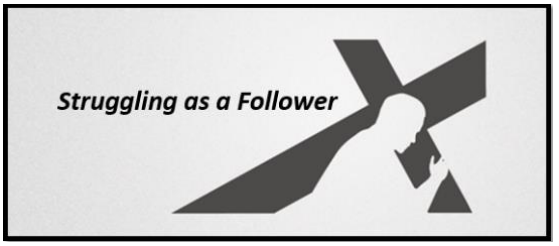


Part IV: So Be It

Finally we've reached the end. That is, through Job we identified the problem that arises in the midst of suffering and difficulty (Where did God go?). But we saw how God bridges that gap through Jesus. Jesus knows God and is God, but more than that Jesus has made Himself known in the world (the Christmas story and so on). So the end is upon us – how do we look like faithful followers of Jesus once suffering surfaces?

Pastor and Christian writer Timothy Keller brings up an interesting observation in his work on Christian suffering. He notes that two people will react in completely different fashions to the same event. He uses the example of the Holocaust. One person can look at that event and conclude that *clearly* there is no God – because God would not allow something so terrible to occur. Or if there happens to, in fact, be a God then one *should not* trust that God because He is either limited in power (i.e. unable to prevent atrocities like the Holocaust) or just plain evil Himself (i.e. for allowing something so terrible to exist).

Keller, however, notes that there were many who were experiencing the Holocaust firsthand or even onlookers who are looking at the event from a historical distance like ourselves that were drawn to God in spite of the circumstances. Why? Because they hoped for a reversal of the evil, and if there was anyone capable of reversing the events it was God.

So…two different reactions to the same event. Somehow I think you can guess which way is more ideal. But keep reading because the Bible provides us with a special language for reacting to suffering.

In 2 Samuel 7, King David (the giant slayer) wants to build a permanent house for God. You'll recall that the Israelites' original temple was a tent called a tabernacle. It was a tent because the people were always on the move. Since the people had become stationary by David's time David wanted a stationary temple for God too.

The story goes David went to Nathan – David's special advisor and prophet (I want one of those :)) – and inquired as to whether or not he should build. Nathan said, "Go for it." The story shifts though because God shows up, and in so many words, shuts down David's construction project. David's big plans come to a screeching halt as God asks David, "Would you build me a house to dwell in?" In other words, "You're just a man and you think you can tackle building a house for Me the Maker of Heaven and Earth?" Buried underneath God's message I think – and I'm not infallible – is God telling David that he has a great deal to learn still.

Then David responded to God's encounter: "Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?" We can answer that question: David is nothing. He is nothing *before* God and he is nothing *without* God. We'll be confirming this about our own lives soon on Ash Wednesday – "To dust you came and to dust you shall return." But in spite of David's mere "manly-ness" in the presence of God, David becomes a somebody because of the faithfulness of God. So it's not David who will raise up God through the

construction of the temple, but rather it is God who will raise up David (vs. 16).

David's response could be summarized in three simple words: so be it. Job has a similar response once his family, work force, and livestock are eliminated. "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Both David and Job resign themselves to accept the circumstances presented to them while at the same praising God. Yikes! Way to be goody two shoes David and Job! But look – you can react in the same way, too. I know you can because you have the Holy Spirit, for crying out loud.

This is how it's going to happen. Something is not going to go to your liking. Your plans will be altered or halted altogether just like David. When that happens you'll probably feel something like irritation, anger, frustration. Don't dismiss those emotions, because all people experience injustices committed by friends, family, or complete strangers. The thing is those emotions need to be filtered through a strainer. Are those emotions the result of real injustices or are those emotions there because there's a false god roaming around?

When I first came here and I had to undergo chemotherapy I was mad. I hated having to be away; missing worship and confirmation. As I reflect on some of that anger, however, I'm led to repent. You see the plans I had for Trinity were to some degree halted. The things I wanted, the visions I had imagined were sitting at a red light that would not change.

My plans, much like David's, were replaced with God's. Now please do not hear me saying that God is responsible for cancer or something like that. Quite frankly, I don't know what God's hand was doing or not doing – that's why I need that prophet (no just kidding). But that not knowing directs me to the cross, because that is the source of knowing. I know what God is up to through and in Jesus. So do I know that God loves me in the course of undergoing chemo? You better believe it! The Father sacrificed His Son for me. Is God working to fully eliminate suffering, pain, chemo, so on? Oh boy, is He?! The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us! That's what Easter is all about; victory over death. "Pastor Andrew you'd build up Trinity for me? Psh – I've been with Trinity all the way back to the 1880s."

So be it, Lord. In your Son, Jesus, I can see that you have my best interests in mind no matter the smoke screens in life that'd give me a different impression.

A faithful follower of Jesus who is currently enduring some troubling news about their health said, "You know, when I was praying the Lord's Prayer, I prayed 'And Thy will be done.' I actually meant it this time. So if things go well I'll praise God, and if they don't go well I'll still praise the Lord." So be it.

You have a Father who knows how many hairs reside on your forehead. You are connected to the Son who will stop at nothing to protect you. Don't believe me; look at the cross. Has anyone died for you lately? And a Spirit – a life generating Spirit is in you. You were once dead in sin, but the Spirit has made you alive. Dead things can't do anything, but alive things can. When you're alive you can receive and react. And as difficult circumstances beat you up in the here and now or future ones spring up, you will say – so be it, blessed be the name of the Lord! – Pastor Johnson

Ministry Apps

Applying the Gospel to Hearts and Homes (February 2018): Zion and Trinity Lutheran

Applying the Gospel to Hearts and Homes in the Mission Fields of the Zion and Trinity Communities

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have an "app" for love? Feeling lonely or rejected, one could just grab the phone, engage the app and immediately receive loving affirmations and connections. God provides a love application through Jesus. God's love is not due to miraculous technology, but through the sacrifice of Jesus. While God's loving applications cost the life of His Son, the application is available to us totally free by God's grace. While the world suggests Valentine's card and gifts, we receive and share His loving message for all. Read God's Valentine to you in I John, chapters 3 and 4.

Lenten Worship—Signs of God's Love

Traveling along the roads we see a variety of signs: stop, yield, U-turn, merge, etc. Common road signs will take on additional spiritual significance this Lenten season. The signs take us to Scripture, to the passion account, and to God's love in Christ on the cross. Join us each Wednesday (beginning on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14). Worship will begin at 5:45 p.m. with a fellowship meal served by youth and their families at approximately 6:30 p.m. The Ash Wednesday service will include the imposition of ashes and Holy Communion.

I Love My Vocation--Farming

The Zion Fellowship Club will meet on Monday, February 12, at 7 p.m. The Fellowship Club continues the celebration of vocation. It's not your grandfather's or father's farm with increasing technology. Farming practices and production marketing continues to change. Special presenters at our February meeting will be Rod and Kristin Backhaus. GUESTS are welcome. Thanks to the visitors who joined us for Burke Johnson's January presentation. All our tasks and roles are God's gift of love to us.

The Places We Love: Family

St. Paul's admonition "walk in love," (Ephesians 5:2) focuses immediately on the love between husband and wife and parents and children. Zion will host two special events in February which strengthen family love. A marriage retreat (facilitated through Iowa District West and Lutheran Family Service) will take place on Saturday, February 3. Zion Preschool will sponsor a parenting workshop on Sunday afternoon, February 25 for parents of children of all ages. The Parenting Workshop will focus on some of the difficult challenges in today's permissive culture. Watch for more information in weekly bulletins.

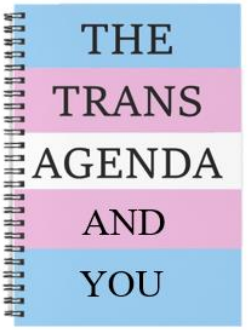
God's Love in Times of Crisis

God's Word to Jeremiah and God's people in crisis was "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). The judgments of God would be real but temporal. God's love would be everlasting. The weekly journey through Jeremiah continues each Monday at 9:30 a.m. Join us on this fascinating journey with the Old Testament prophet. Did you know the Book of Jeremiah is the longest (most words) book in the Bible?

Love Demonstrated in Word and Deed

"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18) Members of Trinity and Zion often live that passage in the contacts of their lives. Thank you for your words and deeds of love—prayers, cards, calls, visits, etc.—during my recent hip surgery. Praise God I am healing quickly and look forward to serving "pain free" with you.

Walking and Loving because of God's love in Christ,
Pastor Bob



You need to read this article. You probably need to read it twice. The world has changed *and it will affect you*. It's not just that headlines now require double takes: "Man gives birth to gender neutral child."[1] And it's not just that Facebook offers a dizzying array of gender designations or that we are overwhelmed by new vocabulary: transgender, cisgender, gender fluid, genderqueer, and non-binary; and gender-neutral pronouns: ne, ze, hir, zir, ve, xe.

It's not just that we are awash in confusion and contradiction, being told that sexual orientation is fixed, but gender identity is fluid and that a biological male must be addressed as a female, if he believes he is. It's not even that we are told that "male" and "female" are meaningless terms, but a male can become a female and vice versa, and we're supposed to find that meaningful.

It's that all of these troubled streams are flowing in one powerful torrent that threatens to swallow all who dare to stand against it. Under the handle "trans," this movement has quickly gained not only far-reaching influence, but startling power with strong totalitarian overtones. Through media, courts, councils, boards, departments, and legislatures the trans agenda is moving forward – and confessing Christians are in the way.

The following is but a glimpse of the trans movement:

California recently passed a spate of gender identity laws to force compliance with the trans agenda. Long-term care facility employees can now be criminalized for "misgendering" residents, i.e. for using the wrong gender pronoun. And facility residents will now be able to use the restroom of their choice. State residents can now more easily change the gender on their birth certificates and may now designate "non-binary" for their gender on state documents. Further, California employers with 50 or more employees are required to mandate training bi-annually on gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation harassment and employees must display posters detailing special transgender rights that entitle trans/non-conforming gender individuals to tax-payer funded programs.

The Delaware Department of Education has proposed a new state regulation that would enable public schools to bypass parental consent for students wishing to change their expressed race, gender, or sexual orientation when schools deem parents unsupportive, i.e. not on board with the trans agenda. In fact, parents who affirm their child's biological sex and race can be considered a "non-ally," and could even be labeled discriminatory and abusive. Further, the proposed regulation would allow students to use the locker rooms and to join school sports in line with their gender identity or expression.

New York has outlawed therapy to help individuals change their sexual orientation and their sexual identity, unless it's in line with the trans agenda. In other words, people can seek counseling to transition from heterosexual to homosexual and from male to female, but not from homosexual to heterosexual and to back to their biological sex.

And the non-profit advocacy group, Athlete Ally, that helped NCAA schools write LGBT-friendly policy suggestions, is now publicly rating/shaming schools on their LGBT friendliness (much like the Corporate Equality Index does for businesses). To earn high scores schools must have schoolwide

[1] Multiple new agencies and websites reported this. A biological female, who identified as a male, gave birth, but most media outlets referred to the mother as a man.

nondiscrimination policies, openly LGBT-staff, pro-LGBT resources for student-athletes, LGBT interest groups, promotion of LGBT pride events, partnership with LGBT organizations, and policies that include transgender athletes. Those who score low are publicly shamed.

The message is clear: affirm the trans agenda or be demonized, even criminalized. Christians, take note. Families, take note. Both are in the way.

Christians are in the way because we confess these three foundational, but increasingly counter-cultural, truths:

1. **Mankind has been created in image of God.**
2. **Mankind has been created male and female.**
3. **Male and female were created for each other**.[2]

In other words, mankind exists in two distinct sexes: male and female,[3] which were designed for each other. Our biology (lovingly designed by God), which informs our identity, affirms this. Every organ in the human body can complete its function without partnering with another body except the sexual organs. They need their complement from the other sex to complete their function.

Only these two sexes (because they are the only two sexes) can unite in this way and every one of Facebook's 50+ genders falls into one of these two sexes. Yes, there may be many different ways to live as male or female, but there is only male and female, and male and female were clearly created for each other. The trans agenda ignores this in favor of an agenda that runs contrary to the Creator's design and intention, an agenda that ultimately impales people on the rocky shoals of reality. Reality has edges and lives lived on those edges suffer, as studies are increasingly showing (despite the media's unwillingness to cover the findings).[4]

Families, defined as father, mother, and child(ren) are in the way because they declare that children originate and thrive with a father and a mother. In fact, as social science is continually showing, every measurable characteristic of well-being is boosted by what Christianity has promulgated from its inception: Husband + Wife + Children = Good.[5] It's not only that the institution of family is good, it's that it is good for us, all of us.

Husband + Wife + Children = Good

But it doesn't matter that reality is on our side; the trans agenda is about redefining reality and this is why you need to take note. It *will* affect you. It will affect your children. One author explains, "This gender-neutral scheme obliterates the template for the family as a unit. And if the family is no longer accepted as a union that originates through the union of male and female, there is no real basis for the State to recognize any family as an autonomous unit."[6]

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[2] Ryan Anderson shared these three truths with the LCMS National Convention in Milwaukee in 2016.

[3] If we find that our perceived identity is not in line with our body, the problem is not with our body; the problem is with our thinking. One sees a parallel in people struggling with Body Integrity Identity Disorder. In this disorder, people with healthy bodies believe they are, in fact, paraplegic or blind or (fill-in-the-blank) and are asking doctors to bring their bodies in line with their beliefs. Again, the problem isn't with the body; the problem is with the beliefs about the body.

[4] See
world.wng.org/content/sex_change_regret_silenced
Also: *The Health Hazards of Homosexuality: What the Medical and Psychological Research Reveals* by Brian Camenker

[5] See:
world.wng.org/content/children_fast_tracked_into_gender_transition
thefederalist.com/2017/11/03/research-proves-no-1-social-justice-imperative-marriage
Also: "The Importance of Moms"
world.wng.org/content/children_fast_tracked_into_gender_transition

[6] thefederalist.com/2014/06/23/how-the-trans-agenda-seeks-to-redefine-everyone/

In other words, if male and female cease to be seen as objective sexes that must join to procreate, and if this male and female union in marriage ceases to be seen as the ideal situation for raising children, the family falls. And if the family falls, the state rises. And an empowered state may claim the right to regulate our personal relationships, to control our child rearing, and to limit our speech.

IF THE FAMILY FALLS, THE STATE RISES.

In fact, Ryan Anderson, author of *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom*, made this point to our church body's national convention in 2016: "If man-made laws don't mirror natural law/Divine ordering, then government will have to refashion human nature and reorder the dissenters." The trans agenda is attempting to unmoor humanity and our laws from reality, and dissenters like the Christian Church and the Christian family, will need to be reordered.

So what do we do?

1) **Strengthen marriage and strengthen the family**. Invest heavily in these institutions. These are the cradle of culture and the bedrock of civilization *and* the greatest defense against an intrusive state. Support and get involved with groups that undergird marriage and family. Start with your church and then check out www.lfsiowa.org, www.hausvater.org, www.frc.org, thefamilyleader.com, www.lcms.org/social-issues/marriage, www.lcms.org/lutheran-center-for-religious-liberty. Invest heavily in a local married couple. Intentionally pray for them. Support them. Encourage them. Strengthen *your* marriage and *your* family. Zion is offering two opportunities in February (see pg. 19).

2) **Invest heavily in your church**. Get involved. Make the church the hub of your life, the hub of your family's life. Worship together faithfully. Learn how to think like a Christian. Find out *why* we confess what we confess. Understand why it is good and why it is worth publicly confessing and defending. And then talk about it as a family. Practice in the family what you will need to confess in public. Help your children practice at home what they will need to confess outside the home.

3) **Insist on family time**. Turn off the screens. Cancel unnecessary appointments. Limit extra-curriculars. Eat supper as a family. Read a book out loud to your children. Play a board game as a family. Talk to each other. Anchor identity in the family. Sitting separately in front of screens is not being a family. Eating separately is not being a family. Enrolling children in multiple extra-curricular activities so that they spend more time outside the home than in it is not being a family. Those things fragment the family and fragmented families leave children adrift with no shore in which to cast the anchor of their identity. And the current of the trans agenda will sweep unanchored youths away, a sight we are growing accustomed to seeing on college campuses as youths from fragmented families adopt the trans agenda in search of a meaningful identity. Insist on being a family.

The situation is serious. Our response must be significant. For further ideas or to continue the conversation, come talk to me. Email me (revconner@mmctsu.com), call (655-2352), or stop in. Marriage and family need your support and involvement. It's time to get involved. – Pastor Conner

ON THAT NOTE

Treasuring our Musical Treasure

On February 14th, while the world exchanges valentines and indulges in chocolate, the Christian Church will be wearing ashes. As penitent sinners we will gather before the Lord with the words of Job on our lips: "I… repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Our hymnody will assist us. Among those hymns is this month's hymn "Chief of Sinners Though I Be" (*LSB* 611). Written by William McComb in the mid-1800s, this hymn powerfully places us among the world's sinners who have found their forgiveness, hope, and life in Christ.

It is critical that we are able to see our place among sinners. In fact, as Lutheran pastor and professor David Scaer has said, "If you cannot find yourself among the sinners, you might very well be a morally acceptable person, but you are no Christian." "Chief of Sinners Though I Be" accomplishes this for us, but not to leave us in despair; it places us among the sinners because that's where Christ is! Christ has come among us sinners to redeem, forgive, and save us! Let's let the hymn show us.

Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me,
Died that I might live on high,
Lives that I might never die.
As the branch is to the vine,
I am His, and He is mine.

"The saying is trustworthy," Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." With this confession on our lips, our hymn places us squarely among the world's sinners – among the world's sinners for whom Christ died! His death ensured our life and now, as Jesus announces in John 15, as braches receiving life from the vine, we have life in Christ.

Oh, the height of Jesus' love,
Higher than the heav'ns above,
Deeper than the depths of sea,
Lasting as eternity!
Love that found me—wondrous thought!
Found me when I sought Him not.

Verse two gives dimension to Jesus' love. The psalmist wrote of the height of the Lord's love: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him…" (103:11) and Paul spoke of the "breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love for us (Eph. 3:18-19). This three dimensional love personally enfolds us in Christ, who as Scripture teaches, sought us. We have been sought after. We have been pursued. In Christ, God's love has found us!

Only Jesus can impart
Balm to heal the wounded heart,
Peace that flows from sin forgiv'n,
Joy that lifts the soul to heav'n,
Faith and hope to walk with God
In the way that Enoch trod.

Balm heals. It soothes and calms. In contemporary usage we speak of lip balm that soothes chapped lips. Our hymn, echoing historic and biblical imagery, connects this healing and soothing balm to Christ who heals hearts wounded by sin. Those blessed to receive this forgiveness know a peace unavailable elsewhere and a joy that lifts their spirits above the sin-cursed world to the very halls of heaven. Jesus and Jesus only gives this balm, peace, and joy. And Jesus only grants the faith and hope that allows us, like Noah's ancestor Enoch (Gen. 5:24), to walk with God.

Chief of sinners though I be,
Christ is all in all to me;
All my wants to Him are known,
All my sorrows are His own.
He sustains the hidden life
Safe with Him from earthly strife.

Despite the ruins of our sin-shattered heart, Christ remains our all. To Him and to Him alone we cling for salvation, life, and hope for He knows us all the way through. Our wants, He knows. Our sorrow, He knows. Our anxiety, our grief, our loss, our fear, He knows. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. With Christ we remain safe in the face of all earthly strife.

O my Savior, help afford
By Your Spirit and Your Word!
When my wayward heart would stray,
Keep me in the narrow way;
Grace in time of need supply
While I live and when I die.

Now, having confessed Christ and His all-encompassing love for us, we turn to Him in prayer, asking Him by His Spirit and His Word, by His Spirit working through His Word, to sustain us in the narrow way of life. Further, we boldly request grace in our times of need, grace sufficient for each day and grace to help and sustain us when we die. This is the prayer of the sin-conscious soul, the prayer of the soul who has found himself among sinners. And this is the prayer Jesus richly answers in His Church as He gives grace to needy sinners through His preached Word and given Sacraments. Praise God for His grace in Christ to us sinners!

Hollywood Collides with *The* Truth

Standing before adoring fans, indulgent friends, and doting colleagues, Oprah Winfrey received the Cecil B. DeMille Award for lifetime achievement at the 2018 Golden Globes. Taking advantage of her platform, she addressed the sexual harassment scandal rocking Hollywood. After thanking the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (a group of several dozen foreign reporters who report on Hollywood) for their pursuit of "absolute truth" (her phrase), she powerfully launched into this:

> What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have. And I'm especially proud and inspired by all the women who have felt strong enough and empowered enough to speak up and share their personal stories… We all have lived… too many years in a culture broken by brutally powerful men. For too long, women have not been heard or believed if they dare speak the truth to the power of those men. But their time is up. Their time is up.

Hollywood lauded Oprah. Media pundits swooned, calling her "stunning" and "brave." One Hollywood favorite opined, "I will now officially divide time like this: Everything that happened before @Oprah speech: Everything that will happen after." Many suggested she run for President, NBC going so far as to tweet, "Nothing but respect for OUR future president."

What should the thinking Christian make out of it? And why should the thinking Christian care what Oprah says?

Let's start with the second question. In one sense, Oprah's words carry no more weight than your brother-in-law's and shouldn't be given any more credence. Your brother-in-law, however, doesn't have the platform Oprah has. Second, Oprah is bigger than an individual; she represents a cultural mood, a way of thinking that is becoming all pervasive. So, Oprah helps us detect the pulse of the American culture and gives us a good starting point for offering a response.

What do we make out of her words?

1 So what should a thinking Christian make out of Oprah's words? At least two things. First, her phrase "your truth" is deceptively dangerous. She's right that it is a powerful tool, but it is a destructive power, not a constructive one. To see why, contrast her words with Jesus' in John 18. Standing before Pontius Pilate, being interrogated with His life on the line, Jesus, with true bravery, declared, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (18:37). Those are stunning words! And notice how Jesus spoke of truth; He came to bear witness to *the* truth. Oprah exhorted people to speak *your* truth. There's a difference, and it's a big one.

Your truth is subjective. That means it's anchored in you, the individual. And the world is populated by 7.6 billion individuals. Does truth have 7.6 different definitions? Is each one equally true? Such a position is ludicrous, but it's precisely where Oprah leaves us, unable to differentiate between competing truth claims. It ultimately fragments truth and leaves it lost at sea.

Jesus speaks of truth differently. He refers to *the* truth, truth that is objective, truth that is outside and beyond us. *The* truth is grounded in reality. It has one anchor – God. And, in endorsing *your* truth, Oprah and her Hollywood supporters are suppressing *the* truth, which is precisely what Scripture says sinful man does: "by [his] unrighteousness" he "suppress[es] the truth" (Rom. 1:18).

2 Second, Oprah's "your truth" comment was intended to encourage female victims of sexually immoral behavior to speak out. Speaking out against evil should be encouraged because evil must be stopped, but this assumes evil can be defined in some objective sense, that it is somehow anchored in an objective truth that differentiates between good and evil. But this is precisely what Oprah has rejected! Against what, then, is Oprah exhorting women to speak? Are they merely being told to make their preferences known – that they simply don't prefer to be sexually harassed? – Or is sexually immoral behavior truly evil? Aren't those engaging in the behavior she condemns merely living *their* truth? When objective truth dies, we are left with nothing but individual truths, which are really just opinions in disguise.

Thinking Christians should be greatly disturbed by Oprah's comments not because she has condemned sexual immorality (sexual immorality should be condemned!); we should be disturbed because when objective truth is rejected and *your* truth is endorsed, power is the only tool left to advance *your* truth/opinion and the sexual revolution is about power.

Don't be deceived, Oprah is no friend to women or men. No one who has rejected objective truth can be. Oprah, and many of her Hollywood compatriots, are arguing out of both sides of their mouths, lobbying for sexual liberty at one moment and decrying those who put it into practice the next. What Oprah doesn't understand is that reality won't let her have it both ways. Either truth is objective and sexual ethics are grounded in this truth and apply to all (including Hollywood and her) or they're not and everyone can live his or her individual truth.

The sexual liberty espoused by the sexual revolution and endorsed by Hollywood (including Oprah) is simply untenable. Sex that has been loosened from its moral anchor can't be contained or controlled. It is too powerful and too prone to harm. And the current cultural sexual disaster is living proof.

Oprah and Hollywood's vehement condemnation of inappropriate sexual behavior has slammed them into the Christian sexual ethic which has always differentiated between objective good and objective evil. Some behavior is evil. Some sexual behavior is objectively wrong. And not a shred of it depends on *your* truth.

Quite simply, if the great pandemic of sexual allegations and condemnations besetting our culture proves anything, it proves that the Christian sexual ethic stands vindicated. Christianity grounds its sexual ethic in God's created order (described in Genesis) and lovingly insists that sex, accordingly, belongs in marriage. It has been given by God to join husbands and wives in a one-flesh, exclusive, monogamous union aimed toward the procreation of children.

Sex has a home: marriage. Christ said as much:

> "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Matthew 19:4-6

Here Jesus, who testifies to the truth, endorses God's created order. It is the ground for reality. God created mankind as male and female and male and female have been specifically designed for the one-flesh marriage union. We are not permitted to separate what God has joined together. Narrowly, Jesus is speaking of divorce, but more broadly He is grounding the Church's sexual ethic in God's created order and exhorting us not to divorce what God has united – and not just because it's wrong, but because it opens a Pandora's Box of evil, evil we are watching run amuck in real time today.

What we need today is not vehement condemnation of another's person's truth; what we need is an ardent endorsement of objective truth. This is the truth to which Jesus testifies and the truth that will ultimately restore sexual ethics. – Pastor Conner

- We are gearing up for our Valentines Banquet Fundraiser which will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Manilla, IA on February 11th, 2018 from 6 to 8pm. We will have childcare provided, along with a three course meal, and fun games and prizes. We are excited and believe it is going to be a really fun night for all involved. Tickets are $20 for couples or $10 for singles. Please see Pastor Johnson, Tiffany Johnson, or Zion's church office for tickets.

- Trizion youth group started back up after the Christmas season with a new series. We are looking at the seven churches in Revelation. In this study we will be looking at why the church is important, how the church started, and how the churches in Revelation can teach us about our own churches and communities today. While it is cold, we will continue to play games inside. The kids have had a lot of fun with some of the games we have been playing and have even been playing them in school when they have downtime.

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Ladies Guild of Zion
January 10, 2018

Pastor Conner spoke to us about the hymn "To Jordan's River Came Our Lord". He pointed out that at Jesus' baptism it was revealed who Jesus, the Christ is. Jesus was baptized not for any sin of his own, but stood in the stead of all sinners as their substitute. Following prayer, the LWML Pledge was recited. Christian Life Chairman Margaret Backhaus read a piece that encouraged us to "Rejoice Always" even as the Apostle Paul did while being imprisoned. The mite box was passed as the mite box prayer was offered.

President Buhr called the business meeting to order in the name of our Triune God. Roll call was answered by 14 members recalling a highlight moment over the holidays. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved. Correspondence included thank you notes from Pastors Conner and Riggert, Zion preschool, Timothy Conner, C-3, and the residents of Char Mac. Treasurer Mary Grimm and kitchen treasurer Darlene Vollstedt gave their reports. Human Care Chairman Audrey Roe said quilters were again busy and that a quilt had been donated for the Rick Spack fundraiser to be held on February 3rd at the Aspinwall Community Center.

Old business: After discussing the paper products used and purchased by several groups for use in serving from the kitchen, it was moved by Sue Puck and seconded by Mary Grimm that kitchen treasurer Darlene Vollstedt should purchase all the products and they should be made available to the youth group. The motion carried. Next the subject of the sunshine chairman vacancy was addressed. Bev Grundmeier moved that the guild no longer have that office. The motion was seconded and carried.

New business: The treasurer reported on the dispersal of $4050.00 to various missions. It was moved by Susan Schilling that $100.00 be sent to the Zone treasurer for the activity fund and $25.00 to the zone for transportation costs. The motion was seconded and carried. The audit of the treasurer's books will be done following the meeting.

Plaza bingo will be held on January 26th with Darlene Vollstedt as chairman with Joene Bohlmann, JoAnn Thomas, and Laurene Meeves as helpers. The next meeting is February 14th. Hostesses will be Carol Kahl and Margaret Kuchel. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer and the table prayer. Refreshments were served by Becki Ehlers and Mary Grimm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Puck, secretary

Thank you 7th and 8th grade students of Zion and Trinity!

On Sunday, January 21st, youth from Zion and Trinity delivered meals to our homebound and home-limited members. They shared smiles, love, and prayers. Well done!

Preschool Praises for January 2017

This cold and snowy January has thrown the wrench in a few of our days at preschool, but that hasn't stopped us from having fun and learning!

The first full preschool week we read The Mitten by Jan Brett and enjoyed acting it out the next day with masks and a sheet over a table to be the "mitten" that the children would climb into. There were a lot of giggles that day! We worked on the letter O and enjoyed blocks of ice in the sensory bin that they could then use droppers to put water onto and make divots in the ice. We cut papers into snowflakes and matched mittens and gloves together from a big pile. When it is so cold out, we enjoy singing, dancing and playing instruments to work out our energy and use our large motor skills. For Jesus Time we studied when Jesus was 12 years old and was at the temple when Mary and Joseph finally found him after 3 days of searching. I can't imagine the panic they were in to not only have lost their child, but the Son of God! No wonder they were "astonished" when they found him casually speaking with the teachers!

The second week we read The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats and made a painting with puff paint (shaving cream and glue) and put a figure of the little boy from the story into it to look like he was walking in snow. They really turned out cute! We learned about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and how he wanted everyone to be equal and that it doesn't matter what the color of our skin or eyes or hair is; what matters is that we are all children of God and therefore worthy of love! We worked on color and shape recognition and the letter C. We studied the baptism of Jesus and when the sky opened up, the Holy Spirit descended onto Jesus and God the Father spoke from Heaven "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased." What an amazing sight that would have been!

The third week we read about penguins and enjoyed a science experiment with little beads that, when added to water, puffed up into big jelly beads that we added to our sensory bin along with plastic penguins. We studied counting and numbers, patterning and scissor skills as well as shape sorting and sequencing events. The letter Q was painted using Q-tips to make dots. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, he went into the desert and didn't eat for 40 days and nights. Then the devil came to tempt Jesus, but the children learned that unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus resisted the devil's temptations and did not sin!

We are working hard to learn our songs for February 18th when we sing in church next and we really look forward to showing everyone our cute songs! We have Preschool Registration on February 21st from 4-6 pm, so if you have a child that you want to sign up or if you know of someone that has a 3 or 4 year old child, please send them our way!

Thank you for your continued support and prayers,
Mrs. Gore and Mrs. Nemitz

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

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

On Sunday, January 28th, over 70 friends and family of Zion gathered for an afternoon of bowling. Adam Gruhn topped out the experienced division, while Crystal Dreher, much to her husband Randy's chagrin, topped out the amateur division. Special thanks to Shelly Gruhn and the Board of Education for organizing the event!

SERVING THE LORD IN
PANAMA
NEWS FROM THE GAUTHIER FAMILY

Nov/Dec 2017
Vol. 2 Issue XI

Happy New Year and a blessed Epiphany to you all! This is the time of year for setting goals and making resolutions. If you are anything like me, the resolutions and goals can quickly fall by the wayside if you do not see any results. Often times work in the church and on the mission field can be the same. When little fruit is seen, there is a tendency to want to change plans or give up. However, I included this photo as a reminder that we may not see the fruits of our labor immediately, especially in the church. Twenty-five years ago a vicar started meeting with a few families in Loma Cova in hopes of planting a church. These little girls are now the third generation of Lutherans in this small village outside of Panama City. They attend weekly Sunday school and worship twice a week at Dios Es Grande, the Lutheran Church in that community.

This photo is greatly encouraging as the Lutheran Church of Panamá embarks on planting a new church in Sabanitas. I may not see the fruits of this work in my time in Panamá, but my job, along with the national church is to plant and water - to preach the Word of God in its fullest and baptize and teach. The Lord by and through the Holy Spirit will create faith and build His Church. How comforting to know that the Church does not depend on me or the efforts of a national church, but on the Lord and his promises through His Son Jesus Christ.

The Lord has been more than faithful already. We have a building, Pastor Carlos Mario Marion has accepted the call, and we have mission teams and organizations ready to work in the community bringing pastor to the community and the community to the pastor. Please pray for Pastor Carlos as he moves to Panamá on March 1. Pray for the national church as we volunteer to paint and make ready pastor's apartment and the church building. Pray for Sabanitas and the people, that the Spirit would soften their hearts to receive the Gospel of Jesus with repentance and joy. And pray that the Lord opens your eyes and hearts to the opportunities in your own lives to share your faith and give a reason for the hope you have in Christ Jesus!

Hi Everybody, It has been a crazy two months for me. In December we went back to the United States for vacation. I went to a place called 'the dentist' and a lady looked at my teeth. I got sick when I was in the US because of the new germs so daddy had to change our travel plans. When I got better I got to visit my nana and grandpa in Colorado! It was cold there too, but they had snow! I enjoyed playing in their backyard and with their kitty "Jinx." Grandpa has a big, white truck! Then I flew with mommy to see daddy in St. Louis. I only stayed there for the weekend but I got to visit my great grandparents, cousins, and my great aunt. Finally, we flew home. We were supposed to stop in Chicago so I could see my aunt, uncle and cousin, but our plane had problems so we got on a different plane to Newark and then finally to Panamá. My suitcase did not make it though. So for two days my toys were on a plane in a different country!

I love being back home in Panamá. It is warm and sunny. I also get to play with my toys and sleep in my own bed. I can't wait to go to church on Sunday to play with my friend Ian and on Monday I get to play with my friends Emelia and Martina. Their daddy is a pastor in Sorá. Thank you for praying for us and helping us tell people about Jesus in Panamá!
In Christ, Ezra

Charles, Cheryl, Caleb, Caitlin, Carissa, Cassie, and Chloe Ferry

Missionaries to Indonesia

We do a lot of singing in our home. The songs of the Church provide us with comfort, assurance, and a sense of connection with the rest of Christendom. They also help us to remember the Word of God, and to pass it on to others around us. This time of year, we find ourselves singing:

> Now greet the swiftly changing year
> With joy and penitence sincere.
> Rejoice! Rejoice! With thanks embrace
> Another year of grace (LSB 896:1).

The past year has been filled with joys, challenges, blessings, sins… and complete forgiveness. Daddy was separated from the Ferry Family for large stretches of this past year due to work travels, but still the kids and Momma managed to get by and even thrive thanks to the incredible support of friends and loved ones. Christmas came and went with little fanfare, for Christmas isn't that big of a deal here… even among the Christians. So we made the most of the opportunities that were given to us, and made sure that we remembered the real reason for Christmas. It wasn't about presents (or snow for that matter!), but about our Lord Jesus who became incarnate to live and die for us. What a wonder!

With Carissa and Cassie being in a local school this year, they had the opportunity to participate in the school's Christmas program. There was a little about Christmas, but it was largely a talent show. They sang with the other kids, and were spotlighted with questions they had to answer in front of everyone. Cheryl even got to offer the mealtime prayer for the whole group. It was an experience they're not likely to soon forget. And once the program was over, they took the opportunity to gather with some friends in Medan to do some Christmas activities, play games, and sing songs.

SELAMAT

Read more online at:
http://ferrys.asia

This next year is promising to be one chock-full with more joys, challenges, blessings and sins… and also to include full and complete forgiveness in Christ our Lord. We know it will be interesting, what with the impending birth of Baby #6, as well as some other interesting things on the horizon. But knowing that you are with us, we are comforted and consoled. Knowing our Lord's love in cross and empty tomb, in Word and Sacrament, we sing:

> With Him as Lord to lead our way
> In want and in prosperity,
> What need we fear in earth or space
> In this new year of grace (LSB 896:5)!

December brought about opportunities to visit the church leaders in Japan, as well as spend some time with our LCMS workers there. We had a sit-down meeting with leaders of the Okinawa Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Japan Lutheran Church (NRK).

This month also afforded the chance to visit Papua New Guinea and see the fruit of another long-time LCMS mission. I was able to visit with our current LCMS personnel, some LCMS veterans, and the local church leaders. I even preached for the graduation service at Timothy Lutheran Seminary in the highlands of Enga Province.

Thank you for all of your prayers, encouragement, and generous support throughout the last calendar year. We are so grateful for your ongoing trust, love, and partnership. We pray for the Lord's blessings and peace to go with you from 2017 into whatever 2018 will bring. You are redeemed, you are free, you are loved. Praise be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

To support our work financially, send a tax-deductible gift to: The LCMS, P.O. Box 790089, St. Louis, MO 63179

Or: Mission Central, 40718 Highway E-16, Mapleton, IA 51034
Make checks payable to **The LCMS**, and mark them "Support of Charles Ferry." Gifts can also be given securely online through our online giving page at *www.lcms.org/ferry*.

!Amigos En Cristo!
News from ***La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo:*** *Friends in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church:* **Pastor Daniel Vogel**, Denison, Iowa

Iowa District West, LCMS
Year 14, Issue 2, February 2018

EPIPHANY IN DENSION Three Kings Day is very popular in Latin America. It remains that way among Latinos in the United States. It is the commemoration of the wise-men who bring gifts to the Christ child. We use this day's event to reach out to the Spanish speaking community. It is wonderful to have Christ-centered cultural traditions that we may use as a means to reach our neighbors.

Right: One of the Three Kings Day traditions is the eating of "Rosca de Reyes" or "King's bread." It's a type of fruitcake. Inside the fruitcake one will find small figures of the baby Jesus. This represents Jesus being hidden from King Herod's forces.

UPCOMING EVENTS We have a busy Lent ahead of us. We will resume mid-week services for the entirety of the season. Look for photos and biographies of them in your next newsletters. New member classes continue and we hope to receive all current students as members by Easter. More information about them will be shared in the future.

Please Continue to Support **our church**: For our mission friends financial support checks should now be sent to: Amigos en Cristo Lutheran Church, 1004 1st Avenue South, Denison, Iowa, 51442

CONTACT:
Pastor Willie Grills
1004 1st Ave. South Denison, Iowa 51442
Church: 712-263-2235 Pastor's Cell: 606-225-2122
pastorgrills@gmail.com

China Lutheran Seminary
Our Missionary in Taiwan
Dr. Stephen Oliver

中華信義神學院
China Lutheran Seminary

The Olivers: Isaac, Maggie, Ginny, Stephen, Gary,

MINISTRY Spreading God's Word in Asia through teaching, preaching and other ministry continues to be our main work at China Lutheran Seminary and other places in the region. Thank you so very much for your wonderful support in prayer, giving, encouragement and many other ways!! We see God's Grace at work through you. Many continue to become believers, be nurtured in faith, and especially be formed & prepared to be servants of the cross to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus for the salvation of Chinese and all Asians! God's Word is the Gospel, which endures forever and will not return void! (Isaiah 40 & 55 and 1 Peter 1:25)

FAMILY Maggie continues to remain very active with the mommy fellowship that meets weekly in our home, with Bible study, caring for the family, and Sunday School (this year she directed the children's Christmas program, in which Isaac was the main actor). Isaac (10), Gary (8) and Virginia (6) are at Hsinchu International School and each of them continues to take piano lessons. In addition, they've been enjoying ping pong lately and Isaac is also taking violin lessons. He has been able to serve in Sunday School with both piano and violin.

We value your continued PRAYER for:

1. Our good health (physically and spiritually).
2. Our family and relatives to come to faith and salvation in Christ, especially Maggie's mother (Suzhen), brother (Reggie) and his wife (Nicole).
3. Our ministry of God's Word through teaching & preaching. A special focus is the "Grace Alone" seminar Stephen (keynote speaker) is preparing for on 3/12/18.

UPCOMING EVENTS @ ZION & TRINITY

February 3

Strengthening Marriages (at Zion) with Lutheran Family Services
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
$40 per couple

February 5, 12, 19

Jeremiah Bible Study (at Zion)
9:30 a.m.
Join Pastor Riggert for a journey through Prophet Jeremiah's writings.

February 11

Valentine Banquet (at Trinity)
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
$20 per couple, $10 for singles
Childcare available
Tickets available through Zion or Trinity

February 14

Ash Wednesday
Midweek Lenten Services begin
5:45 p.m. service; 6:30 p.m. meal (Zion)
6:30 p.m. service (Trinity)
(special early imposition of ashes at Trinity at 7:30 a.m.)

February 25

Lutheran Family Services Guest Preacher and special Bible class on Physician Directed Suicide

February 25

Strengthening Parents (at Zion)
Lutheran Family Services
Afternoon Workshop

March 11

Family Game Day (at Zion)
3:00 – 5:00 p.m. w/ pizza at 5:00
Bring your favorite game and enjoy a fun afternoon with the Zion and Trinity families.

February Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion & Trinity

Birthdays (T = Trinity)

1. Gerald Beck
   Paige Mohr
   Scott Lahr (T)
2. Carl French
   Brooklyn Riesberg
   Kendra Walters
3. Ray Christensen
4. Todd Gruhn
   Andrew Puck
   Adella Farley (T)
   William Joens (T)
5. Jean Hargens
   Scott Lingle (T)
6. Michaela Chapman
   Curt Struve
7. Kennedy Adams
   Sasha Backhaus
   Marlyn Fielweber
   Ardith Lage
8. Dena Diersen
   Russ Spies
   Rexanne Struve
10. Joe Ewoldt
    Devontay Hocken
    Olivia Paska
    Doug Ridgley
11. Dane Blom (T)
12. Tammi Powers
    Donna Schmarzo
    Sarah Birks (T)
13. Jason Opperman
14. Ken Puck
    Sierra Riessen (T)
15. Kristin Backhaus
    Frank Boeck (T)
16. Ryan Borkowski
    Scott Saunders (T)
17. Cory Beyer
    Beth Daniels
    Carol French
    Adam Gruhn
    Jeanne Gruhn
    Jenna Rosener
18. Zach Dreier
    Carolyn Kerkhoff
19. Shaunda Martin
    Curtis Weems
    Roger Wegner
20. Janice Monson
    Jayde Rosener
    Lynette Gaskill (T)
    Mary Rasmussen (T)
21. Jean Ferneding
    Sierra Ferry
    Mike Powers
    Sierra Ferry (T)
23. Tom Wegner
    Mitchell Lahr (T)
24. Scott Opperman
    Barb Page
    Eric Christensen (T)
25. Kodilynn Rosener
26. Deanna Frank
    Keith Boyens (T)
27. Rylie-Shea Muhlbauer
    Scott Stribe
    Jeremy Wulf
28. Adam Albertsen
    Gary Dammann
    Katie Sextro
29. Karen Vollstedt

Anniversaries

2. Errol & Anna Belle Wegner
3. Richard & Judy Irwin
4. Joe & Becky Karsten
5. Paul & Monica Christensen
9. Lowell & Betty Schroeder
12. Lenus & Kristie Borkowski
13. Bill & Deb Ranniger
14. Dave & Bev Grundmeier
    Chad & Lynette Gaskill
15. Bob & Gloria Ewoldt
18. Lance & Jamie Hanson

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

Zion:
Transfers Out:
Barb Anderson to Christ Lutheran Church, Rawlins, Wyoming, January 24, 2018

Official Acts

Joan Marcine (nee: Mesenbrink) Wittrock; Died January 14, 2018; Funeral January 19, 2018 (Ohde funeral Home); Pastor Jonathan Conner

Lyle L. Donnelson; Died January 19, 2018; Funeral January 27, 2018; Pastor Robert Riggert

In Our Prayers

Walt Noelck, Dave Grundmeier, Heather Kusel, Sherri Steffes, Jim Deevers, Gabriel Albers (Pastor and Rebecca's nephew), Athena Bess, Diane Henkleman, Pastor Johnson, Ron Claussen (Laurene Meeves' brother), Rick Spack, Ray Christensen, Arlo Dammann