

ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

REFLECTIONS NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER, 2016



Worship Times

Sunday - 8:00 & 10:45 AM

Monday - 6:00 PM

Bible Studies

Sunday - 9:30 AM - All Ages

Tuesday - 10:00 AM - Ladies

Contact Us

Church Office: (256) 536-9987

Fax: (256) 536-8104

Preschool/CDC: (256) 536-5245

Websites: ascensionhsv.org (church)

cdc.ascensionhsv.org (CDC)

Special Prayer Service
Emphasis on praying for our nation
and our future

November 5 at 5:00 PM

This Sunday, November 6, takes us back to Central Standard Time. Sleep an extra little bit, then get up and still make it to church on time!



COMING IN NOVEMBER

Everyone is ready for November to come around, right? Good! Because November has a lot going for it, especially at Ascension!

For starters:

- HHR Missional Outreach will be doing worship services three times - November 2, 16 and 30 at 10:00 AM;
- Youth Group LOCK-IN! November 4, starts at 8:00 PM;
- A second Missional Outreach begins November 8 at 1:00 PM and November 22 at Regency on Max Luther Drive;
- A prayer service on November 5 to prepare for Voting Day;
- A sad farewell to our Vicar, whose last preaching service will be November 20 as he leaves on November 22 to finish up his seminary studies;
- Thanksgiving Day service, November 24 at 9:30 AM;
- Decorating the sanctuary and church; and
- Advent!

Get ready, get set!

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Well, it's November and Time has marched on again, faster than ever, it seems. The Holiday Season is upon us now that Halloween, Reformation Day, and the Festival of All Saints have receded into the past. The Holiday Season is the season of finding and possessing whatever your "one thing needful" is this year. This season comes around every year and adds fuel to our natural greed as it narrows our focus to attain all our desires. The coming season for giving is really the season for getting. How ironic that is!

In our culture, the Holiday Season centers on Christmas—that time when we celebrate the birthday of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. In the years since Christians began celebrating Christmas (the Mass of Christ's birth), this holiday has become the occasion for us to acknowledge God's gift of Jesus and is His blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation, and to do so as we give special gifts to each other.



"'Tis the season for giving," states an oft-repeated motto. But is this still true? We train our children to the contrary by asking them well in advance of the Holiday Season, "What do you want for Christmas?" What we might do, instead, is to inquire what they will give someone else. Yet, the Santa Claus tradition reinforces the idea of getting instead of giving. That, in turn, becomes our temptation to compromise our relationship with God and fall into great spiritual disaster. What kind of disaster may this be? The disaster of being an idolater.

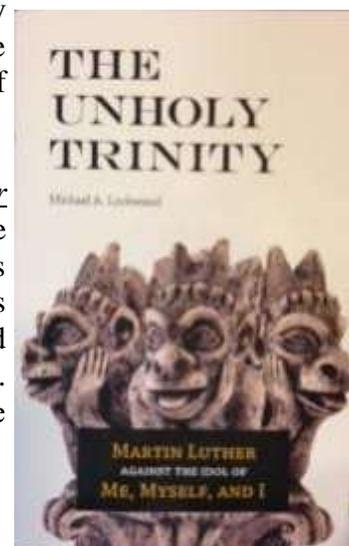
An idolater is a person who commits idolatry; that is, one who breaks the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me!" Idolatry is a disaster, truly. But, who is an idolater? The bad news is, "You and I are idolaters." Idolatry, the worship of idols or false gods, is the premier sin we all are guilty of.



God's command against idolatry was taught to the Israelites by Moses and was known as the "shema," one of two required daily prayers for all the descendants of Israel. Jesus labeled the "shema" "the first and greatest commandment." You yourselves know it well: "You shall love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and soul.... Beware, lest your heart be deceived and you turn and serve other gods and worship them, and the anger of the Lord will blaze against you, and He will close the heavens and there will be no rain, and the earth will not give you its fullness." Idolatry yields a curse - not a blessing - and it results when we turn away from the true God to serve and worship false gods.

We are all idolaters, for that "turning away from God" is what we do. The Holiday Season tends to bring out the worst of that idolatrous spirit in us, and now in these two months of November and December, we are all liable to give in to the time of getting and not giving. Let us analyze this.

I have started to read a new Concordia book, *The Unholy Trinity: Martin Luther against the idol of Me, Myself, and I*, that identifies the unholy trinity of idols that we all wrongly worship and adore. In this book, the author categorizes the many aspects of idolatry that Martin Luther teaches about in his voluminous writings. Although this book names many false gods that demand our attention and worship, all idols offend the three Divine persons of the Holy Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, the author identifies as "me, myself, and I" the deeply personal idols he calls the unholy trinity. We are the problem.



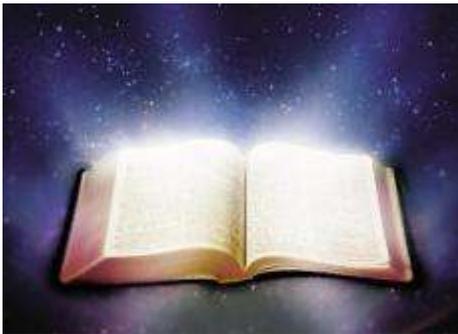


Dare To Share

All students of *Luther's Small Catechism* must acknowledge their sin of idolatry whenever they prevent the only true God from occupying first place in their lives. We are all guilty of this all the time. It is idolatry when we regard and worship any other thing as God—like silver and gold, like our own stomachs. We have other gods when we put our faith and trust in a god who is not the Triune God. Many Bible people worshiped idols and so do we. When we value costly clothing and fine dining more than God...when we praise and honor other people more than God...when we consider our personal accomplishments as most-important, we have created idols. God requires that we fear, love, and trust in *Him* above all else. God wants us to avoid all that displeases Him and trust in Him with our whole life. God wants all our love.



The coming Holiday Season—with its sparkle and glitter—offers us many desired things and presents a huge obstacle that can keep us from loving God as He commands. Therefore, we must be on guard not to set our hearts on earthly things, but to sharpen our heavenly view. God will help us seek those things that are above.



Two closing thoughts from *The Unholy Trinity*: “As Christians we know and believe that the Lord Christ is the solution to every human need. Yet, we often act as though we don’t know what our need is, and, therefore, we feel no need for the answer that Christ provides. Luther’s belief is that we feel no need for the true God until we are disenchanted with the false gods we have put in his place, which we think can provide all we need.” Thus, it is “only when the futility of such false gods is exposed that the Gospel will be heard as good news: the true God gives us by grace all the good things we have vainly sought to provide for ourselves.”

These thoughts are worth considering as we get ready to plunge into the twisting spirals of the Holiday Season.

Love,

Pastor Bernie



Hello and welcome to my ongoing series discussing notable figures and events of the Thirty Year's War and the Reformation. Last month, I discussed the figure and impact of Johann Tserclaes - otherwise known as the Count of Tilly. As I said at the end of my article last month, I would like to take this time to go through and give a short summary of the events that I've already covered. I hope that this week will give you a better timeline as to when the events that I've already covered so that it's easier to navigate the 130 year timeline of both the Reformation and the bloody war in the following century.



1524 – 1525 – Peasant's War – Groups of Peasants across the Holy Roman Empire were stirred into a frenzy by those who sought to do damage to the aristocracy. However, the armies of peasants quickly found themselves overwhelmed by the better-equipped and better-trained army of the Swabian League. It's important to remember that the Reformation itself was not the direct cause of this conflict and also that Martin Luther stood vehemently against the rising of the peasants.



1489 – 1525 – Thomas Müntzer – Thomas Müntzer was a protestant minister who was one of the key figures of the peasant's war. He was one of many protestant ministers that stirred up the peasants to fight against the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. After the battle of Frankenhausen, Müntzer was tracked down and executed on May 27, 1525. Müntzer and Martin Luther knew each other and carried on a correspondence between the two of them for some time. They initially got along; however, as the Peasant's War developed, their relationship became strained as Luther thought Müntzer was bloodthirsty and Müntzer thought Martin Luther was soft and weak.

May 6, 1527 – The Sack of Rome – This event was a very strange and controversial event that pitted the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V against the Pope, Clement VII. The Holy Roman Emperor was upset that the Pope had given his support to the French and thus Charles V and his army sought to balance the scales by declaring war on France. However, one of the general unspoken rules of having a mercenary army is also having the money to pay them. Since Charles V had no money to pay his mercenaries, camped outside of Rome, they sacked the city. This was also the event that brought the Swiss Guard to prominence as they sacrificed themselves to ensure the escape of the Pope who surrendered within the following few days.



1559 – 1632 – Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly – Along with Albrecht von Wallenstein, the Count of Tilly was one of the main commanders of the Roman Catholic forces during the early phases of the Thirty Year's War. His early victory at the Battle of White Mountain helped to drive the protestant armies from Bohemia and allowed the Catholics to recapture Prague. He is perhaps better known for the Sack of Magdeburg where his forces massacred 25,000 of the 30,000 inhabitants of the city. After the sack of Magdeburg, he began a campaign against the Swedes and during that campaign he sustained a wound from a cannonball at the Battle of Rain, which caused him to contract Tetanus, to which he submitted on April 30, 1632.

Dare To Share

1583 – 1634 – Albrecht von Wallenstein – Wallenstein was another pivotal commander of the Roman Catholic forces during the early stages of the Thirty Year’s War. He, along with the Count of Tilly, were responsible for significant Catholic victories that resulted in the expulsion of Protestant forces from Bohemia. Wallenstein commanded the forces at the Battle of Lützen where despite the protestant victory, the Catholics were able to land a substantial blow that came with the death of Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish king. However Wallenstein’s rise to power caused fear among the upper ranks of the Holy Roman Empire and fearing that Wallenstein would make a grab for power, the Holy Roman Emperor put out an open patent charging Wallenstein with high treason. This led to his assassination in his bedroom on February 25, 1634.



1594 – 1632 – Gustavus Adolphus – Gustavus Adolphus was the King of Sweden during the time of the Thirty Year’s War. He was a very important commander for the protestant forces and during his time as King of Sweden he turned them into a formidable fighting force. He did so by revolutionizing the tactics regarding the use of artillery and firearms throughout the course of battle. His revolution of battlefield tactics has caused him to be considered as one of the greatest military minds in history, a sentiment shared by generals such as Carl von Clausewitz, Napoleon Bonaparte, and George S. Patton. During the course of the Thirty Year’s War Gustavus Adolphus drove the Catholics away from Northern Germany and Denmark and at the Battle of Rain his army defeated and killed the Count of Tilly. However at the battle of Lützen he was struck by a bullet and killed on November 6, 1632.



May 23, 1618 – The Defenestration of Prague – This event is considered by most historians as the catalyst for the Thirty Year’s War. This event all started due to the “*Cuius region, eius religio*” law which states that the ruler of the region would be able to choose whether the region they ruled was protestant or catholic. Bohemia was declared as Catholic, but the rulers of the region did not force their subjects to become catholic. However, when a new Holy Roman Emperor took the throne, he sought to enforce this law more strictly and ended the construction of protestant churches and dissolved the protestant assembly within Bohemia. In a meeting between the Catholic Lords and Protestant estates, it was uncovered that it was these lords who persuaded the Holy Roman Emperor to order the halt of construction of protestant churches. In anger, they did the only thing they thought was appropriate, they threw the catholic lords out the window where they landed gracefully on a pile of horse dung. After this event, both Catholic Lords and the Protestant estates began to rally troops to their cause.



Dare To Share



This will be the last article that will be published during my time here in Huntsville. I want to emphasize to all of you who have read my articles and spoken to me about them how much I appreciate your feedback. I would also like to say to all of you how blessed I have been to be your vicar over the course of the past 12 months. I truly appreciate all of the love and support you have shown me in my time here and I can honestly say that this has been the best experience I could've possibly asked for. I am certainly going to miss all of you terribly and I would like to encourage you to keep in touch. In case you were wondering, I do plan on continuing these articles through the 500th anniversary of the Reformation next October.



May God continue to bless all of you and since I don't believe in goodbyes, I'll see y'all next time.

With Love,
Vicar Alex

Youth Group Lock-in
Coming on November
4 (Friday night)
starting at 8:00 PM.
There will be food,
desserts, games and
fun!



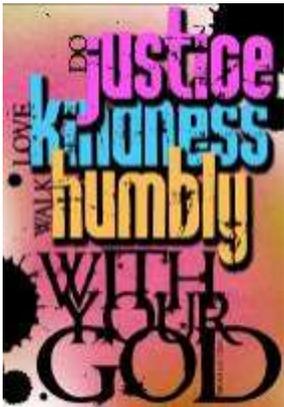
Bring a sleeping bag,
pillow and your Bible.

In past *Reflections*, I've focused on the established missions of the LWML to let people know what LWML does. These various missions often require planning, fundraising, distribution of funds, etc. But while thinking about all these activities, there were things that came to mind that we can do daily to show our love of God to others. Sometimes we get so caught up in our own daily lives, it escapes us that every minute of every day could be spent in "mission" to others. There are many acts of simple service that don't require planning, don't cost anything, may mean a lot to the recipient, and just may surprise us at the reward we get. Just to name a few. . .

WORD *of the day*

Psalms 90:17

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands upon us.



- Smiling at strangers we meet on the street; speaking to people we don't know
- Taking time to really listen to an older person's story of their past experiences
- Comforting a crying baby
- Calling or sending a note to someone who is ill or homebound just to say "I care"
- Sharing in a small child's wonderment when they discover something new
- Stopping to listen to a co-worker who says "Can we talk?"
- Putting others needs before our own
- Interacting more with people most important to us instead of rushing through the day

And the list goes on and on. These are things that maybe we were taught as children, but as we grew and other things occupied our minds, we simply don't do them anymore.

Maybe you're thinking - I already do all these things. Well, if you are, that's wonderful!

But for those of us who aren't, shouldn't we be getting back to our mission of simple service to others as our Lord taught us through His Word? Showing love and concern for others in need just may be an opportunity for sharing the message of Jesus.

ASCENSION LWML

The month of November reminds us to be thankful for all our many blessings and to share with others. With this in mind, some of the November LWML activities include:

- Donating food items to the Rose of Sharon Thrift Shop and Soup Kitchen to help feed the needy.
- Delivering "Cheer" baskets to three homebound ladies.
- Providing food for the CDC Food Bank and refreshments for the English class.
- Supporting a missional outreach to Regency Nursing Home

Ascension LWML will meet on November 12 at 10 AM. Please come and join us!

GULF STATES DISTRICT

Gulf States District LWML has pledged \$3,000 for "Be a Friend" Camp Counselor Intern at Bethesda's summer camps for Campers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Bethesda's Auxiliary hope is to encourage more youth to serve as "friends" and camp counselor interns. This would enable the building of relationships with campers as they share God's Word and Jesus' love during five days of camping in God's awesome creation.



Dare To Share

NATIONAL LWML

The National LWML Rally in 2019 has been moved from Birmingham to Mobile in 2019 due to cost concerns.

Back in 1965, LWML members were encouraged to extend hospitality and Christian refuge to foreign students attending universities and colleges in their vicinity. This continues today as another “Paid in Full” national LWML grant of \$32,500 has been given to St. Paul Lutheran High School in Concordia, Missouri, which is a boarding school with their student body being 45% international students. These students are from impoverished countries across the globe. By assisting with funds for these students, who intend to prepare for ministry and return to their country of origin as leaders, they will declare Christ “to the ends of the earth.” Many of these students go to study at St. Paul in preparation for post-secondary education at a Concordia University.

THANKSGIVING BEATITUDES

- Be thankful that you don’t already have everything you desire. If you did, what would there be to look forward to?
- Be thankful when you don’t know something, for it gives you the opportunity to learn.
- Be thankful for the difficult times. During those times you grow.
- Be thankful for your limitations, because they give you the opportunities for improvement.
- Be thankful for each new challenge, because it will build your strength and character.
- Be thankful for your mistakes. They will teach you valuable lessons.
- Be thankful when you’re tired and weary, because it means you’ve made a difference.

--Author unknown.

Blessings to all from LWML!

We are sponsoring the following seminarians:



Josh Brakhage (Wife-Suzy)



<https://www.facebook.com/peacelutheranpittsburgh/videos/1013825708669479/> (Alex’s Vicarage)



Alex Garber

BOTH SAINT AND SINNER

Most Christian denominations teach that after conversion (coming to faith), we have the choice as to whether we do good or we do evil. In effect, according to their teachings, we are in a similar state to Adam and Eve before the Fall in that we can choose whether we will obey God or whether we will disobey Him and do wrong.

Lutherans have a different doctrine on this topic. We believe that, after conversion, we are both saints, incapable of sinning, and sinners, incapable of not sinning. Essentially, we have a split personality; part

of us is perfect (saint) and incapable of doing wrong and the other part of us (sinner) contains

the sinful nature with which we were born and is incapable of not sinning.

While the difference between having the “choice to sin or not sin” doctrine versus the “being both saint and sinner” doctrine might seem insignificant, in actuality, there is a wide gulf between the two. If we have the choice to sin or not sin, then the onus is on us to make the right choices, to always take the path that leads away from sin. Of course, no one can do this and trying to do so leads to frustration. Even worse, we may well despair of our failures or alternatively take pride in how well we have made the right choices. Both of these paths lead away from God and put the focus on us.

The Lutheran doctrine states that we, in particular our sinful selves, will undoubtedly make wrong choices and sin. Therefore, our path to making the right choices consists of turning away from ourselves, a process called dying to self, and turning toward and relying solely on God. Only by killing (I personally prefer “starving” since we can never actually kill) that part of us that is sinful and turning to God for strength and direction (i.e., feeding our saint side) can we make the right choices. So how do we do this?

We must surrender our will to God, we must take up our cross and follow Him; we must die to ourselves and live in Him; we must become a living sacrifice for Him; and we must repent, turn away from our sinful nature and turn toward God. Unfortunately, all these things that “we” must do, we are incapable of doing.

Only the Holy Spirit working inside of us through faith can do these things. In fact, there is nothing good “we” can do without the Holy Spirit. Everything must be done by Christ, through the Holy Spirit, for us.

WORD *of the day*

Galatians 5:16-18

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.



2 Thessalonians 2:13



Dare To Share

Fortunately, this is exactly what God wants to do. He wants to lead us to make the right choices, to guide us to do good works. He wants to transform us, a process called sanctification, and therefore, to feed our saint side while starving our sinful side.

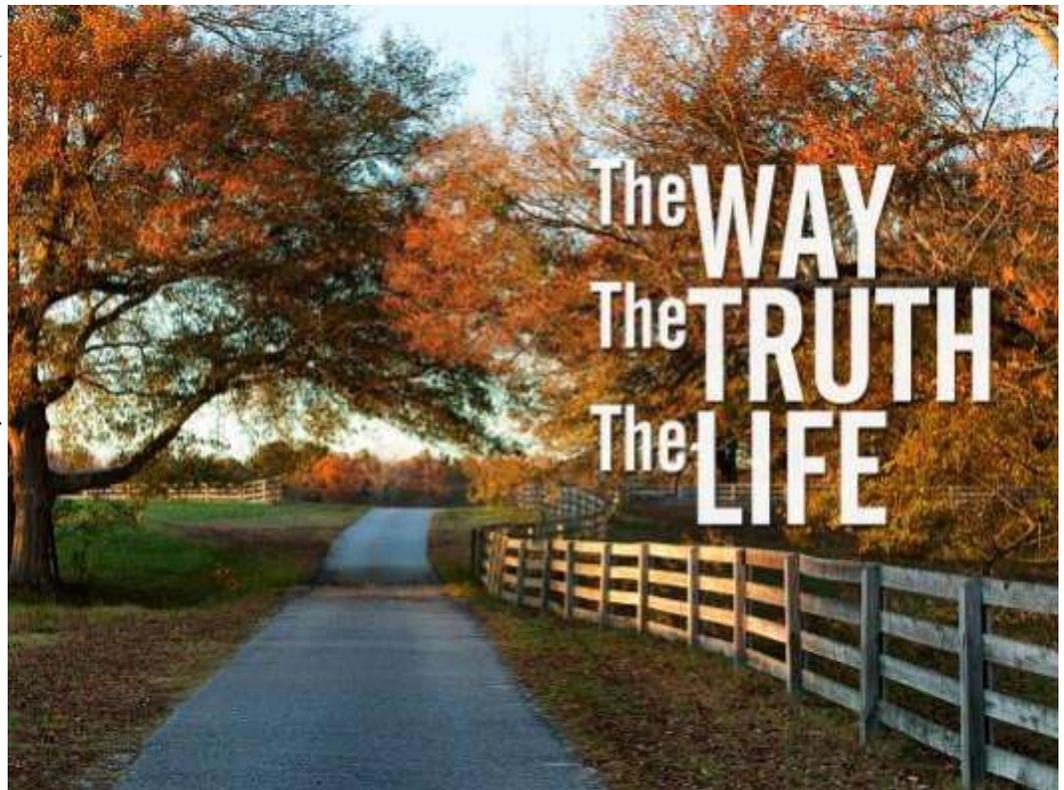
Just as our faith is a gift from God for which we get no credit (however, it is 100% our fault if we reject Christ) we also get no credit for our sanctification but must take total blame when it doesn't proceed. We can grieve or quench the Holy Spirit by choosing to sin (i.e., feeding our sinful side), in effect slowing or stopping the process, but we can do nothing to accelerate the sanctification process.

So is there anything constructive that we can do? Yes. We can pray. We can read and meditate on the Word of God. We can worship and glorify God. We can trust in God. We can try to do the right things and ask and trust in God to make them into good works. We can put on the armor of God and follow Jesus into battle. And we can recognize that we are poor, miserable sinners and repent (with the help of the Holy Spirit) of our sins when we inevitably commit them.

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”
(Matthew 16:15-16)

This is the only question that really matters. If you believe that Jesus Christ is, as Peter asserts, the Son of the living God and the only way to the Father and salvation, then you are on the straight path to the narrow gate that leads to Heaven. On the other hand, if you don't believe this, then you are on the wide path that leads to damnation.



It's that simple.