and his desire to follow his new Master, Zacchaeus declared in the presence of all his dinner guests, “Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Zacchaeus remembered the poor. He remembered the individuals and families he had defrauded in the past. He put his faith to work, or as Paul says, his faith expressed itself through love (Gal. 5:6). Through his generous response to the grace of Christ, Zacchaeus helped to ease the burdens of the poor and destitute. Touched by His grace, too, we can share our blessings with those in need.

—K. C. W.

Israelites forgot the kindness and love of God. They turned away from His covenant. They despised His Word. They neglected His call to live in fellowship with one another, a fellowship that included the poor in their towns and villages.

The prophet Isaiah witnessed their hypocrisy and hollow worship. He observed how too many of his fellow Israelites went through the motions of their traditions without genuine repentance and faith.

Isaiah thundered God’s righteous judgment on the people:

**“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
To set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood.”**

(Is. 58:6–7)

By their selfish, uncaring attitudes and actions, the people of Israel had forsaken God’s command to serve one another in love.

Jesus came as the Servant of the Lord. His mission revolved around proclaiming the Gospel: “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me.” He announced in the synagogue at Nazareth, “because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). He also assured impoverished families and homeless men and women that the heavenly Father has loved and always will love His creation.



Every Wednesday, volunteers with Lutheran Community Services in Wilmington, Del., distribute bags of groceries to more than 100 hungry families, working right on the sidewalk. This is one of several ways they share God’s blessings with people in the community.

I care for you in your time of need, He encouraged the anxious and oppressed, for I have come to live for and with you, to experience your daily hardships and pain, and bear all your sorrows and grief. I understand your anguish in this world, and I willingly give My life for you, so that you may one day share My glory in heaven.

Jesus chose poverty for us, Paul later reminded the believers at Corinth. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). And because believers have been enriched in Christ in every way, we can be generous as we have opportunity to share our blessings, in gratitude to God.

Alms and today's Christians

Remember the poor! Christian congregations still give alms within their communities. Many churches have food pantries and regular collection boxes or baskets for canned goods, personal hygiene items, household necessities, and previously-owned clothing. These donations—gifts from the saints to aid the needy—provide a healthy witness to God's love in Christ toward all people. At different times of the year, churches gather special offerings for helping disadvantaged individuals and families in financial distress. These cash gifts, too, are modern alms at work to alleviate human suffering. Monetary support for homeless shelters, medical emergency funds, utility bills, and other basic needs show the compassion of the Savior through the Church, His servants in ministry in His name.

Yet almsgiving is more than a congregational initiative or program: Remembering the poor is a vital part of our individual calling in Christ. The Lord has claimed us in our Baptism.

By His grace He summons and empowers us to live as His followers in our different situations. He places us in families, homes, neighborhoods, and communities. He assigns us jobs and careers, daily work and responsibilities, and equips us to carry out our vocations—our callings. Though our situations differ, we share a common identity and purpose: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; quoted in Matt. 5:43, Luke 10:27, and Rom. 13:9). This calling applies to every Christian, Martin Luther noted in his "Table of Duties." In our everyday relationships, tasks, and decisions, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we have the privilege to reach out to others with an active love and hope rooted in a true, living faith.

At a time when Christians were routinely criticized, the Greek philosopher Aristides, a convert to the faith, wrote that Christians "love one another. They do not overlook the widow, and they save the orphan. He who has ministers ungrudgingly to him who does not have. When they see strangers, they

take him under their own roof and rejoice over him as a true brother, for they do not call themselves brothers according to the flesh but according to the soul."

Christians give quietly. We give willingly. We give generously, since our Lord has generously given to us.

Look for ways to help the poor in your calling. Ask your pastor or church leaders for opportunities to work with members of your congregation to give of your resources, time, and energy to assist those in need. Pray that the Lord will open doors for His people to see poverty in our midst and to be "openhanded" in our response.

I like Paul's attitude: "It's the very thing I was eager to do!" (Gal. 2:10).



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"You Will Always Have the Poor Among You"

Jesus immediately rebuked Judas Iscariot: "Leave her alone" (John 12:7).

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, wanted with all her heart to honor Jesus. At a dinner just before Jesus' passion, Mary knelt before the Master, opened a jar of pure nard, an expensive perfume, and poured it on Jesus' feet. She longed to show her gratitude for everything Jesus had done for her and her family.

But Judas was outraged. He demanded to know why the perfume wasn't sold and the money given to the poor. Though the thought may have been noble, the motive was anything but pure. St. John reveals Judas "did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it" (John 12:6).

In reply, Jesus recognized Mary's devotion as preparation for His burial—another indication of His upcoming death for the sins of the world. Yet Jesus also declared to His disciples, "You will always have the poor among you..."

Is the compassionate Lord unconcerned about the poor? Is Jesus now indifferent to the plight of the hungry and homeless? In this story from John 12, Jesus quotes or alludes to Deut. 15:11: "There will always be poor people in the land." His words simply affirm what God revealed long ago: because of the fall into sin, human beings will live with poverty and hardship in this world. All people suffer the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience: brokenness, alienation, and ultimately death.

Jesus is not suggesting or implying that His followers neglect helping the poor. In fact, the very next sentence of Deut. 15:11 reads, "Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." The Lord had often taught His disciples to care for and help the poor and needy.

Yet Jesus rebukes Judas for missing the deeper act of giving: His own gift of His body and blood on the cross for the life of the world. Mary believed her Lord. In faith, she honored His priceless sacrifice.

—K.C.W.

THE CHRIST AND THE TSUNAMI

by Matthew Harrison

I stood staring at miles of devastation beyond comprehension—beyond anything I’ve ever contemplated, much less beheld with my own eyes. The twisted wreckage of the passenger train “The Queen of the Sea” carried the stench of a thousand lives lost.

Why?

I had not known before of Pastor Ranjith Fernando, but I do now. When I visited Sri Lanka in January, I had to see the wreckage of the train in which he was traveling when the tsunami waves struck.

The first wave stalled the train. Hundreds made their way to the roofs of the rail cars to wait it out, only to have a second wave nearly 40 feet high hurl the train into a suburban neighborhood, leaving rail cars on rooftops. A thousand drowned, among them Ranjith, who had just translated the Lutheran Confessions into Sinhalese, and his wife.

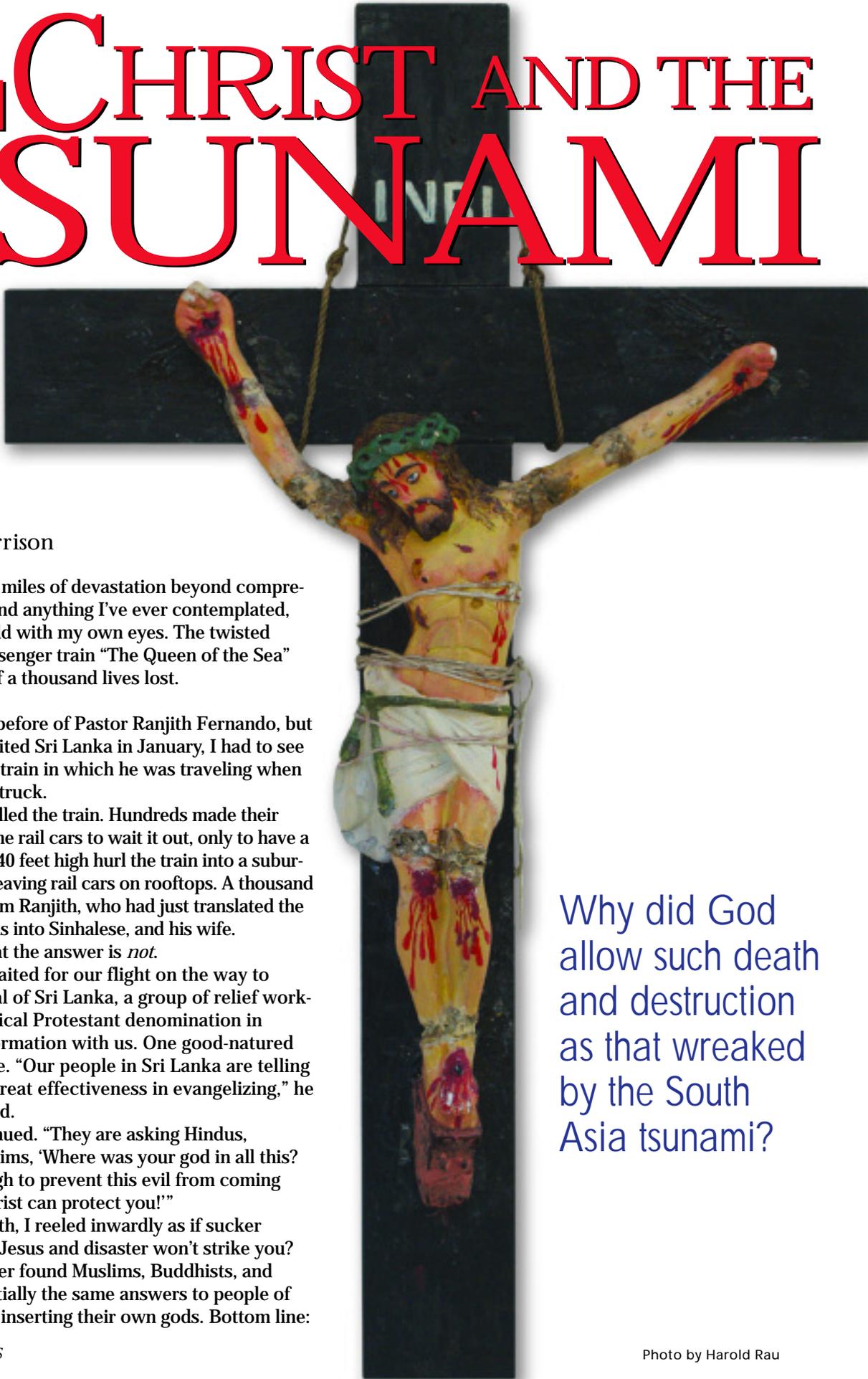
Why? I know what the answer is *not*.

In Paris, as we waited for our flight on the way to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, a group of relief workers from an evangelical Protestant denomination in America traded information with us. One good-natured man pulled me aside. “Our people in Sri Lanka are telling us they are having great effectiveness in evangelizing,” he said. I was interested.

“Yes ...,” he continued. “They are asking Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, ‘Where was your god in all this? Was he strong enough to prevent this evil from coming upon you? Jesus Christ can protect you!’”

Thinking of Ranjith, I reeled inwardly as if sucker punched. Believe in Jesus and disaster won’t strike you? How ironic that I later found Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus giving essentially the same answers to people of other faiths—albeit inserting their own gods. Bottom line:

Why did God allow such death and destruction as that wreaked by the South Asia tsunami?



This tsunami struck you; God struck you, because you had things wrong religiously.

I would rather confess with Martin Luther and the New Testament: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."

Would a benevolent God do this? Would an all-powerful God allow this? Is God then good? Is God then actually in control of the world He created? Is there a God? The only answers God gives us are in Christ and His cross.

Mark's gospel bears this out in a remarkable way:

At Jesus' baptism, the Father says from heaven, "My beloved Son. ..." Jesus is the Son of God. After that, no one in the gospel (aside from the demons!) gets Jesus right! Jesus healed the paralytic only to have the religious officials scoff, "Why does this man speak like that? Blasphemy!" The demons were sent out of a man and into pigs only to have the locals plead, "Go away!" Jesus was rejected by the people of Nazareth, "a prophet without honor in his own hometown."

Even the disciples didn't get it. Peter did seem to get it for a moment—"But thou art the Christ ..."—but when Jesus told them that being Christ meant going to the cross, Peter said, "No!" Then came Jesus' strongest rebuke: "Get behind me Satan." Jesus kept telling them that He would die, then rise in three days, but "they did not understand."

Then Holy Week. It began as the crowd sang His praise with palm fronds, symbols of Palestinian liberation. They got Jesus wrong, too. The high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the son of the blessed?" When Jesus answered, the priest tore his robe—"Blasphemy!" The crowd wanted His blood. "Crucify!" The soldiers mocked, "Hail, king of the Jews!" The passersby wagged their tongues, "Save yourself!" "Those who were crucified with him also reviled him."

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus prayed Psalm 22 as valedictory, and they got that wrong, too. "Behold, he's calling Elijah." They *all* got Jesus wrong ... all except one man: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).

Only when face to face with Christ hanging dead on the cross, does someone finally get it right. The Son of God came to suffer and to die for us. Though risen, He



W. Nehal Gamini, a Sri Lankan fisherman whose village was devastated by the tsunami, gives Rev. Matthew Harrison a crucifix that had been in his house. Today, the still-battered but somewhat repaired crucifix (left) hangs at the International Center of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Kirkwood, Mo.

ever remains the "crucified one" (1 Corinthians 1).

What does that mean for a tsunami? I don't finally know the mind of God. But I do know from the cross that God works His most profound deeds in suffering. And so I plunge my feeble mind into the suffering of Christ and know that amidst trials and crosses and disaster upon disaster, God *loves us* in Christ. And there, only there, I find consolation amidst the devastation. In faith, I know that resurrection follows Good Friday.

The women stood at a distance and watched Him die. Hopeless. The end. "God hates this Jesus ... and us," they may well have thought. Or perhaps even, "There is no God, or certainly no God who cares about us."

Yet right there, on Good Friday, God the Father was doing what He had prepared to do from all eternity for the salvation of the world. The most loving act of God in history was veiled and hidden by a bloody, wretched cross.

Where was God in this tsunami? Where He always is—in Christ, in suffering, in the cross.

Why did God allow it? I don't know. There is no Elijah or Jeremiah to tell us exactly. "In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son." I do know that in Christ, "God so loved the world. ..." And I do know that this tsunami is driving us—and many, many Asians—to the foot of the cross, to confess, "Truly, this man is the Son of God."

Now it's time to work and bind up those for whom Christ died.



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SEEING IS BELIEVING ...

The gospel of John tells this story of the first discovery of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave:

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

“So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but

that they themselves have not experienced, touched, or seen. Certainly something as difficult to believe or comprehend as the prophecy of Jesus that He would conquer death by rising from the grave must have been very difficult for His friends and followers to believe. Such return from death to life just doesn’t happen, does it?

Those of us who have lost loved ones to the clutches of death might hope and pray and long for the possibility of the return of those loved ones to life on earth even now, while we who mourn their passing are still alive. Although these loved ones are no longer living on earth, don’t you sometimes feel that it would be a blessing to be able to pick up the phone and call your father, or go by and have lunch with your mother, or see your young child who died all too young grow to adulthood? But a part of grieving is coming to grips with the reality that the bodily reunion with a loved one who has died will

It is our eternal hope in Christ, whose suffering and death have satisfied a righteous God, that enables us, though we have not seen, yet to believe that Christ is risen.

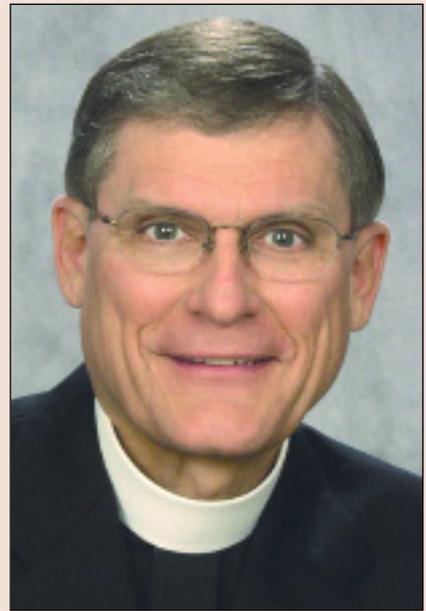
did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead)” (John 20:1–9).

We’ve often heard the statement “seeing is believing” from the lips of folks who find it quite difficult to believe what they’ve been told but

not happen until the time of the resurrection of the dead, when Jesus comes again—a truth that also brings us comfort and hope as we await that glorious day.

The disciples of Jesus had heard His prophecy. They knew Him more completely than anyone else. Yet John writes, “They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” That’s why Peter and John (“the other disciple”) did not believe that Jesus had risen until they saw the empty tomb and the burial cloth without the body it previously had enshrouded.

Those of us who call ourselves



Christians believe that which we have not seen. How do we know God created the world? How do we know Jesus rose from the grave? By believing in faith what the Bible tells us. While many people take great pains either to prove or to disprove these and other great miracles of biblical history, the truth remains that faith is a gift of God, given by the Holy Spirit through the communication of God’s truth in His holy Word and through His holy sacraments. Thanks be to God for this immeasurable gift!

Heb. 11:1 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It is our eternal hope in Christ, whose suffering and death have satisfied a righteous God, that enables us, though we have not seen, yet to believe that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

God’s grace, mercy, and peace be with you all!

Jerry Kieschnick

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

John 3:16 –17

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