Easter Isn't About Heaven

This may come as a surprise to you, but Easter isn't about heaven. Jesus didn't rise from the dead so that you could die and go to heaven. Does that mean that Christians who die don't go to heaven? No. The souls of Christians who die are taken to be with Jesus in heaven, but that's not why Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus has far bigger reasons for rising from the dead. He had His eyes set on a much bigger prize than our bodiless existence. To understand what we need to understand the heart of Old Testament theology.

In Genesis 1 and 2 God speaks His creation into existence. Repeatedly He declares it "good," and then on the seventh day He deems it all "very good." But through Adam's sin the creation was cursed and was, as Paul says in the New Testament, "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20). In Noah's flood God laid the creation waste, but ensured that it was not totally annihilated by preserving humanity and animals on Noah's ark. And at various times throughout the Old Testament God promised to renew His creation. Isaiah writes about the elimination of death in chapter 25, about the renewal of the animal kingdom in chapters 11 and 65, and about the restoring of the earth in chapter 65. The consistent message of the Old Testament is that God cares for His creation. At no point did He ever give up on it.

The same holds true in the New Testament. St. Peter and St. John both write of the coming new earth. We need to understand that the "new" earth of which they write isn't an earth totally new in kind (as in never known before), but an earth superior in kind, an earth refreshed and renewed. The New Earth will be this earth made more real, more fresh, more alive, and more vibrant. Paul writes about the renewal of creation in Romans 8:

> The creation itself waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (v. 19-21).

In other words, the entire cosmos is waiting on the edge of its seat for the day when God will raise the dead and renew all things. The message of the Bible is consistent: God has never and will never give up on His creation. God will renew, restore, and redeem it.

Jesus' resurrection fits into this hope. It is God's new creation breaking into this fallen creation. It is the in-breaking of the Last Day resurrection and renewal into the present day. That means Jesus' resurrection is the future itself crashing into the present and showing us in living color what we're looking forward to. Our great, high hope isn't to die and go to heaven. Our great, high hope is to rise bodily and see heaven come to this earth.

That means salvation is exponentially bigger than souls going to heaven. Salvation involves the restoration of creation and the resurrection of our bodies. And that means that when our lives are joined to Christ through Baptism we are invited into God's new creation even now. We build for the new creation *now*. What we do here doesn't die when we die; it endures into the new creation. That's how Paul can say at the end of his great resurrection chapter in 1 Corinthians 15, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." In other words, we're not simply living until we die and go to heaven. We're living until we live forever in our resurrected bodies on this renewed earth. Since we have been brought into God's new creation, we live to build for that new creation now. And that means Easter is far bigger than heaven for souls. Easter is God's new creation foothold on this fallen creation – His invitation to enter and live for the new creation, the New Earth, even now. Thanks be to our risen Savior! Alleluia!

After enjoying its run atop the *New York Times* bestseller list, *Heaven is for Real* is headed for the big screen just in time for Easter 2014. If you aren't familiar with the story, it's about a sincere, Bible-believing Christian family living in small-town Nebraska. The main character, four-year-old Colton Burpo, suddenly finds himself headed into surgery for a ruptured appendix. His life hangs in the balance. His pastor-father desperately prays for a miracle while his anxious mother urgently contacts family and church members to pray. For a while things look very bad, but God spares young Colton's life. The family welcomes him home with tears of joy and gratitude to God.

But strange things start happening. Colton starts talking about seeing people and knowing things of which he should have no knowledge. He not only claims to have had an out-of-body experience in which he saw his father and mother praying during his surgery, but he claims to have been to heaven and seen Jesus – and the Father and the Spirit. He also says that he saw his sister who had died before birth (who his parents hadn't told him about), his great-grandfather (who he had never met), and John the Baptist. Further, he says there were animals there, colors we've never seen, people with light above their heads and wings on their backs that allowed them to fly. Colton's simple message to his family and to the thousands that read the book and will see the film: Heaven is real.

It's a gripping story that inspires hope and promotes heaven. So, who could object to that? It isn't easy to write this – but it's not quite that simple. Christians need to take a closer look. First, let's be clear that we're not objecting to the sincerity of the Burpo family's faith. The entire family appears to be a walk-the-talk Christian family, the kind all of us would be blessed by knowing. Further, we aren't objecting to Colton's experience. No one is in a position to deny its realness. Could he have seen Jesus? Yes. Could he have met his sister and great-grandfather? Yes. Could his story draw people closer to God? Yes.

So what concerns exist – why must we exercise discernment in reading the book or seeing the movie? Three reasons:

1. Experience is crowned king.
2. Personal testimony distracts from the prophetic and apostolic testimony.
3. The hope with which readers/viewers are left is anemic. It doesn't tell the whole story.

Experience is crowned king.

I don't have reason to doubt that Colton had a remarkable experience. We do, however, have the responsibility as a discerning Christian to interpret all of reality Biblically. A person's experience may be incredibly powerful – but a person's experience is secondary to Scripture. If we want to know what Heaven is like, we don't turn to experience (our own or others'); we turn to the Bible. If we were to allow experience to become king, we would soon discover a battlefield of competing experiences vying for supremacy. Consider but a handful of the recent books on people's experiences of Heaven:

- *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*
- *90 Minutes in Heaven*
- *To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again*
- *My Journey to Heaven: What I Saw and How it Changed My Life*
- *Clinically Dead: I've Seen Heaven and Hell*

All of these were published after *Heaven is For Real*, which is only four years old! Every author claims to be recounting what Heaven is like. What if they

contradict one another? Which one should we believe?

As I said before, I don't doubt that every one of these authors had an experience, perhaps even of Heaven. Further, I'm not questioning the faith of any of these authors. They may, like the Burpos, be genuine, Bible-believing, God-glorifying people. Our concern must be over the place experience has in certainty of God and Heaven. Certainty is found in the revealed Word of God not in fallible people. If we want to know what Heaven is like, we turn there.

Personal testimony distracts from the prophetic and apostolic testimony.

"Giving your testimony" has become standard fare in modern evangelical church culture, so much so that few ever question the wisdom of the practice. Certainly it's possible to be encouraged by another's personal testimony, as many are sure to be by Colton's heaven-is-for-real testimony, but the multiplying of personal testimonies quickly distracts everyone from *the* testimony of the prophets and apostles. We, as believers, all too quickly find ourselves dwelling on the latest personal testimony and what it might tell us about what God is doing and what He's like, and not on the Spirit-breathed testimony of God's chosen prophets and apostles.

As a result, we are easily led astray by personal-testimony-giving charismatics claiming to receive direct revelations from God. A quick sampling of America's most popular preachers reveal as much: Steven Furtick, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, and T.D. Jakes (one of the producers of *Heaven is for Real*). All claim direct revelations from God and all distract from the written testimony of the prophets and apostles. It may be hard to admit, but we tend to gravitate toward the latest excitement, the latest spiritual "upper" that will give us the jolt we need to keep our faith excitement up. Lost in the excitement is the testimony of the prophets and apostles who announce the coming of God's Kingdom in Christ and His Gospel (given in His Word and Sacraments).

Further, the unspoken dark side of personal testimonies is the feeling of inadequacy and insufficiency it produces in hearers' faith. Testimonies that continually direct our attention to the amazing things God did in another's personal life, while initially encouraging, inevitably lead to questions of God's working in our lives. Why doesn't God act in my life? Why doesn't He give me a sign of His love? Is my faith real? Lasting comfort and hope, however, are found in testimony that consistently points us to Christ and the certainty of His actions for us in the cross, the font, and the altar.

The hope with which readers/viewers are left is anemic.

Heaven is for Real leaves its readers/viewers with the belief that our greatest hope as Christians is "to die and go to Heaven." Let me make sure we understand: The great promise the Bible announces isn't that Christians will "die and go to Heaven" (although our souls will go to be with God in Heaven upon the death of our bodies). The great promise the Bible proclaims is that Jesus will return and raise our bodies from the dead so that we can live eternally with Him and all the redeemed on the New Earth. *Heaven is for Real* leaves us with the impression that our bodies and this earth don't matter, as if our great hope is to leave it all behind for an eternal non-physical existence. The Bible, however, speaks of the renewal of the cosmos and of the physicality of our resurrected bodies.

Further, *Heaven is for Real* makes it sound like death is our friend because it allows us to leave our bodies and world behind. The Bible never speaks of death as our friend. Death is our enemy and it is one that Jesus will one day finally overthrow. This is what we celebrate in Easter.

If you choose to read or watch *Heaven is for Real*, wear your discernment glasses. Remember, the true story is told in Scripture and its message is far bigger: God's Kingdom is real; it has come, it is coming and you will see its fullness in your resurrected body when Jesus returns to renew the cosmos.

MINISTRY APPS—Zion Lutheran
Applying the Gospel to Family, Community and into the World
"I Promise!"

Promises are at the heart of our relationship with God and relationships in the family. The couple stands before God on their wedding day and promises to one another "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer . . . according to God's holy will." Blessed with children, the couple stands at the baptismal font and promises to "support them in their ongoing instruction and nurture in the Christian faith." Nurtured in the faith of their baptism, the child promises as a confirmand that they "intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed remain true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even to death." While a few promises are public, most are lived and kept in the routines of life. God's ultimate promise to promise-keepers is "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

April is a time of promise remembrance and celebration:

April 2—Lenten Midweek Worship where the broken promises of Peter (Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75) are heard and the gracious response of the Suffering Savior is shared.

April 20—Jesus promised that He would come out of the tomb after three days (Matthew 27:40). We celebrate that Jesus' resurrection validates all His promises.

April 27—The confirmation class makes a public confession of their faith and states their promise to be faithful to Christ and His church. Midweek classes conclude for the year on April 23 (an evening of public witness for the confirmands).

Strong and faithful families hear God's promises and by God's grace remain faithful to the promises that are made to Him and to others.

A Promise Place—Zion Sunday School Classrooms

Zion is blessed with a team of Christ-connecting, child-celebrating Sunday school teachers. Sunday school classes will continue each Sunday through May. Zion is blessed with an abundance of little children in the preschool through kindergarten classes. Parents, it is important that your children regularly attend the Sunday morning classes through high school (and adults are invited too). Christian parents promise to nurture the faith of their children. VBS 2014 will be great! We promise!

Children of the congregation and community are invited to the "**International Spy Academy"** where they will discover how to be agents for the one true God. VBS week will be the mornings of **June 2-6.** Children ages 4 through grade 7 may be enrolled. Many volunteers will again be needed. Put it on your family calendar. Share the date and opportunity with your children, grandchildren, and neighborhood friends.

The C-3 planning committee promises a special community celebration of Christ on Sunday evening, June 8. Mark your calendar.

Rev. Bob Riggert, Assistant to the pastor

Easter Sunday • April 20th • 7:00 a.m.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Mark the date and get up early to celebrate the resurrection of Christ our Lord.

Children (members and guests) are encouraged to participate in the opening parade of lilies and flags. They will gather in the fellowship hall 10 minutes before the service begins.

Confirmation Dates:

Question and Answer Night
Wednesday, April 23
@ 6:00 p.m.

Confirmation Sunday
April 27

Celebrate the public profession of these young people's faith!

Unmarried Cohabitation: Why Not? [Straight Talk with the Confirmands]

A few weeks ago the question of cohabitation (living together without marriage) came up in confirmation. Many of the confirmands had some sense that it wasn't ideal, but, because unmarried cohabitation is the norm in our culture, they struggled to understand why it wasn't acceptable.[1] And given that many in their family have or are cohabiting, it was an emotionally sensitive question. In answering their question, we defined 1) what marriage was (the lifelong union of man and woman for the express purposes detailed in Scripture: procreation, one-flesh union, and mutual delight) and 2) when marriage begins (when a man and woman make their public promise before God and witnesses to enter into marriage). Anything else isn't marriage.

Cohabitation involves no public promise before God and witnesses. Typically, couples slide into it and slide out of it. "But what about engaged couples?" the confirmands asked. Engaged cohabitation is really no different. Engagement involves a promise, but it's only a promise to eventually make a promise before God and witnesses. This is difficult to write, and I know that MANY will direct their disapproval at me with epitaphs of "judgmental," "close-minded," "uncaring," and more, but the truth of the matter is that unmarried cohabitation is nothing more than telling lies with our bodies. We can dress it up however we want to. We can justify it with any number of reasons, but the fact remains: It's not marriage. It acts like marriage. It enjoys the gifts of marriage, but it's not marriage. It's a lie.

"But," the students offered, "it's more economical." There's no debating the reality of the savings afforded by one house/rent payment versus two. Unmarried cohabitation might save couples money. So to answer their question I excitedly told them that I had found a way to slash my grocery bills to almost nothing. I explained that feeding five kids was getting expensive so I had spent quite a bit of time thinking up a plan to cut costs and had finally come up with a plan. They were eager to learn my secret. I told them, "I'm going to steal my groceries. That's way cheaper than buying them." Immediately they countered, "You can't do that! It's wrong and illegal." So I said, "What if it wasn't illegal?" They said, "It's still wrong." So I asked them, "What's the difference then between cutting grocery bills by stealing and cutting rent bills by living together? Do cost savings make either one of them right?" We all know better. There's simply no way to make unmarried cohabitation not sin. It might save money. It might be what most people do today. It might look more pleasant than other sins. But Christ doesn't call us to die to unattractive sin; Christ calls us to die to all sin. No matter how popular unmarried cohabitation is, it remains sin that is opposed to God's order.

Before we wrapped up our discussion, we needed to clarify that God wasn't simply being a killjoy. In clearly defining marriage, God is establishing walls of protection for husbands and wives to joyfully receive the gifts He wishes to give them in marriage. Alternative arrangements settle for too little. This is what lies behind the Church's disapproval of unmarried cohabitation. The Church isn't trying to squelch the happiness or pleasure of unmarried couples; the Church is concerned to preserve the greater joys and pleasures that God gives to marriage. Further, the Church is concerned to honor God's created intentions for marriage, understanding that the children God gives to marriage benefit most from fathers and mothers who live in line with God's order. Want to talk more about this? Come visit with me. – Pastor Conner

[1] Since 1960 the number of unmarried cohabiting couples has increased seventeen-fold. More than 60 percent of first marriages are preceded by cohabiting relationships (a practice that has been found to increase the rate of divorce). You can read a thorough study of the state of our unions here: http://www.stateofourunions.org/2011/social_indicators.php

The Gift of Pleasure

We worship a God of gifts. We daily recognize many of them: family, church, friends, clothing, home, and food. Some, however, we enjoy without fully appreciating their source in God. As such, we too easily forget the need to steward them well. Among the greatest gifts from God that we regularly overlook and fail to steward well is pleasure. Consider but a few pleasures that we may have recently received from God:

- The embracing warmth of steaming soup upon escaping the blistering winter wind
- The delicious spring heat and the exhilarating rushing cataracts of icy melting snow
- The delicate brush of affectionate fingers across a spouse's hand.
- The gut-cramping joy of a prolonged belly laugh
- The heaven-glimpsing harmonies that echo in soaring symphonies of hope
- The guilt-drowning gulp of Christ's blood received in His Supper

These are good gifts of God, and like all gifts, must be stewarded well. Unfortunately, pleasure and God, especially religion, have been pitted against one another in recent years. Pleasure and Church are viewed as incompatible. Philip Yancey writes in his insightful book *Soul Survivor*, "Evil's greatest triumph may be its success in portraying religion as an enemy of pleasure when, in fact, religion accounts for its source: every good and enjoyable thing is the invention of a Creator who lavished gifts on the world."

The message of Christianity isn't opposed to pleasure. Quite the contrary! Christianity offers greater joys and deeper delights. It was St. Paul who reminded us that God "provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Pleasure is at the heart of Christianity. The Scriptures burst with promises of joy, dancing, feasting, laughing, rejoicing, and celebrating. These promises are ours in Christ!

But, as with all gifts, poor stewardship of them can turn them into burdens. The good pleasures that God gives must be received in the good context in which God gives them. This requires self-control. Ravi Zacharias explains:

> All pleasure must be bought at a price. The difference between illegitimate and legitimate pleasure is this: For legitimate pleasure, the price is paid before it is enjoyed. For illegitimate pleasure, the price is paid after it is enjoyed. Turning aside from instant gratification is one of the most difficult things to do. But this is where the battle is often won or lost. The strength of our will – and this is crucial – surrendered either to God or ourselves – reveals the character we possess, and the strength of our will determines when the price is paid. It is the submission of our will to God that protects us from illicit pleasure, so that we may fully enjoy those which are legitimate. When that distinction is made and honored, life becomes a delight.

When we rightly order our pleasures, Christianity is a religion of delight. When, however, we fail to order our pleasures in line with the Giver's intentions, we can quickly find our pleasures empty, even laden with guilt and remorse. This is a lesson we must all learn. Again Zacharias offers counsel: "Any pleasure that refreshes you without diminishing you, distracting you, or sidetracking you from the ultimate goal is a legitimate pleasure." Pleasure is God's gift, and when received in line with His order, it is a cause for great joy and gratitude. May we receive it with joy and thanksgiving and then steward the gift well. – Pastor Conner

Holding Your Family Together

Two months ago we introduced five simple steps to help you hold your family together (listed below) (from *Holding Your Family Together*). Last month we explored Step 1 (Sharing) in depth. This month we address Step 2 (Reading).

Family Faith Practice 2: Read

After you've "called the huddle" and shared your highs and lows for the day, it's time to transition into Family Faith Practice #2: reading a Bible verse, story, or teaching text. In chapter 17 of his Gospel, St. Matthew records the transfiguration of Jesus. He describes Peter, James, and John seeing Moses (the representative of the Law) and Elijah (the representative of the Prophets) talking with Jesus, who has been transfigured and is radiating light. Suddenly they are overshadowed by a bright cloud from which God speaks, "This is my Son, my beloved one. Hear Him." The apostles fall to the ground in terror only to be told by Jesus to stand up and stop fearing. When they looked up, Matthew says, "They saw no one but Jesus only." The point? If you want to know the heart, will, mind, and word of God, you listen to Jesus.

Share the highs and lows of your day.

Read a Bible verse or story.

Talk about how the Bible reading relates to your highs and lows.

Pray for one another's highs and lows.

Bless one another.

That listening begins in the Divine Service where we gather as the church to hear the Word read, taught, and proclaimed. In the Divine Service we hear the story of God and are invited to enter into it through the Baptismal font and Altar. There God brings us in and sustains us in His story of creation, fall, and redemption. There he teaches us how to see the world rightly and how think about life, love, culture, money, sex, politics, family, death, and eternity.

In many ways the church functions as the hub of a bike wheel with its members being the spoke beads that come and go. As we start our weeks we all gather together to read and hear God's Word. As the week turns into Monday, Tuesday, and so on, we, the spoke beads, slide out into our vocations. As our week ends, we again gather with the church to hear the saving story of God again.

The Family Faith Practice of reading from Scripture grows out of the church's practice of reading the Scripture. It may be helpful, then, to use the church's readings to guide your family reading throughout the week. Read the texts and go deep with them throughout the week. Or, subscribe to the sermon by email and read and discuss it throughout the week. Don't let the fear of not understanding the Bible keep you from reading it as a family. Mastery of any skill in life takes practice – you didn't learn to ride your bike by keeping it parked in your garage. The Bible is no different. The pieces will only fit together for you and your children if you make a habit of reading it every day (or as close to every day as possible).

Further, if you recall last month's discussion on neuroplasticity, you'll remember how vital the regular repetition of an action is for getting it to stick. Dr. Rich said,

> Your brain tends to develop "grooved pathways" that favor those habits you feed and nurture the most. The earlier you get started in a habit, the easier that habit is to imprint, and the longer it will last.

A little later he added,

> Baby nerve cells that receive and retrieve sensory instructions and act on those instructions will strengthen if those instructions are repeated soon after the initial input. If repeated often enough, they will link to more neurons, forming whole networks devoted to the new thinking, skill or movement. With practice, these rapid-fire connections strengthen, get more efficient in firing, and grow an even thicker and more connected network.

If you have children in the home, the time to start reading God's Word to them is NOW! The earlier and oftener you read the Word, the earlier their brains begin to cut grooved pathways, pathways they will be able to follow their entire lives! The world is not remaining idle. Every day the world streams its message through a plethora of media outlets. The grooves are being cut. The world is tattooing its stories on your children's brains (and yours). To counter the wave you need to begin every week in the hub of your existence, the church, and then continue the hard work of being the church in the Word throughout the week.

Numerous wonderful resources exist to help you in your evening reading. Here are but a few to consider:

1) ***The Story Bible***
   My family has been blessed by this wonderful resource that highlights 130 of the Bible's historical accounts. Each story is illustrated with life-like images and questions to get conversation flowing. (And right now Zion has a renewed stock of them available for $20!)

2) ***My First Catechism***
   This helpful resource pairs a Biblical story with each of the Catechism's six chief parts and helps kids grasp the concepts being expressed. My family used this little resource until the pages fell out.

3) ***The hymnal***
   Not only is the hymnal loaded with many and diverse Biblically-founded, Christ-centered hymns that span continents and generations, it has several helpful resources for families, including a variety of family prayer services, a daily lectionary (reading plan), prayers for specific occasions, and *The Small Catechism*. This has been a regular resource for family devotions.

4) **The Bible**
   Reading through the entire Bible is an accomplishment you'll never forget and a memory your children will treasure throughout their lives. Numerous reading plans are available online. Dr. Rich highlights a chronological reading plan that he has found helpful. You can find it here: http://www.ezraproject.net/products.html.

5) **The sermon**
   Preparing a sermon usually takes a minimum of 10 hours (anything less results in shallow preaching). If you only hear it once, you are giving yourself (and your children) 15-25 minutes to fully comprehend the truths that took 10+ hours to compile. What if you received the sermon via email and read it and discussed it throughout the week? Imagine the grooved pathways you could cut in your child's brain (and yours) after dwelling on the message several times throughout the week.

When you connect this Family Faith Practice to your highs and lows (of Faith Practice Step 1), you give your children a gift that will last their entire lives. Dr. Rich explains,

> If you introduce your children to the practice of sharing highs and lows, reading God's Word, and then applying that Word to their highs and lows, you will be giving them a tool that will bless their lives. You will be teaching them to see the positive, to be honest about the negative, and to concentrate together on healthy solutions and resolutions.

Start your Family Faith Practices tonight!

Counterpoint

Countering falsehoods with facts for the sake of life

Last month for our *counterpoint* focus we countered the false claim that abortion was acceptable because we don't know when life begins. The truth is that we do know and this knowledge requires us to respect it and protect it, not abort it. After last month's article was published, this issue came up again in a significant way. Cecil Richards, the president of Planned Parenthood (the organization that has killed the most babies in the U.S.), was interviewed by Jorge Ramos on Fusion TV. Her comments were as stunning as they were obfuscating. It's important that we know how to offer a reasoned response. A portion of that interview is recorded below.

Jorge: "For you, when does life start? When does a human being become a human being?"

Cecil: "This is a question that I think will be debated through the centuries and people will come down with very different points of view."

Jorge: "But for you, what's that point?"

Cecil: "It's, I mean, it's not something that I feel like is part of this conversation. I mean, to me, we work with women… I guess the way I'd really like to a… I think every woman has to make her own decision. What we do at Planned Parenthood is make sure that women have all their options for health care and that they have the option to have a healthy pregnancy, they have an option to put a child up for adoption if they decide to carry a pregnancy to term, or they have a right to make to make a decision to terminate a pregnancy."

Jorge: "But why would it be so controversial for you to say when do you think life starts?"

Cecil: "Well, I don't know if it's controversial. I don't know that it's really relevant to the conversation, but for me I'm a mother of three children. For me life began when I delivered them. They've been probably the most important thing in my life ever since, but that's my own personal decision.

As we hold Mrs. Richard's comments up to the light of reason, it's important that we remember why we do so. Our goal is not to demean Mrs. Richards. Despite our profound disagreement with her worldview, she remains an individual created in the image of God for whom Christ has died. Rather, our goal is to honor God by speaking truth into a world deceived by lies. Further, we have a responsibility to the well-being of our neighbor. The unborn is our neighbor and he needs us to speak up for his well-being. His life is being sacrificed because of the lies being perpetuated by people like Mrs. Richards and Planned Parenthood.

With that said, let's examine Mrs. Richards's words. She was asked when life begins, when a human being becomes a human being. How did she answer? She didn't. Her first response was an attempt to deflect the question by appealing to the fact that people have different points of view. While it may be true that people have different points of view, it doesn't mean that the different points of view are all right. The fact is that science (not to mention theology) has shown us when life begins: at conception. There is simply no debate on this and Mrs. Richards certainly knows this. Admitting this, however, would cast Planned Parenthood in a negative light because it would show their willing disregard for life in the womb and their true ideology that only "wanted life" deserves to live.

Mr. Ramos persisted, "But for you, what's that point?" This was a reasonable question. If people have different points of view, it is certainly fair to ask Mrs. Richards what her point of view was. How did she answer? She said that the question of life's beginning wasn't "part of this conversation." But that was the whole point of the conversation! As the

president of an organization that "terminates" over 300,000 "pregnancies" every year, wouldn't the question of what's being terminated seem to be part of the conversation? Why would Mrs. Richards insist that it's not important?

After dismissing the question as unimportant, Mrs. Richards went back to the standard abortion euphemisms that are intended to keep questions such as Mr. Ramos's at bay. She spoke of a woman's "decision" and of ensuring that women have "all their options for health care" including having a "healthy pregnancy," putting a child "up for adoption," or to "terminate a pregnancy."

In previous newsletters we've addressed the "health care" euphemisms. Abortion is not health care. It doesn't promote health and it certainly isn't caring. Abortion is bad for mothers (physically and psychologically) and abortion kills the unborn! But Mrs. Richards washed over that by including abortion under "health care." Sadly, despite pretending to fairly present the many "health care" options, 94% of their options end in abortion. In fact, Planned Parenthood performs 149 abortions for every 1 adoption referral.[2]

Further, she strategically used the phrase "terminate a pregnancy" as if an abortion merely ended an unwanted condition. Abortion does more than end the condition of pregnancy; abortion kills the child with whom the mother is pregnant.

As an aside, it's interesting that this same terminology is used to market "emergency contraception." These drugs are marketed as contraception that doesn't "terminate a pregnancy." Sadly, the definition of pregnancy was changed several years ago from the point of conception to the point of implantation (when the fertilized embryo implants in the mother's uterus). "Emergency Contraception" (such as Plan-B and Ella)[3] are designed to keep an egg from being fertilized and to reduce the likelihood that a fertilized egg will implant. Be sure you understand that. Keeping a sperm from fertilizing an egg is contraception (acting against conception). Preventing a fertilized egg from implanting is abortion.

Returning to Mrs. Richards's interview, Mr. Ramos persisted in his line of questioning asking why it was controversial to say when life starts. In other words, he was politely asking her why she was repeatedly avoiding the question. Again, Mrs. Richards downplayed the importance of the question, claiming it to be irrelevant. She then proceeded to discuss her three children and offered these stunning words, "For me life began when I delivered them." Mrs. Richards has suggested that children don't have life until they are born (at least not life with any value deserving of legal protection)! In the side-by-side pictures below you can see a 4D ultrasound taken before birth and a picture taken shortly after birth. Mrs. Richards is suggesting that the picture on the left depicts a child without life, at least a child without value or inherent worth. But what is the difference between this child before birth and after? He's the same child. Does he only gain inherent worth after birth? Mrs. Richards is suggesting this. And she's suggesting that killing this child in utero would be a healthy part of a woman's health care.

No matter how politically incorrect it may be, life begins at conception, and because that life is human life, it is the life of our neighbor, whom Jesus called us to love. The unborn are our neighbors, and out of obedience to Christ, we are called to love them. We begin to do that by countering falsehoods with facts for the sake of life. – Pastor Conner

[2] http://liveactionnews.org/planned-parenthood-receives-1-5-million-a-day-in-taxpayer-funding/

[3] These "Emergency Contraceptives" are essentially an oversized dose of the oral contraception pill and share the same functions.

Ladies Guild

March Highlights

Zion Guild met on March 12th for its regular meeting, hosted by Barb Anderson and Bev Grundmier with 15 members in attendance.

Pastor Conner provided devotions from Matthew 4, explaining how Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, to be tempted by Satan.

Margaret Backhaus provided our Christian Life message entitled "All Eyes on the Cross". The topic described the season of Lent and the 7 last words of Christ from the Cross.

President Susan Schilling led the business meeting.

Circle Reports were as follows:

Circle 1 serving March fellowship coffee
Circle 2 will serve April fellowship coffee
Circle 3, 4 & 1 reported serving a total of 323 at the three funeral lunches of Leona Hansen, Allan Lammack and Neva Hinners.

President Schilling reported on World Day of Prayer held at Zion in Arcadia on March 7th.

The president also announced the date of the LWML Spring Rally to be April 5, 2014 at St. Paul Lutheran in Carroll. Instead of a registration fee the Carroll ladies are asking attendees to donate underwear for men, women and children.

The Guild will again buy flowers for the confirmation class this year.

The Theme Basket and Quilt Auction will be held at the Iowa West Biennial District Convention at Okoboji, June 19-21, 2014. Three quilts will be donated by this Guild for the Quilt Auction and $100 donated for the Theme Basket event. Anyone planning to attend this convention as a delegate needs to contact Susan Schilling before April 10th.

Our April meeting will be on the 9th for its 1 PM meeting. Hostesses will be Audrey Roe and Sue Puck. Plaza Bingo workers for April 25th will be Cynthia Genzen, Audrey Roe, Margaret Backhaus and Joene Bohlmann.

Cheral Buhr,

Acting Secretary

Charles, Cheryl, Caleb, Caitlin, and Carissa Ferry
Missionaries to Indonesia

February 2014
Issue #7

Salamat datang anak perempuan! (Indonesian for "Welcome daughter!")
The Ferry Family has a new member! Cassandra Ruth was born on 6 February… weighing 8 lbs. 2 oz… Needless to say, the family has been completely occupied this month with the birth of our newest daughter, and readjusting to life with a little one who's completely dependent… I was absolutely certain that this was going to be a second son, and we had purposely not asked what we were having this time. It was another reminder that we are not in control, but are dependent ourselves upon our loving, grace-filled God who grants all good things according to His will.

The family has now been spending the last few weeks getting adjusted... The older kids have been stepping up and helping out as they're able, trying to be a little more responsible as much of Mom's attention has to be focused on Cassie… Cassie been very healthy, and Cheryl recovered quickly from the delivery; I was able to bring both of them home the very next day. Cassie's a very happy girl if her belly's full. We had the great privilege of taking Cassandra to our home church right away that next Sunday (9 February) to be welcomed into Christ's Kingdom and claimed by Jesus in the waters of Holy Baptism!... Our biggest "helper" around the house has been Carissa, now 20 months old. She tells everyone to "shush" when Cassie's sleeping, and has taken to running for diapers, patting Cassie on the back to burp her, and loves to bring Cassie the pacifier when she's crying. Her favorite word is "baby!" We think she's really taking to her newfound role as big sister… Now that Cassandra is officially with us, we are only waiting for her birth certificate and Social Security card to be issued before pursuing her passport and visa. We're so close!

Work Snapshot
Chuck was able to make a trip to the Ft. Wayne seminary for the annual Symposia before the new kiddo was born. While there, he was the sole Air Force representative at the banquet. There he visited with Regional Director Darin Storkson, and with Navy Chaplain (Captain) William Hampton, a friend and mentor.

Family Update
The older three kids (Caleb, 8; Caitlin, 4; Carissa, 20 months) have been very good about integrating Cassie into the family. Caleb has been especially good about playing the role of big brother, and shows incredible poise and comfort in handling his new baby sister. His actions show not only his growing maturity, but his experience in handling little sisters! The kids also did really well during our appearance with the saints at First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Algonac, Michigan. Pastor Herrod and his wife Lynn served as our hosts and advocates that day, making all sorts of adjustments as we did our first presentation with Cassie in tow. While there, we even took our first picture with all the kids!

A Parting Word
Romans 6:3–4 ESV 3Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

To subscribe to the Ferry's newsletter with photos log onto www.cferry.com.

The Process Has Begun to call a local Hispanic pastor in Storm Lake. This is a team effort as our Hispanic ministry is praying for 3 special partners to work with us to complete the goal of calling a Hispanic pastor to live and work in Storm Lake. Since 2007 I have worked in Storm Lake, coming two or three times a week from over an hour away. Now through the help of IDW, through Grace Lutheran, and the possibility of the Tyson plant chaplaincy program, our Hispanic mission hopes to call a bilingual Hispanic pastor to live in Storm Lake. Keep this process in your prayers.

A visit with Pastor Abiut Fajardo and Dora: March 8-10 Rev. Abiut Fajardo Ruiz and his wife Dora came to Storm Lake to visit with our Hispanic mission about the possibility of serving as pastor. He also visited the Tyson plant to consider the possibility of working as a Chaplain. Pastor Abiut and Dora are originally from Mexico where he has served for more than 25 years as a Lutheran pastor. He moved to Yakima, Washington in 2012 and is helping out at a local Lutheran church. He is interested in our ministry and the chaplaincy work at Tyson. May God bless this special couple.

My Tyson Chaplaincy at the Plants in Denison and Storm Lake: ***"MY NEW JOB"*** I started a new job last month. I began working part-time (10 hours a week) as a chaplain at Tyson in Storm Lake. This is in addition to the 10 hours I continue to work at the beef plant in Denison. The reason I am working in Storm Lake is that one of their two chaplains had resigned because of his busy church workload. I offered to help out temporarily. I am hoping we can place a local bilingual pastor from our church in that position. I have been on the job at Tyson, Storm Lake for a month now. This very diverse plant is a pork plant with over 1,800 workers. The plant has two chaplains. I serve those who speak English and Spanish and the other chaplain, Paul Maychen who is from Laos, serves the Laotians and the Asians. Paul is a Presbyterian Asian pastor and has worked at the plant for the past 3 years. This has also been a busy month in Denison. In addition to my normal work at the plant I gave a presentation of my Chaplaincy work at a Denison Rotary meeting and I spoke to dozens of middle school students on their career day at IKM-Manning in Manilla. The really big event in Denison was the news from the corporate office that there are no plans to close the Denison plant any time soon. For 2 years we have lived under the cloud of rumors about closing the plant that has operated for more than 50 years. What a wonderful blessing for our workers who now have the security of a long term job.

Denison Mission Works to Become a Church: In our process to incorporate our mission and to become chartered with Iowa District West of the LCMS we have voted on a new name. Instead of our mission church simply called the Hispanic Lutheran Church of Denison, the church will be called: *"La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo"* which is translated: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church Friends in Christ." May the Lord bless this powerful name for generations.

Please Pray: In thanksgiving for all the blessings from the visit with Pastor Abiut Fajardo Ruiz and his wife Dora and for the calling process at our mission in Storm Lake. + For Jose in Storm Lake who is studying to become an adult member. + For the blessing of a new church name in Denison and for our meetings with voting members to charter our mission. + For my temporary work as Chaplain at Tyson in Storm Lake and the opportunity there to meet many special people. + For our families in this Lenten season that they would grow in faith as we prepare for the Easter celebration. + ***In thanksgiving for the mission hearts of the many individuals and congregations of Iowa District West who monthly support the Lord's work among Hispanic immigrants.***

TO CONTACT ME:
Rev. Daniel Vogel
32678 Aspen Ave. Manning, Iowa, 51455
1-712-653-2354 or Cell: 712-309-1292 or E-mail me at: Dan.Vogel@idwlcms.org

April Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion

2. Connie Ahrendsen
Larry Hansen
3. Aaron Ahrendsen
Emma Lacy
Lillie Ceminksky
4. Dorothy Knudson
Duane Otto
5. Bob Henkelman
6. Darla Neumann
Viola Ostebee
Dennis Tibben
7. Jeff Bradley
Jesse Page
Hadley Wiig
8. Judy Bald
Mikasia Jacobsen
10. Stephen Grimm
Dorothy Larsen
11. Vicki Tibben
12. Cory Otto
Vila Ranniger
Thomas Ulrickson
Nathan Vetter
13. Drew Greving
Vernon Larsen
Deborah Ranniger
14. Katelyn Dreher
15. Jerry Backhaus
Natalie Bauer
Nancy Muhlbauer
Dan Peters
Karen Reinke
16. Duane Wegner
17. Tim Kienast
Sue Puck

18. Curt Janssen
Cheryl Kerkhoff
Susan Lamb
19. Colton Otto
Diane Riggert
20. Tanner Bald
Franklin Mohr
21. Jasmin Bald
Joene Bohlmann
22. Conrad Kurth
23. Shauna Borkowski
Ashley Johnson
Roger Sinow
Daniel Vogel
Judith Wegner
24. Collin Borkowski
Ericka Irlbeck
25. Jackie Hagedorn
Virginia Johnson
Becky Karsten
26. Myrtle Otto
Ron Schilling
Geri Spies
27. David Gore
Georgia Lohrmann
28. Glen Ahrendsen
Eric Lage
29. Craig Wegner
30. Andy Booth
Emily Brus
Nancy Opperman
Sara Puck

8. Todd & Tammy Winter
12. Ron & Susan Schilling
20. Merlin & Jean Borkowski
25. Brian & Diane Vetter
28. Greg & Sandra Sextro

If we missed or misspelled your name, please inform the church office.

Congregational Servants

Council:
Curt Struve, President
Sam Musfeldt, Vice President
Donna Forman, Record. Sec.
Amber Neumann, Fin. Sec.
Karen Kienast, Treasurer
Jeff Hargens, CFO

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Stan Baack, head elder
LaVern Bald, Stan Musfeldt
Dave Grundmeier
Tim Kienast, Lynn Kruse
Craig Musfeldt,

Board of Deacons:
David Bohlman, Bruce Grimm,
Ryan Crawford, Eric Ramsey
Paul Christensen, Richard Zinke,
Don Lamb

Board of Trustees:
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Joni Kienast, Laurene Meeves,
Kari Ranniger, Kathy Vollstedt

Preschool Board:
Dianne Riggert, Chair
Jean Ferneding, Diane Riggert,
Sandra Sextro, Heather Kusel,
Jen Morris
Elder: LaVern Bald

Altar Guild:
Monica Christensen, Director

Stewardship Board:
Rick Lohrmann, Chair

Ladies Guild:
Susie Schilling, President

Fellowship Club:
Russ Mohr, President

Choir:
Dr. Tom Ulrickson, director

Children's Choir:
Susie Ulrickson, Jill Arp

Dear Zion Lutheran Church Members,
What a blessing it is to share the monthly news of Zion Lutheran Preschool.

Happy April! Did you get fooled? I anticipate the preschoolers will share many cute little jokes. Children can tell the best! April 6 -12 is the Week of the Young Child "Early Years Are Learning Years!" April 4 is Manning Spring Open House….hopefully you will notice Zion preschool art in some windows. The children will have the opportunity to celebrate the week in many ways. We will promote literacy by having some community members and leaders come to the classroom and read their favorite book. We will close our fun week with a special event.

Zion Preschool will not have classes on April 17th, Maundy Thursday and will resume classes on Wednesday, April 23. We try to follow the IKM Manning school calendar to help parents with scheduling.

Unscramble the words: (hint – only two different words)

aretes	reseat	eaters	
seater	teaser		reins
resin	serin		siren

"He is Risen" Happy Easter!
God's Blessings,
Mrs. Fink and Mrs. Nemitz

ZioN Lutheran Preschool Manning, Iowa
Christ Centered... Child Focused... Family Connecting