

## Changing of the Guard & the Need for (wholesome) Identity



It was time. Tiffany and I snuck over to Trinity just in time for the Service of the Sacrament. The sanctuary was packed in large part due to a baptism. As the congregation sang the Agnus Dei, Tiffany along with assisting elders marched forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

Sporting my walking stick for balance, I kneeled, and I received the Meal among fellow sinners and saints at Trinity for what may be the last time. It was more than just the reception of Christ sacramentally speaking, but it was my way to signal my goodbye as the primary under-shepherd to Trinity.

It was time though. Stamina has decreased. Sometimes breathing can be a challenge to the point where I use oxygen. When I rose from the Communion rail, in my mind, the guard changed. Trinity was placed under the excellent care of under-shepherds Trinity has worked with before. The hard thing, however, about the changing of this guard was that I was no longer going to return for another shift. It was time for me to step down, but it's hard to see your farm, your family, your flock switch to the care of different people. Holding back tears, we exited through the side door – in terms of full-time pastoral ministry, my shift had come to a close.

I've wondered if retiring conjures the same sort of pain. Walking away from the building you've worked in for years if not decades and leaving beloved co-workers behind. Sure, new opportunities arise as we retire, but if we take the doctrine of vocation seriously then God was working through you no matter your title in order to care for His Creation. The transition of that calling – a calling that may have given you great joy – splashes sadness and questioning in your general direction. Leaving you wondering, "Who am I now?" Who am I now without my work or co-workers, or, in my case, who am I without my beloved flock?

A significant doctrine for our time and day that I'm finding intellectually and emotionally vital at this moment of waving goodbye to my people is the teaching of identity. In our normal parlance we might say, "How do you identify...?" Or an even simpler way of thinking about identity is, "I am...." I am a father, a mother, a cancer survivor, a mechanic, a victim, a straight-A student, objectively beautiful, well off financially, in touch with how life really works. There are no shortages of identities that make us who we are. The question is, however, are these identities capable of lasting the test of time? Follow-up question – will these identities overturn our inevitable endings when death comes to call?

Was my vocation as pastor a good thing? Sure. Through me, God forgave, enlightened, and nourished His people. But as I begin the process of entering my casket, is 'pastor' a good identity? Well, it hasn't gotten me bonus points to redeem for a cure to my cancer. My being a pastor does not get me a free pass into the presence of God upon my death.

Pastoring then has served as a wonderful vocation, but it makes for a lousy identity. We can go through our list of identities and come to the same conclusion. Is being objectively beautiful bad? No, but if that's what gives you meaning, what's going to happen to you internally when aging kicks into high gear? Beating cancer is great, but the heroism and bravery so many have attributed to you won't stop new tumors from invading or prevent different diseases from killing you softly down the road. Parenting can be especially heartbreaking as kids move away (cats and the cradles and all that); how will you handle your need to be needed by your kids once they've moved away? Straight-A's are fantastic, but as you move to bigger ponds for bachelor degrees or master degrees you'll quickly catch on that there are smarter people than you. How will you deal with that revelation? The identities we claim tend to be too weak to ferry us into the afterlife let alone comfort us in the here and now.

Saturday night I said goodbye to Trinity without explicitly saying so. With that goodbye, my calling as a pastor ended to a certain degree. It was time, but it was hard...no, it was crushing.

On Sunday morning, I still had a couple of baptisms lined up. In hindsight, the two baptisms were just as much for the kids receiving Christ as they were for me. I was reminded that I have a bullet-proof identity. Because of my baptism back in 1990 God incorporated me into His family. You might say my identity was a child of God. A child in so far as I was connected to Jesus in the Holy Sacrament, or, better yet, I was aligned to the God who was going to take care of me; this identity received in Baptism connected me to Jesus' death but also His resurrection. Finally! There is an identity that can bring to an end my death sentence.

As much as we rely on identities to make us feel like we are full, whole, and in control of our lives, that reliance is just our hearts pulling the wool over our eyes. Embracing the identity of child of God is extremely difficult because it strips us of the destinies we are aiming for with our preferred identities. Christ takes the driver's seat; we're only children for crying out loud, we can't drive. But to invoke the biblical character of Job quickly, his identity as father, employer, businessman, and farmer was stripped from him in a matter of days. Identifying as a child of God has no expiration date; disease and death like to make God look like a chump – "If He really loved you, why didn't He stop the cancer from spreading?" But the Psalms make it abundantly clear that evil folds in on itself; falls into the traps it made for you. Identifying as a child of God, however, means you are cared for all your life; it means Jesus cares for you post-death as your body and spirit separate from one another; and, finally, that identity places you in the clan of Christ – the same one who rose from the dead (permanently).

We all have identities or ways in which we see ourselves which make us feel significant. Vocationally, I was a pastor, but if I'm being honest I made pastoring an identity too. But I'm proof, however, that pastoring is one of millions of identities that cannot prevent death from taking over. As I poured water over two adorable children on Sunday, I was reminded that I possess an identity that is like a mighty fortress. I am a child of God. It's time, I think, for us to recall our baptisms and embrace the identity that God bestowed upon us rather than the identities we've painted on ourselves. – Pastor Johnson

# When the Whatifs Strike, Strike

Back with Truth



Shel Silverstein, the children's poet (author of the well-loved *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *A Light in the Attic*, *Runny Babbit*, and more), in the playful poem below, raises a question that plagues us all: *What if...*? In this article we will dare to answer the question. But first, the poem:

***Whatif*** by Shel Silverstein

Last night, while I lay thinking here,  
some Whatifs crawled inside my ear  
and pranced and partied all night long  
and sang their same old Whatif song:

Whatif I'm dumb in school?  
Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?  
Whatif I get beat up?  
Whatif there's poison in my cup?  
Whatif I start to cry?  
Whatif I get sick and die?  
Whatif I flunk that test?  
Whatif green hair grows on my chest?  
Whatif nobody likes me?  
Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?  
Whatif I don't grow tall?  
Whatif my head starts getting smaller?  
Whatif the fish won't bite?  
Whatif the wind tears up my kite?  
Whatif they start a war?  
Whatif my parents get divorced?  
Whatif the bus is late?  
Whatif my teeth don't grow in straight?  
Whatif I tear my pants?  
Whatif I never learn to dance?  
Everything seems well, and then  
the nighttime Whatifs strike again!

Adults may smile at some of the silly *whatifs* dancing in this child's ear, but several of her *whatifs* are serious and sobering. And the honest adult will admit that those *whatifs* age with us and continue to climb into our ears at night (and, if truth be told, all throughout the day).

So what do we do about them?

## Acknowledge the *whatifs*

First, acknowledge them. Acknowledge the *whatifs*. The first step is simply admitting that these questions plague us all. Yes, some of them are probably as silly as the imaginary child in Silverstein's poem, but some of them are just as serious and sobering.

*Whatif I lose my job?*  
*Whatif my spouse dies?*  
*Whatif I can't afford my medical bills?*  
*Whatif someone brings a gun to my kids' school?*  
*Whatif I say something stupid?*  
*Whatif my child gets hurt... or worse?*  
*Whatif I can't stay in my home?*  
*Whatif I make a bad financial decision?*  
*Whatif the economy implodes?*  
*Whatif persecution breaks out?*

Nobody likes these *whatifs*, but everyone is visited by them. Everyone. Denying them is no good. It only gives them power over us because denying them keeps them in the dark and ensures that we will be tormented by them alone.

## Say the *whatifs* out loud.

So after acknowledging them, the next thing we need to do is to say them out loud. Say your *whatifs* out loud to your husband or wife, to your friend, to your pastor, to your counselor, even to

your mirror. The important thing here is to drag those little pesky *whatif* bugs out into the open so you can get a good look at them and put them in their place. And, ideally, you will say them out loud to a mature Christian. We'll see why in a minute.

These *whatif* bugs thrive in the darkness, in your unspoken thoughts and fears. They're a lot like the monsters that used to live under your bed as a child. They were much bigger in the dark. The light had a way of making them smaller. Saying our *whatifs* out loud drags them out into the light and immediately makes them smaller.

### **Answer the *whatifs* with God's truth.**

Now, with them dragged out into the light, it's time to start answering them. This is key. These *whatifs* maintain power over us when they remain unanswered. That's what makes them so scary. They peddle in the unknown. They thrive in the darkness of uncertainty. We don't like the unknown. It scares us. It keeps us up at night. It paralyzes us into inactivity. That's why we need to drag our *whatifs* out into the light and answer them. Yes, the answer might be unpleasant or even painful, but then we will be dealing with the known and operating in the light. Then we can bring God's truth and wisdom to bear.

In order to bring God's truth to bear, we need to know God's truth. So before we answer our *whatifs*, let's review the promises of God that we will use to answer them.

The LORD will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time forth and forevermore (Psalm 121:8).

Jesus says: "the gates of hell shall not prevail against [my church]" (Matthew 16:18).

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son Romans 8:28-29

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me... (Psalm 23:4).

If we have been united with him in a death like his [in baptism], we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:5).

God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea... (Psalm 46:1-2).

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Meditate deeply on these words. Marinate your mind in them. Rehearse them out loud. Make them your mother tongue. These (and the hundreds of promises like them) will form the basis for the answers you will speak into your *whatifs*.

Please appreciate the essential nature of this step. You must know the promises of God. And the only way to know them is to hear them, to study them,

to sing them, to confess them, to speak them, and to pray them. There is no shortcut. Without a mind ruled by the promises of God your *whatifs* will reign.

So let us learn to say our *whatifs* out loud and then to answer them with the promises of God.

*Whatif I lose my job?*

Well, that would be very unpleasant. I might have to give some things up. I might have to move. I might have to start over on some things. I might need to depend on others for help. But Christ's Church would remain and His promises would still be mine and I could trust Him to give me grace for each day and to provide my daily bread.

*Whatif my spouse dies?*

That would be terrible. I would have to rethink most things in my life. I would experience great grief. I would cry... a lot... for a long time. I might have to move. I might have to start over on some things. I might need to depend on others for help. But Christ's Church would remain and His promises would still be mine and I could trust Him to give me grace for each day. And I would yearn all the more for the resurrection.

*Whatif I say something stupid?*

Well, that would be embarrassing. People might think I'm incompetent. I wouldn't like that. But, I might learn from it for the future. And I would remind myself that my identity is not built on my competence or ignorance but on my status as a beloved, redeemed creation of God. And Christ's Church would remain and His promises would still be mine.

*Whatif I can't stay in my home?*

I would be sad... very sad. But I would tell myself true things. The things of this world are transitory. I can't cling to them forever. They will fall through my fingers. Further, I would strive to find something beautiful and good about the place to which I was going. And I would choose to focus on that. I would choose to define my life by my present abundance, by the good and enjoyable daily bread that God provides, and not by my lack, not by what I don't have.

*Whatif someone brings a gun to my kids' school?*

That would be horrible. If someone was shot and killed, if my children were shot and killed, I would be devastated. I would struggle with anger and guilt and a whole host of emotions that I probably can't even imagine right now. So I would need to get help. But dying an unpleasant death isn't the worst thing imaginable. Dying any death without knowing Jesus is. Therefore I will ensure that my children are equipped to confess Christ with every fiber of their being. I will ensure that my children fear the Lord not death, that they know the power of His promises and the certainty His resurrection gives us even in the face of death.

We are all harassed by the *whatifs*. But we are not helpless before them. In fact, God has mightily equipped us to fight back against them – and fight back we must! It's no accident that Scripture depicts His Word and promises as a sword. It's our offensive weapon. So let's learn how to use it to slay those little *whatifs* that try to crawl into our ears at night! – Pastor Conner

FROM RED LETTER CHALLENGE

# FORGIVING CHALLENGE



A 40-DAY LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

ZACH ZEHNDER

A few years back, Trinity embarked on the Red Letter Challenge – focusing on the words of Jesus. For Lent this year, we pick up another resource by the makers of the Red Letter Challenge. The Forgiving Challenge will equip you to acknowledge sin in your own life, receive the forgiveness of Jesus, and challenge you to forgive the people in your life who have hurt you.

There is a book companion that features a daily meditation. We have 50 copies. Zion and Trinity members are welcome to pick up a copy on Ash Wednesday (or thereafter). Copies are available on a first come, first serve basis.

Trinity will host a meal at 5:30pm and a service at 6:30pm throughout Lent. No meal will be served on Ash Wednesday.

## Poetry, Prayer, & the Psalms Lent 2023

2.22: Psalm 13  
3.1: Psalm 16  
3.8: Psalm 19  
3.15: Psalm 29  
3.22: Psalm 32  
3.29: Psalm 82



Services begin at 5:45  
with supper following.

## Fellowship Club Update

### Fellowship Club in Mission!

Orphan Grain Train (OGT) has received Fellowship Club support through clothing collections (next collection in late April) and deliveries to the Ida Grove warehouse. You can join the Fellowship Club in their OGT support on **Sunday, March 12**. That Sunday's fellowship free-will offering will go toward BOXES FOR THE IOWA DISTRICT WEST BRANCH. The shipping boxes, once donated by an Iowa company, now need to be purchased for \$1 a box. Approximately 3000 boxes are needed each year. A uniform size is needed for the around the world charitable shipping. Bring a special Lenten season donation toward the BOX project on March 12 as you enjoy the fellowship time hosted by the Fellowship Club. Thank you!

The February meeting included a presentation by Warren Puck on the Garuna mission in Cambodia and the surrounding countries. Through the Garuna mission, schools are started (presently seven and soon nine schools), churches are planted, and church workers are trained. \$360 supports a Garuna student for a WHOLE YEAR. The Fellowship Club has adopted a student! Visit with Warren if you or your family is interested in sponsoring a student or in other ways supporting this unique outreach of our church.

The Fellowship Club will meet again on **Monday, March 13 at 1:30 p.m.** We appreciated the guests who joined us in February and always welcome visitors to grow together in Christ and members of the fellowship of Zion.



## Zion Ladies Guild February 2023 Secretary Report

The regular meeting was held on February 8 @1pm. Pastor Conner opened with prayer and devotion. President Ehlers called the meeting to order in Name of the Triune God. League Pledge recited. Roll call was answered with giving a favorite winter pastime you have. 18 members were present.

**Birthdays:** Janice Munson. **Anniversaries:** Paul and Monica Christensen, Bob and Gloria Ewoldt. The secretary notes were read and approved. Thank you notes were read from Shannon, Lutherans for life, Lutheran Family Services, and Camp Okoboji. The Treasurer's report was given by Sheryl Zinke. Darlene gave the kitchen report. She bought a new coffee pot for the kitchen. \$500.00 were received from recent funerals. Circle has had no activity. Human care reported they are continuing to quilt. 10 quilts went to Orphan Grain Train, along with bags of clothing.

**Old Business:** 2 books have been purchased for the church library. *Good Grief* and *Bible Discovery Devotions*.

These books are in memory of Cheral Buhr. No more information on bingo at Accura.

**New Business:** Sheryl Zinke will be retiring from the Treasures position. Karen Reinke will take over starting 2-10-23 as a motion was made by Darlene Vollstedt, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Mary Grimm. Voted and approved by 17 members present. Linnet Nissen and Karen Reinke were welcomed by Pres. Ehlers. Mite box purpose and distributions were explained as well as what the kitchen funds are used for.

Kitchen cleaning was discussed. Audrey will make a sheet up with what needs to be done, people can sign off as they have completed areas. Discussion on selling or giving away some of the place settings as well as the choir robes that are no longer needed. Connie Ahrendsen has a contact she can check with possibilities of donating these items. Shannon brought up the idea to Becki on making a flyer on what the Guild does, our goals and our part in the life of Zion. New members are always welcome to join the group. More discussion to be done next month on this.

The Lord's Prayer and table prayer were recited. Meeting was adjourned. Lunch was served by Audrey Roe and Monica Christensen. Next meeting will be March 8, 2023, with Cynthia Genzen and Joann Thomas serving.

Gloria Ewoldt, Secretary





BIRTH



DEATH

ing Well

I've been thinking about death lately. The better word is probably *meditating*. I've been meditating on death. Maybe you think that's weird. Perhaps it is, but for something that happens to everyone, you'd think we'd meditate on it more. You'd think we'd meaningfully prepare for it. Maybe the weird thing is how ardently we avoid thinking and talking about death, as if we can make it unreal by not naming it. Why do you think we don't talk about it, don't meditate on it? Is it too scary, too unpleasant, too distressing? I don't find the idea enjoyable, but do you think our ardent avoidance might be making the matter worse (the way avoiding anxiety-inducing fears gives them more power over us)? Is it possible that our avoidance is hindering our ability to prepare and to finish well?

Perhaps that's what so many of us have found edifying in Pastor Johnson's sober reflections on death. He's dragging the monster of death out into the light so that we can get a look at him. Death is ugly. He's mean. He's devious. There's plenty there to fear. But by dragging Death into the light, Pastor Johnson has drawn attention to the Light, the Light of Life, Jesus Christ. The beauty of Christ outshines the ugliness of death. The power of Christ outmatches the strength of death. The authority of Christ outranks the claims of death.

Pastor Johnson invites us to meditate with him,

With the darkness of death in mind... I find that I have two alternatives. I can reach into the darkness and go insane due to unanswerable questions. There's no way I can avoid death. The valley of the shadow of death is too big; I can't jump over it or walk around it or pay my way out of it. It has to be faced. Exclusively dwelling in the darkness will generate hopelessness, because death is an enemy to humans – an enemy so brutal, no human has been capable of beating death. I can feel that inability in my bones – I know I can't beat death – hence my fear... I feel death's weight, and it terrifies me.

But there is an alternative response. Yes, death is unavoidable, but I'm learning – admittedly, slowly – that I can look beyond the casket. If facing death is standing on the edge of a valley, I can look down into the hole or I can look off to the horizon. Slowly and slowly my body will be separated from my spirit, and I will take up residence in a casket. But as my eyeline lowers and lowers and lowers into the coffin, there's a great deal of hope to view in the distance.

The only thing that's getting me through this experience is that my existence, my being sees something beautiful out there. In a word, Jesus.

I've read his words many times. Many times. I pray you do too. There's wisdom there, wisdom borne from years of meditating on God's Word in the face of death. It was a meditating that started in childhood when his parents had the courage and fortitude to take him to church. Pastor Johnson reflects,



The greatest gift my parents gave to me was getting my lazy rear end out of bed in order to attend Sunday school and worship. Every week we went. And every week, whether I knew it or not, the hymns, liturgies, creeds, and Bible stories etched themselves into my soul... The passing down of the faith from my parents to me has equipped me to face the end.

Appreciate his words. His parents knew the necessity of digging a great reservoir for God's Word deep in Pastor Johnson's soul. They didn't know he would face cancer (and death at a young age), but they knew death was real and that he (and they!) needed the Word of Jesus. And through the repeated hearing and confessing of that Word, God filled a great reservoir of His Word in Pastor Johnson's soul (and in his parents' souls), a reservoir from which Pastor Johnson has and continues to draw nourishment and strength, a reservoir so deep that it overflows in rich, nourishing truth for you too.

Have you given thought to your reservoir? To your children's, your grandchildren's? Is your need for such a reservoir of God's Word in your soul any less? Do you need the nourishment it provides any less? Death doesn't take a day off and it doesn't exempt anyone. And, speaking soberly, NO ONE KNOWS WHEN DEATH WILL TURN ITS ATTENTION TO HIM.

When I've meditated on death I have envisioned it as a line of people (depicted in the image that accompanied the title to this article). It's a long line and we're all in it. We enter the line at birth (really, at conception). We reach the front of the line on our death day. But here's what we must soberly acknowledge: no one knows how close to the front of the line he is. Sometimes infants are called to the front. Sometimes young children are.

Sometimes teenagers and young adults are called to the front. And sometimes we don't reach the front until many years later. But *we all reach the front*.

Perhaps a similar sober thought moved the psalmist to write:

O LORD, make me know my end  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting I am!  
Behold, you have made my days a few  
handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.  
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!  
Psalm 39:4-5

And

So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm  
90:12

The last words in each quoted text are important (and call for thoughtful meditation). Psalm 39:5 ends with these words: "Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!" The word *breath* is the Hebrew word *hevel*. It shows up repeatedly in the book of Ecclesiastes:

[Hevel] of [hevel], says the Preacher,  
[hevel] of [hevel]! All is [hevel]. Ecclesiastes  
1:2

As we've discussed before, *hevel* means "vapor, breath, or smoke." Envision stepping outside on a frigid winter morning and exhaling. Watch your breath turn and twirl. Then grab it and hold it. When you open your hand, what do you have? Nothing. That's what the Preacher of Ecclesiastes is saying and what the Psalmist is confessing. We are *hevel*. Whether we live one year, 32 years, or

100 years, we are momentary breaths (until Christ solidifies us in our resurrection!).<sup>1</sup> Living as if we are something more than breaths is not only foolish, it's dangerous, because it keeps us from preparing (from digging and filling the reservoir for God's Word).

And that's why the last word of the quoted verse from Psalm 90 is so important. The Psalmist has meditated deeply on the vaporous nature of our life and has turned to the Lord in prayer, asking Him to grant "a heart of wisdom." We would all do well to pray likewise. We will live for a finite number of days. One day it will be our last day. On that day we will reach the front of the line. It may be many, many days away. It may be today. Sometimes that day comes suddenly (an accident or health event); sometimes it signals its approach (a terminal diagnosis). But the day comes. Surely and steadily it comes.

Soberly accepting this reality, preparing for it, and facing it without fear demands wisdom. In fact, wisdom teaches us where fear belongs, not groveling and trembling before the death monster, but reverently bowing before the Lord. The book of Proverbs captures the idea:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom... Proverbs 9:10

Wisdom teaches us to fear the Lord, not death. Space prevents us from giving this teaching the attention it deserves, but the fear of the Lord is the central component to Godly wisdom (i.e. to moving through life well *and* to finishing well). On the one hand, fearing God means fearing His just

wrath against sin. As Jesus instructs in Matthew 10:

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him [God] who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

This just wrath, however, has been propitiated on Jesus. He has endured it for us! Paul announces, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Such astonishingly good news!

On the other hand, fearing God brings confidence in His everlasting, covenantal love:

Let those who fear the LORD say,  
"His steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 118:4

You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD!  
He is their help and their shield. Psalm 115:11

Fearing the Lord means acknowledging Him as the Lord. Further, it means embracing His promise of everlasting, covenantal love. And through baptism, *you* have been joined to God's everlasting, covenantal love! Meditate deeply on Scripture's announcement:

For you have died,<sup>2</sup> and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:3-4

---

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis writes about this solidifying (he calls it "firming up") in his imaginative novel on Heaven *The Great Divorce*. And Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5, writes

about being "further clothed" in the resurrection. Their words are worth meditating on.

<sup>2</sup> Paul is here referring to Baptism. We died with Christ in Baptism.

We 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:4-5

Baptism joins you to Jesus, both to His death *and* to His resurrection. Just as He entered death and rose in victory, you will too. This empowers us to stand in Death's presence without fear, even to speak to Death from the perspective of our baptism-assured resurrection. Paul models this for us in 1 Corinthians 15:

O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting? (vs. 55)

Christ has dragged Death into the light and stripped him of his power, and through our Baptism, He gives us the authority to speak His victory over Death. This doesn't exempt us from dying, but it does exempt us from fear and despair. Death has been defeated.

Pastor Johnson describes it this way,

The only way to walk through the valley of the shadow of death is to hire a guide who knows the directions out of the gorge.

That guide is Jesus. And knowing and confessing Him as Lord empowers and equips you with the wisdom to finish well. And that wisdom changes the way we see the front of the line. Instead of fearing it, we can see it as our finish line. Our goal is to finish well. As such, we are moved to ask a different set of questions from the rest of the world. Instead of asking how we might maximize our pleasure and minimize our discomfort, we ask how we can better know Christ and make His reign

known. Instead of obsessing over "bucket lists," we can think bigger than a bucket and focus, instead, on filling a reservoir in our souls with the nourishing Word of God.

Our prayer, like Pastor Johnson's prayer, now becomes a prayer to finish well. Yes, we pray for miracles and deliverance when death threatens, but our greater prayer is to finish well with the confession of Christ confidently and joyfully on our lips, to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). That's how we finish well. – Pastor Conner

A poster for a 'Rally for Life' event. The background is dark with silhouettes of people raising their hands. A large teal oval in the center contains the text 'Rally for Life'. Above the oval, it says 'CRAWFORD COUNTY FOR LIFE PRESENTS'. Below the oval, the date and time 'SUNDAY, MARCH 26 2-5 PM' are listed, followed by the location 'OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH 500 N 24TH ST., DENISON, IA' and 'FREE PIZZA AND DRINKS'. The featured speakers are 'LUANA STOLTENBERG' (Pro-Life Advocate, Author & National Speaker) and 'AARON LARSON' (with local high school musicians). At the bottom, it states 'A FREE Pro-Life Event for Middle and High School Students' and 'ALL ARE WELCOME. JOIN US, HAVE SOME FUN, AND LEARN ABOUT THE VALUE OF LIFE AND HOW TO PROTECT AND DEFEND IT.' with a contact number for questions.

CRAWFORD COUNTY  
FOR LIFE  
PRESENTS

# Rally for Life

SUNDAY, MARCH 26  
2-5 PM

OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH  
500 N 24TH ST., DENISON, IA  
FREE PIZZA AND DRINKS

FEATURING  
**LUANA STOLTENBERG**  
PRO-LIFE ADVOCATE, AUTHOR &  
NATIONAL SPEAKER

AND MUSIC BY  
**AARON LARSON**  
WITH LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL  
MUSICIANS

A FREE Pro-Life Event for  
Middle and High School Students

ALL ARE WELCOME. JOIN US, HAVE SOME FUN, AND LEARN ABOUT THE VALUE  
OF LIFE AND HOW TO PROTECT AND DEFEND IT.

Questions? Call Noel at 712-263-5579.



Register  
Youth & Family  
for Camp this  
summer at  
[campokoboji.org](http://campokoboji.org)

## CAMP OKOBOJI SUMMER 2023

### Discipleship Programs

June 2-4.....Kids' Kamp  
June 8-11.....JOY Camp #1  
June 25-29....Cub Week #1  
July 2-7.....July 4 Family Retreat  
July 9-15.....Junior High Week  
July 13-16.....JOY Camp #2  
July 16-22.....Cub Week #2  
July 23-29.....Youth Week (High School)  
July 30-Aug. 4...Family Retreat #1  
August 6-11.....Family Retreat #2

### Other Events

January 27-29.....Family Ice Fishing Retreat  
May 6-7.....Spring Volunteer Work Weekend  
June 11-14.....Living Proof Dance Camp  
June 17.....Camp Okoboji Auxiliary Quilt Auction  
June 18-24.....Minneboji Lutheran Camp  
August 17-20.....Warrior Rock Camp  
May 30-Sept. 5.....Sunday Morning Worship  
1st Sundays of the Month (May-October).....Omelet Brunches!



For more information  
and to register, visit  
[campokoboji.org](http://campokoboji.org)

## Preschool Praises for February

February we were able to talk about Groundhog's Day, Valentine's Day, and Presidents' Day! Each child was able to vote whether they thought the Groundhog would see his shadow or not. Unfortunately, the Groundhog did see his shadow meaning 6 more weeks of winter! We discussed Valentine's Day and all of the people and things we love. We also discussed the love of Jesus and how because of him we are blessed with all of these things we love.



The children were able to share their love with their Grandparents on our special event this month: Grandparents' Day. This was such a fun event where the children were able to invite their Grandparents to spend the day with them during Preschool hours. The class was able to sing their songs (Jesus Loves Me & If You're Happy and You Know It), enjoy a delicious snack of donuts, bananas, and juice, make a keepsake craft, play games and activities, and show off their classroom! It was such a wonderful time seeing the Grandparents and children enjoy their time spent together.

We started our Community Helpers theme this month and welcomed Manning Dental for our first visitors. It happened to also be National Children's Dental Health Month which made it a perfect time for kids to learn about dental health! We thank Manning Dental for taking the time to come visit us at Zion Preschool! A few snow days postponed more visitors so we are excited to welcome them in March! We are reminded that not only should we show our love of Jesus by going to Church, reading the Bible, and not doing bad things but also helping others. Jesus helped others and to be like him we should strive to help others as well. As a class we talked about different ways we will be helping our community this coming month.

We enjoyed more times with Pastor Conner. He even made it down to our classroom while Preschool Registration was going on upstairs. One of the Bible stories he told was the temptation of Jesus where the Devil came to him after he had not eaten in 40 days and told him to make the rocks into bread. Jesus knew this was not the will of God so he told him no. We discussed this more in our classroom. We reiterated how Jesus resisted temptation to do something that was not coming from the words of God. As a class we decided we would make some rocks into something on our own. The kids were creative and painted and decorated their very own rocks.

Registration has started for the 2023-2024 school year and we have started filling up! There are still some openings available. If you or anyone you know has a child turning 3 by September 15, 2023 let them know they can stop by the Preschool or Church Office for a registration packet.

-Ms. Amy & Ms. Melanie



13







Thank you, Zion, for supporting our preschool so that we can share Jesus with children!







On February 15, Zion families gathered for our Discipling Event. We asked & answered actual questions from students' learning journals. Below are a few of their questions. Are you equipped to answer? Want help? Talk to me (Pastor Conner), read Zion's monthly newsletter, and check out Zion's blog ([zionmanning.com/blog.php](http://zionmanning.com/blog.php)). I answer these questions frequently!

How do people think they can be cats, or the opposite gender?



How would someone get into hell and what would happen to them?



What is the church definition of love and a human definition?



If God created everything and He is good, why do people suffer?



A lot of girls in my class say, "Oh my f\*\*\* G\*\*\*" as every day language. How can I help and why do you think they are saying this?



What are some ways to relieve pain/stress?





# From Where Does Happiness Come?

## Part 1

Happiness. We all want it. But where do we get it? Happiness is not something that sits on a store shelf and you cannot order it from a catalog. Some people think happiness comes from their situation, such as having health, wealth, and great relationships. But the truth is authentic happiness does not come from our external circumstances, it comes from within us. More specifically, happiness is a choice. When our external situation is going well, it might make it easier for us to choose happiness, but it is not the cause of it. You can be happy even when things around you are nothing like you would like them to be.



You can be happy when you are in a job that you don't care for, or when a relationship didn't end the way you wanted it to. And you can become happy when life isn't falling into the perfect plan you had in place. Happiness is an internal decision you make. It comes from what you choose to think about, talk about, and how you look at the world (which is why rehearsing the truth is so important – truth that echoes in the Bible and church).

Being happy doesn't mean everything in your life is going well. It means you have decided you are going to overcome the challenges, look beyond them, and work toward being happy. Part of that means exposing and replacing negative thought patterns. In order to do this, you may find it helpful to talk with a trusted counselor, mature friend, or your pastor. Choosing happiness may also mean building protective boundaries in toxic relationships. You may, likewise, find it helpful to talk to someone equipped to help you do this. It may also mean addressing lingering problems from your past. Maybe you need to ask for forgiveness (from an individual and/or from God). Maybe you need to forgive. Maybe you need to acknowledge your grief and find help talking through it. Maybe it's something else. No matter what it is, it involves a choice, your choice.

Choosing happiness will also mean avoiding choices that work against happiness like trying to fill the hole in your soul with stuff. The hole in your soul can't be filled with stuff; to fill that hole you need Jesus (the same goes for substances and potentially addictive behaviors like gambling; they won't fill your soul.). All additional stuff will do is require you to manage it and possibly add to your financial strain. Achieving happiness may require getting rid of stuff and getting rid of your debt. And you *can* make these choices. They may not be easy, but they will be worth it. And help is available! (You can ask Pastor Conner for direction.) For now remember: happiness is a choice.

Next month we'll continue the conversation on choosing happiness, so stay tuned!

Janet Brus, RN  
Psychiatric Medical Care  
Manning Regional Healthcare Center  
Program Director – Senior Life Solutions





# Amigos en Cristo

News from **La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo:**

*Friends in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church*

**Pastor Pedro Lopez**, Denison, Iowa

March 2023

Hello everyone! It is always a pleasure to write to you and inform you of the latest news about your Hispanic Ministry in Iowa District West. Thank you for your prayers and ongoing support! After a short break from the activities with our Hispanic Ministry, we are ready to move on again. We are working with our brothers and sisters in Hartley to continue with the ESL classes. Our last season brought us in touch with many families in the area and a couple of them are coming to our Bible studies and worship services in English! What a blessing to see newcomers join us in worshipping our God.

In Denison, we are also planning new ESL classes. Things are moving along. We are looking for more volunteers to serve the growing number of students. New community members are interested in our church and becoming good friends of our ministry.

We are looking forward to learn which congregations are on the route of the 2023 RAGBRAI (bicycle riders) to partner with them and have a great time of fellowship and an opportunity to raise funds for our Hispanic Ministry. Please check with your community and find out if you are in their path, and partner with us.

Like always, gracias for everything you do for us. Let us know if we can be of any assistance in understanding the challenge and privilege of serving the ever-growing Hispanic Community in your areas!

Gracias and bendiciones, Pastor Lopez



Rev. Pedro Lopez, Asst. to the President  
Missionary at Large, [pedro@iowadistrictwest.org](mailto:pedro@iowadistrictwest.org),  
571-606-7600





**February 19**  
Rhonda Mohr, Kathryn Schneider, and Pastor Conner celebrate Kathryn's installation as Zion's DCE!



## Snapshots of Zion



**February 19**  
The Zion Family welcomes the Schneider family with a potluck brunch and card shower.



**February 5**  
13 Pre-K - 1<sup>st</sup> grade students sing for worship.

**February 12**  
34 2<sup>nd</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade students sing for worship



**February 26**  
Over 50 people gathered for an afternoon of games, fellowship, and pizza! Thank you to Zion's Board of Education and the Gore family for making it happen!



**February 5**  
Paul and Monica Christensen celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary by sponsoring fellowship.



***Please Note! All times and events are subject to change***



**Sunday  
Morning**

**Zion Family Bible Class (after worship)  
Sunday School at Trinity**



**March 13**

**Fellowship Club (1:30) at Zion**



**March 16**

**Thursday afternoon Communion Service at Zion (1:30 p.m.)**



**Wednesdays  
In March**

**Midweek Lenten Series  
Zion: 5:45 service w/ meal following  
Trinity: 5:30 meal / 6:30 service**



**April 2**

**Palm Sunday  
Trinity: 9:00 a.m.  
Zion: 9:00 a.m.**



**April 6**

**Maundy Thursday  
Trinity: 6:30 p.m.  
Zion: 7:00 p.m.**



**April 7**

**Good Friday  
Trinity: 6:30 p.m.  
Zion: 7:00 p.m.**



**April 9**

**Easter Sunday  
Trinity: Breakfast 7:30 a.m.  
Worship: 9:00 a.m.  
Zion: Worship: 7:00 a.m.  
Breakfast: after worship**



**April 26**

**Confirmation Witness Night at Zion (6:30 p.m.)**



**April 30**

**Confirmation Sunday**

# March Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion & Trinity

## *Birthdays* (T = Trinity)

2. Jennifer Behrens  
Kaleal Hass  
Shelly Helmich  
LeAnne Hinners (T)  
Curtis Lingle (T)
3. Lori Genzen  
LeeAnn Musfeldt (T)
4. Katelyn Crawford  
Rebecca Vollstedt (T)
5. Jessie Blackford  
William Lueth (T)  
Oliver Saunders (T)
6. Camden Alexander  
Maureen Bunker  
Josiah Conner  
Matthew Gore  
Paige Hinners
7. Zachary Lorenzen (T)  
Errol Wegner
8. Lenus Borkowski  
Beverly Bruhn  
Bonnie Lorenzen (T)
9. Bentley Kropf (T)  
Craig Musfeldt
10. Stan Baack  
Randahl Peters
11. Cynthia Grau  
Curtis Grimm  
Jeff Hargens  
Kasie Sanford
12. Layton Lorenzen
13. Shannon Walters
14. Ronald Brus  
Justice Cornelius
15. Kora Potthoff  
Kelly Rutherford (T)  
Tyler Saunders
16. Julie Lamp  
Chad Morrow  
Kam Nelson
17. Nancy Grimm  
Myra Luetje  
Laurie North (T)  
Katherine Vogel
19. Julianna Stribe  
Anna Belle Wegner
20. Barbara Grove  
Cynthia Karsten  
Abby Lapel  
Chloe Otto
21. Dustin Petersen  
Russell Ranniger
23. Robert Nissen  
Linda Vinke
24. Travis Borkowski  
Leesa Christensen  
Nathanael Conner  
Claire Gore  
Alix Puck
25. Carla Backhaus  
Danielle Hargens  
Ember Jensen
26. Marjorie Jurgensen (T)  
Ginger Thorn
27. Noah Gore  
Dwight Gruhn  
Cade Jensen  
Aaron Rutz  
David Tibben
28. Michael Alexander  
Rebecca Conner  
Rachel Stoberl
29. Beth Booth  
Judy Borkowski  
Brenda Ehlers  
Robert Lueth (T)  
Stephanie Steckelberg (T)
30. Beckett Bruck  
Lacey Hinners
31. Sharon Fast (T)  
Joelle Puck

## *Anniversaries*

4. Thomas & Susie Ulrickson
8. Nels & Stephany Olson (T)
29. Chad & Kelli Morrow  
Kenneth & Joelle Puck
31. Lorrell & Judy Borkowski

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

## *Official Acts*

### Transferred IN:

John & Kathryn Schneider, Henry & Leonard from Resurrection Lutheran church, Spring, TX, February 19, 2023

### Baptisms (Trinity):

Rex Andrew Blankman 02/04/23 Parents Trevor & Alexandra Blankman  
Boyd Arthur Vetter 02/05/23 Parents Kyle & Kiley Vetter  
Madison Eileen Musfeldt 02/11/23 Joel & Chassity Musfeldt  
Camber Lynn Point 02/12/23 Parents Colten & Lara Point

### Funerals (Trinity)

Larry Dean Farley: Celebration of Life 02/12 Interment at a later date, Death Jan. 31<sup>st</sup>  
Sylvia Ann Saunders: Wed. Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>., Death Feb 18<sup>th</sup>

## *In Our Prayers*

Lyle Mundt, Pastor Johnson, Stan Baack, Tawnya Jacobsen (Kristin Backhaus' sister), John Bexten (father of Beth Alexander and Amy Blackwell), Jim Deevers, Rick Spack, Justeen Schwieso, Sherri Steffes