

CONTENTS

Volume Twenty-Five, Number One

FEATURES

4 The Seminary They Couldn't Close By Dr. Cameron A. MacKenzie

In the early 1990s, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne was the setting for a synodical controversy over the involuntary retirement of the Seminary's president, Robert Preus. Powerful men in Synod started to discuss closing "the Fort" and selling the property. Thankfully, those plans went nowhere and by the late '90s, CTSFW had recovered. It would remain what it is today—an essential part of the synodical system for training men for the pastoral ministry, and now also women for service as deaconesses.

7 Blessed Is the Man Who Waits By Dr. James G. Bushur

In American culture, there is no virtue that meets with more skepticism and suspicion than the good of patience. We live in a supremely impatient society. In such an activist culture, patience is disdained for its perceived passivity. The patient can be seen as impotent spectators, doomed to an inconsequential passing of time without achievement or fulfillment. To be patient is equated with doing nothing; and to do nothing is to achieve nothing; and to achieve nothing is to be nothing.

10 Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled By Dr. Scott R. Murray

As people are recovering from the devastating effects of COVID-19, many feel that their trial is a sign of their weakness, sin, or unrighteousness. When trial and testing come upon us, we so easily presume that they are a sign of God's wrath, that He is punishing us with such burdens and sorrows. If we find the meaning of our trouble in our own hearts, we will never know what God wants to teach us by our trial.

Also in this Issue:

- What Does This Mean? 13**
- Student Artist Patti Miller 14**
- Upcoming Events at CTSFW 16**
- Called to Serve: Anna Miels 18**
- Instructor Focus: Deaconess Amy Rast 22**
- Rast Reappointed as Seminary President 24**
- Profiles in Giving 28**
- In the Word Bible Study. 30**



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Let **Not** Your Hearts



Photo: Erik M. Lunsford/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

As people are recovering from the devastating effects of COVID-19, many feel that their trial is a sign of their weakness or their sin or their unrighteousness. Sometimes we are even unable to articulate this, though the anxiety and pressure leaves us with this vague unease that our suffering is a divine judgment against us. When trial and testing come upon us, we so easily presume that they are a sign of God’s wrath, that He is punishing us with such burdens and sorrows. Several people have said to me, “Pastor, I know that God is trying to teach me something by this crisis, but I don’t yet know what it is.” The human heart is bent toward self-blame. We fall into what we think of as a moral explanation for our sorrows: “I must’ve done something to deserve this.” This, of course, is the flip side of moral self-righteousness, which presumes that good things happen to me because I have been good. The human heart, in its perversity, is also geared toward self-righteousness. Both self-blame and self-righteousness are equally perverted. If we find the meaning of our trouble in our own hearts, we will never know what God wants to teach us by our trial.

Be Troubled

Scott R. Murray

Christians see their trial and suffering quite differently from those who do not know God's love in Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for our sins by suffering on the cross of Calvary and offering His blood for us. He has made the full payment for sin. Why would we think that our suffering would be some kind of co-payment? How could we consider the priceless blood of Christ to be in any way supplemented by the value of our suffering, sorrows, or trials? If we did, we would be looking at the moral value of our world through the lens only of the Law and not of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. If we live only in the Law, we will never understand the blessing of the crosses that God sends us to exercise and strengthen our faith.

When I am in the midst of trial or difficulty, I am greatly encouraged by walking with Christ to Golgotha's hill. Here is the greatest trial, agony, and suffering. It dwarfs our own. I'm not trying to minimize the significance of our human suffering. No, when I cannot understand the meaning of my own suffering, walking to Calvary with Jesus shows me that the most blessed person, Christ Himself, undergoes the highest agony. It shows me that the greatest blessing flows out of the greatest suffering. If the sinless Son of God can undergo suffering and agony for my sake, it changes the meaning of my own suffering.

His heavenly Father laid on Him the iniquity of us all, that we might be freed from our sin. His suffering changes the moral meaning of everything. It changes the meaning of our suffering. God uses it to strengthen our faith and make us all the more thankful confessors of His Gospel. Our suffering cannot be a payment, because Christ has paid for every and all sin. Therefore, our

suffering must mean something else. Our trials mean that God is urging us into greater faith, a higher confidence in Him, and an otherworldly certainty about His grace toward us. We are becoming blessed with the Blessed One, who sanctified our suffering. Only through the Gospel will we ever know the meaning of our suffering.

From time to time, I suffered anxiety and fear because of all the frightening things that happened this past year and still echo through our culture and nation. Last April, when churches shut down and services went virtual, I suffered 10 days of deep anxiety. I worried about the Church, the future, the nation, and my service to the Gospel. I think many people suffered something of this sort; especially because of the social isolation to which we were all subjected. The Lord brought me through by turning me back to His Word, to what was truly important: preaching Christ to sinners, sinners humbled by their experience of disease and its ill effects. I needed to be turned away from myself and set upon Golgotha under the blood-spattered cross. I needed Jesus more and not less in this crisis.

During the last few months of 2020, I was often approached by parishioners as well as guests from other parishes thanking me for preserving Divine Services, but it was simply a matter of keeping first things first. God gives Himself to His people in Word and Sacraments. COVID could not change that. Instead, the Gospel of Christ addresses our fears and promises salvation, so that whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord (Rom. 14:8). Despite my anxiety about the church, the Lord has brought great blessings out of this crisis. My parish is now experiencing growth, which we

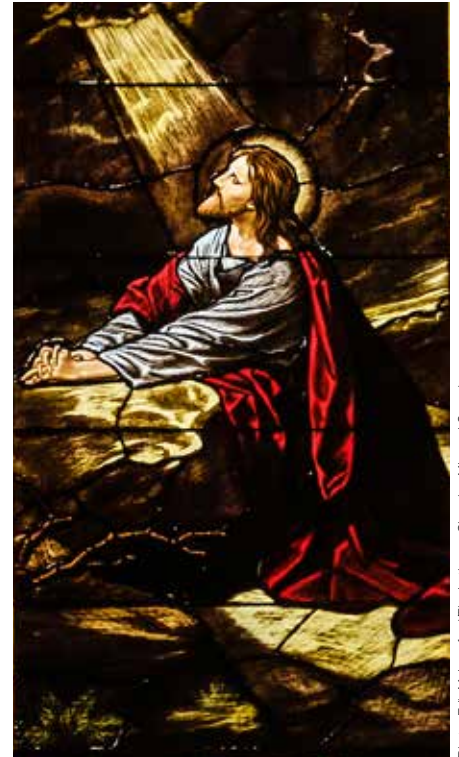


Photo: Erik M. Lunstedt/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Opposite page: *The Rev. Andy Wright, pastor of Saint John Lutheran Church, Keystone, Iowa, on Monday, Aug. 17, 2020. "The tornado sirens went off. You could hear the wind and things just breaking all around you, for about 30 minutes straight. At first we thought a tornado was hitting. But it was not until the storm was starting to dissipate that I looked outside, and saw trees down all around our street, and then I looked back at the church, and my mouth just dropped open."*

Above: *The interior stained glass of Saint John Lutheran Church, Keystone, Iowa, survived intact despite a massive "derecho" wind storm that tore through the Midwest, hitting thousands of square miles with winds of up to 112 mph.*




Our suffering cannot be a payment, because Christ has paid for every and all sin. Therefore, our suffering must mean something else. Our trials mean that God is urging us into greater faith, a higher confidence in Him, and an otherworldly certainty about His grace toward us. We are becoming blessed with the Blessed One, who sanctified our suffering. Only through the Gospel will we ever know the meaning of our suffering.

could not have anticipated in 2019. The health challenges and obvious cultural decline of 2020 had its own blessed way of making clear what is important to us and has driven us back to the gifts of God in Christ.

Jesus is especially thinking of the suffering, anxiety, and trial of His disciples when He encourages them on the night of His betrayal. He says, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me” (John 14:1). He knew the fear that would overtake them when the Shepherd is struck and the flock scattered (Matt. 26:31). While facing the weight of the world’s sins pressed down upon His holy arms at Golgotha, He is concerned for them in their coming tribulation and anxiety.

We too are His disciples, and He speaks to us. Luther says of Jesus’ encouraging speech, “These words were recorded, not for [the apostles’] sakes, but for ours, that we might learn

to apply this comfort to both present and future need.” How much we need Jesus’ encouragement in these COVID-stressed days! He has not abandoned us. He is not punishing us. Yes, the unbeliever may see the struggles of this past year as a clear statement of God’s righteous wrath against a sin-sick world and a decayed society. However, we Christians should always look upon our experiences from the standpoint of the cross and faith. Luther encourages believers, “Where suffering and the cross are found, there the Gospel can show and exercise its power.” Christ has promised that the suffering Lord would be with us in our suffering, for our good and blessing. He says to us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). This is the Word upon which we should feed, and in it find our life. Luther says,

“From these and similar words and admonitions of Christ, we should also learn to know the Lord Christ aright, to develop a more cordial and comforting confidence in Him, and to pay more regard to His Word than to anything else which may confront our eyes, ears, and other senses. For if I am a Christian and hold to Him, I always know that He is talking to me.” When He does, He is saying, “My dear child, do not be afraid. No matter what, I am still your Lord. Let not your hearts be troubled.” 

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