

May/June 2020

MONTANA Reflections

Montana District LCMS

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Walking and Leaping

(Editor's note: Pastor and Cheryl are raising their granddaughter, Angel. Her name may appear from time to time in these pages.)

Angel turned one-year old last month. That means she is in the process of mastering bi-pedal motion. This is a delightful time. Watching her weave, wobble, and fall only to fetch herself up again occupies a lot of time around the Forke household. Thankfully, she is yet well-padded, so sitting down hard is less painful than it may appear.

This learning to walk is an interesting phenomenon. Few species have such a lengthy period of acclimation to mobility. (You may have seen a calf or foal wobble away within hours of birth.) Balancing our big heads takes a lot of muscular development. This fact highlights a captivating miracle that is often overlooked in the life of the early Church.

And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Acts 3:2–10

This man, who had been lame from birth, and who was now more than forty years old, not only had his feet and ankles healed, he also learned to walk in mere minutes. How he spent those first few minutes of freedom is heartwarming. He went walking, and leaping and praising God.

Has something made you lame lately? I mean spiritually, physically, emotionally, or financially, you have been feeling that you just cannot get around on your own. You may have friends to help, as did the man in this story, but it is just not the same. You long to stand on your own two feet. The prospect of learning to walk like Angel is doing, (practice, practice, practice), is just not practicable, or even possible.

While there is no promise of perfect healing in this world, there is a promise of learning to walk with Jesus. "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." Romans 6:4 Learning to walk after having been raised from the death of sin is your overlooked miracle. Jesus has raised you and taught you to walk through the frailties and dangers of this world. On this journey He never leaves you. So, you move with joy, walking and leaping and praising God.

Rev. Terry Forke
Montana District President

Around the District

Rev. David McCarthy was installed at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Eureka, on Sunday, May 17.

Welcome Pastor McCarthy and family!

Thank you, Pastor Matthew Nelson for your service to Holy Cross Lutheran Church.

St. John, Deer Lodge is in the call process. Pastor James Pierce is serving as the vacancy pastor.

Emmaus Lutheran Mission, Big Timber/Livingston, is in the call process. Pastor Arlo Pullmann will continue to serve the vacancy.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Kalispell, is in the call process for a senior pastor. Pastor Kevin Bueltmann serves the vacancy.

Peace Lutheran Church and Christ Lutheran Church for the Deaf, Great Falls, are in the call process. Pastor Wade Harr serves the vacancy.

Ms. Sarah Groeling has accepted the call to Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Kalispell. Please keep her in your prayers, as she transitions from student to called worker.

Of Progress, Plagues, Panic and Promise

A heady aroma of success saturated earth's atmosphere in January of 2020. China and the United States were on the cusp of announcing new trade relations that promised at least détente, if not outright cooperation between the global powers. And, despite U.S. foot-dragging, teenage environmental preachers were gaining a toehold in the minds of world leaders on the defining issue of the day, climate change. The stock market was humming, and some were making money hand over fist. Progress was in the air. The human spirit, unbowed, by moral issues of abortion, euthanasia, sexual perversion, poverty, racism and the like, strode confidently forward, in the full assurance that it had at its disposal the power to handle whatever life could throw in its path.

Then came corona¹. With apologies to those who have suffered at the prongs of this virus, the human reaction would have appeared comical to someone with a global perspective. We were like chickens in a coop wherein a bobcat has been dropped from above, scrambling in every direction at once. The illusion of controlled progress had just been violently shattered. Searching for solutions, (protection, prevention, cure), while simultaneously casting blame on anyone who didn't jump out of the way quickly enough, we were dumbfounded, more by the fact that we didn't know what to do, than by the reality of the virus itself. The upheaval touched every facet of life. Physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and political practices all swayed in response, sometimes meeting each other head on. Panic. Progress was stayed, and we held on for dear life as the roller coaster set out in reverse.

¹I use the name it went by when it first appeared. The name has changed often since then.

Of Progress, Plagues, Panic and Promise (cont.)

Similarly, Job was cast adrift when the skyward progress of his life was ripped out from under him. His charge that God was wrong, (Job 40:8) met with stiff Divine and human resistance. His friend's solution, the infamous quid-pro-quo theology, (i.e. If you do good God gives you good. If you do bad, God gives you bad.) satisfied neither Job nor God. It all boiled down to who was in control. In the final showdown, God challenges Job to demonstrate the extent of his control as opposed to God's. Job declined the offer in a long-awaited show of humility. God is not done, however. He is at pains to clarify the Christology of the point. If Job can show that he is control of the world, "Then", says God, "will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you." (Job 40:14) Job cannot save himself. Bingo. Neither can we. Only God can save. This is as true spiritually as it is physically. What is the message of the story of Job? Job needs Jesus. What is the message of the corona virus? We need Jesus.

"When every earthly prop gives way, (Jesus) then is all my hope and stay." (LSB 575) Corona has knocked over more than a few props. Jesus remains. Yet, the delusion of human progress toward ultimate control is not easily jettisoned. "When things get back to normal," we keep saying to ourselves, because we know that this too, we shall conquer. We believe that someday the corona virus will be an historical footnote of diseases eradicated by man's ingenuity. It will be like every other plague that we have controlled. If that is so, will we have learned the lesson such a plague teaches?

The notion that God would send, or even allow a plague for the purpose of teaching us a lesson regarding control will be offensive to some. It wasn't to Job. "I repent in dust and ashes," he cried. When a plague convinces us that we are not all powerful, when panic demonstrates that the god we had been trusting has been crushed, repentance is the only rational response. We need a bigger God, one that we can always trust. This is precisely the promise that Job found in God's Word to him. *"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* (Job 42:2) Job confesses that God is in control of all things, that he, (Job), is not, and that this is a good thing.

This confession is the proper response to the pandemic we are now experiencing. It is founded on an elegant promise. God is able to use all things for our good. Even plagues. But, learning the fact of God's control is only part of the promise. Receiving the action of God's control is the fruition of the promise. God wields His power not just for the sake of showing the world who is boss. He exercises control for the sake of salvation, shaking down the progress of man to turn our hearts toward Jesus. All of God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus. He alone can save you from whatever plagues you.

In this promise there is no guarantee of the restoration of fortune, as happened to Job. We may never get back to "the way it was before." We will always have Jesus. He is enough.

Excerpt from: The Evangel in Ethiopia—News from Rev. Eric & Johanna Stinnett serving in Ethiopia

COVID-19 Challenges

Addis Ababa— Last month, we talked about some of the changes we are seeing here due to the COVID virus. One thing we mentioned was that the students had all been sent home and we are now trying to teach them remotely. While the idea is not unique to Ethiopia, many of you are either doing the same thing with your children or know someone who is... remote teaching here does have its own challenges.

Initially, when the students were sent home (by government mandate to all schools) they were told it was only for two weeks so many did not take their books with them. Now those two weeks have turned into the rest of the school year.

The biggest challenge for my students is the availability of technology. The churches here cannot afford to pay much more than subsistence wages to the pastors, so most of my students are on the low end of the socio-economic scale. For many of them, smartphones and laptops are luxuries they can't afford. Some of my students who do have laptops, live in remote areas without available Wi-Fi. One of my students lives in a village with no electricity. He has to travel for 1 ½ hour just to charge his flip-phone.

The problem isn't only with the students. Some of our faculty members are lacking computers, smartphones or Wi-Fi at home as well.

Still, the Lord has placed us here and given us work to do. We are doing whatever we can to work with the students in their different situations. Some students are able to connect with apps similar to WhatsApp or Zoom. Some are able to email. Some are only able to call or text, and some can't even do that consistently. We are sending out reading, lecture notes and assignments by all of these means (even resorting to stamps and envelopes when necessary). We are extending deadlines and carrying on. Some students will finish on time, others may not complete this semester until next year. But, we are doing everything possible to continue to train and equip as many pastors for the EECMY as we can. Times like this remind us of just how much the world needs to hear the comforting, reassuring message of the Gospel. Thank you for helping MYS to keep sending those messengers out. By God's grace, it will continue for many years.

To support our work financially, you may send a tax-deductible gift to either:

Mission Central

c/o Gary W. Thies

40718 Highway E 16

Mapleton, IA 51034-7105

Checks payable to: Mission Central

Memo line: Stinnetts-Ethiopia

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

P.O. Box 66861

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Excerpt from: God's Reign in Spain—The Missionary Journey of Rev. David & Shelee Warner

Blessings Abound!

God Strengthens His Church during CV-19

For the first time, ALL the members in Spain could worship TOGETHER during Holy Week!

For the first time, services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Saturday's Easter Vigil were held for everyone. Usually each location gets one or two Holy Week services. Because of COVID-19, we could not do this. Instead, the pastors worked together to provide all the Holy Week services to everyone via the inter-net. This included two Easter Services, one broadcast from the individual homes of Pastors Machado and Lobo in Madrid, and the other simultaneously broadcast from Cartagena and Seville, with LCMS Missionary Pastor Lehman as Liturgist and Pastor Warner as



Preacher. *What a blessing to see the faces of members from all across Spain, joining in fellowship around the Word to celebrate our Crucified and Risen Savior.*

¡Cristo ha resucitado! ¡Él ha resucitado en verdad! Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!

While we wait for Sunday School to start again--

The Pastors are taking advantage of this COVID-19 opportunity to reach ALL of our youth via a short Bible message before the worship service on Sundays. Many thanks to one of our supporting churches, Divine Shepherd Lutheran in South Dakota, and their Pastor Randy Sturzenbecher, for giving us this idea!

Although we have almost 30 members under the age of 15, we only have a concentration of youth in Madrid, making regular Sunday School feasible there. We hope that these new weekly messages with the pastors will provide impetus for further children's study after CV19 restrictions are lifted.

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Around the District

Welcoming Vicar Matthew Goehring

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, student Matthew Goehring has been assigned to St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Laurel. Please welcome Vicar Goehring and keep him in your prayers.

Vicar Goehring will be serving, supported by the guidance of Rev. Arlo Pullmann. Incidentally, while discussing his assignment to Montana with his grandmother, she stated that she only knew of one pastor in Montana, a man who had once served as vicar in her congregation (*Hope Lutheran Church, Rochester, New York*) by the name of—Arlo. God be praised for His wisdom and care in connecting and bringing the family of Christ together!



Telephone—Trinity Lutheran Church, Harlowton

Have you ever played the game telephone? You remember the game where you pass a message around a circle of people by whispering what you heard into the ear of your neighbor. Sometimes the message doesn't come out so well at the end. Sometimes it does. During the Covid lockdown, a member of Trinity Harlowton, who is, shall we say judiciously, in her nineties, had no means to receive the electronic services that were being provided. So, another member, who is, shall we say, younger, would call up the older member and hold the phone next to her computer while the service was being played. In this round-about way the Word of God was shared by and within the body of Christ, during a time of unusual restrictions.

This incident highlights how important the body of Christ, the Church, is. Brothers and sisters are caring for each other, watching out for each other's needs. This is a wondrous gift of God in the Church.

COVID-19 Impact Survey

LCMS Research, together with IC staff and input from a panel of district presidents, has assembled an all-congregation survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the Synod. It is designed to be completed by one congregational leader. It attempts to assess the impact of the disease, of mitigation measures, and the congregation's response and posture at the present time. It is being conducted now with the realization that experiences with this pandemic are varied, and if a survey was to be conducted when the pandemic all completely done with, the responses may be too late to have any useful impact. It is hoped that the data gathered will help assess the impact and guide Synod and district responses in helpful ways. It will also be used to gauge the preparedness of congregations for a potential recurrence, and to identify specific ways in which that preparedness might be improved upon.

Congregations will soon be contacted individually, by e-mail, with specific links to be used to access the online survey. Please check your email's junk and spam folder if you do not receive a survey request by the end of June. *Completing the survey should take about 20 minutes.* Realizing that those most severely impacted have many concerns at present, and may not yet be by any means "to the other side," your time and effort are highly valued and very much appreciated. Thank you.

Around the District

Folks at *Grace in Hamilton* managed to get out and do a few things and still maintain proper social distancing!

- With the help of Thrivent Action Cards we prepared special gift bags including Bibles and story books for area children, including: (11) for children age 2-11, (8) for youth, and (8) for the moms at our SAFE Shelter for women and children, plus an additional (8) bags for the youth at the Linda Massa Youth Home.
- The days have been too beautiful to waste; we properly spaced out along 2 miles of Hwy 93 to stretch our backs and pick up trash.
- With an easing of restrictions by our Governor, we were able to gather again for worship on April 26th, but chose to hold it outdoors! At the end of the service we pealed the bells (electronic carillon) as we traditionally do every Easter morning. We couldn't let the opportunity pass, and we cranked up the volume for good measure! He is Risen indeed!



Board of Directors Meeting Summary

May 8, 2020

The Montana District Board of Directors (BOD) met on Friday, May 8th, at the District office and via Zoom, for the quarterly board meeting. Items included the 1st quarter financial statements, including the volatility of the market related to the pandemic and a Mercy Fund distribution, a review of the 2021 Financial Forecast, and financial support of Emmaus Lutheran Mission—Big Timber/Livingston.

During the past quarter, President Forke made contact with all the active rosters workers of the Montana District, providing truth and encouragement through God's Word.

The next Board of Directors meeting will be held, Monday, July 27th at the District office in Billings.

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Bishop Derek Lecakes, President of the Atlantic District—LCMS. Please continue to keep our nation in your prayers.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The death of Mr. George Floyd has brought to light the ongoing tensions in our life together as a nation. He was not heard in his final moments as his life was taken.

This death sparked peaceful and violent protests across the country. Businesses are being boarded up and curfews have been imposed. Fires have been set and property destroyed.

Why does this matter? It matters because it represents a group of people who believe they are not heard. It matters because we live in a country that is built on the truth that all people are created equal, but some do not have access to that truth. It matters because we believe that all people have a right to life and to be treated with respect. It matters because voices, whether we agree with them or not, have a right to be heard. It matters because if we are to really mean it when we say all lives matter, then we must be willing to say black lives do matter.

This is an event that affects each one of our pastors, church workers, and members of our congregations. We are a very diverse group of people. We represent many races, cultures, political ideologies and walks of life. Yet amid all these differences we all experience the love of Christ. When Christ dies for sin, he dies for the sin of each and every one of us. Christ comes that we might have life and have it to the full.

This death is so striking because this is not the way we treat people. A person should not die in the street with those who could help but did not. It offends our sense of human dignity and what is right.

This death has once again exposed a bitter divide in the way we view each other. It shows that we do not look at situations in the same way. We must do better job as a country to listen to each other. We must provide a forum for people who feel they are not heard. These feelings must be able to be shared openly and honestly. Since we fail at communicating, this reality does not change and we come back to situations like this over and over again.

The Bible teaches us, “love one another as I (Jesus) have loved you.” This means that we are to walk in this life together. This means that we listen to one another. This means that we tackle the problems of this world together. This means that we seek to share the love of Jesus with each other. We stand together as one church.

What can we do together?

1. Pray – I am asking for all of the members of the Atlantic District to take 5 mins each day at noon to pray for our nation, justice, overcoming racial inequity, protestors and police.
2. Take Care – Our words matter. How we talk about issues does matter. We want to make sure we are listening to others and what they are experiencing that they might be heard.
3. Take Action –This can take many and various forms, whether it be legislative reform or simply conversations with neighbors.

Rev. Derek Lecakes

President/Bishop Atlantic District LCMS