

**For the** **Life of the World**  
**Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne**

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**Pastoral Fitness under the Cross**

Rev. Dr Albert B. Collver

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**Fit for Ministry**

Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil

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**Devotional Diligence**

Rev. Kerry David Reese

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Martin Luther's paradigm for making theologians isn't a bad model for spiritual fitness among pastors (and other Christians too): Prayer, Meditation, and Affliction (spiritual struggle). Besides vital spiritual self-care, pastors need shepherding too. Just as barbers need barbers or physicians need physicians, pastors need pastors.

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Ranking at or near the top of a list of occupational hazards for ministers of the Gospel is succumbing to the tendency to treat Scriptures as an academic tool while neglecting its devotional use for the pastor's spiritual strength and well-being. Being "in the Word" includes more than our hands-on approach for preparing cogent sermons and Bible classes.

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Pastoral fitness begins with pastoral passivity. We hear much about pastors "burning out" under increased demands often coupled with confusion over what it is that pastors are to do. Are pastors mainly counselors, managers, public relations experts, or community organizers?



## For the Life of the World

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# Pastoral Fitness under the CROSS

By The Rev. Dr. B. Albert Collver

“... before time began God preordained what sort of crosses and sufferings he would use to conform each one of his elect to ‘the image of his Son,’ and that the cross of each should and must ‘work together for the good’ of that person ...”

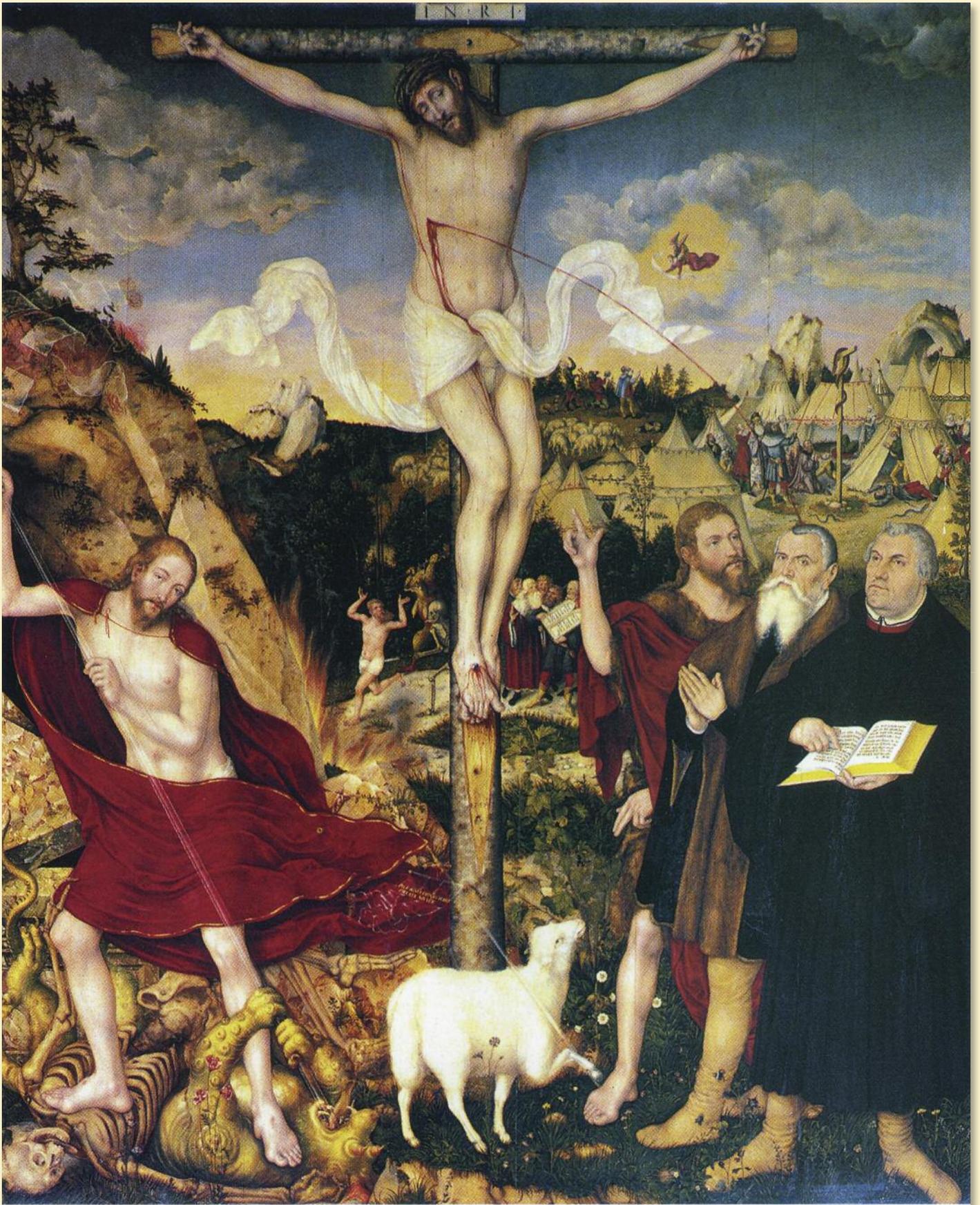
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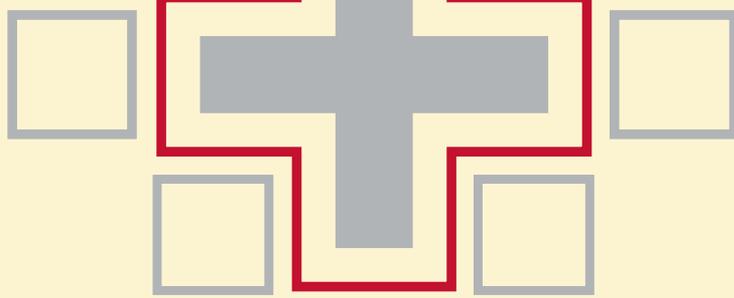
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**There is no greater temptation than to doubt the promises of Jesus; likewise, there is no way to survive the cross than to cling to the promises of Jesus. In fact, the pastor in crisis chases after Jesus and captures Him in the promises He gave him as a Christian in Holy Baptism and as a pastor in Holy Ordination. Jesus loves to be captured in His promises.**

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**W**hat happens when the dream becomes a nightmare? A man, who longed and dreamed to become a pastor, found himself in an impossible situation. The excitement of Call day is shattered by problems in the parish. Imagine arriving at a congregation with divisions and arguments over leadership, a congregation that tolerates gross sin and immorality, a congregation involved in lawsuits against each other, a congregation with disagreements over the practice of Holy Communion, a congregation in dispute over the proper role of women, a congregation with quarrels over worship, and even a congregation that has doubts about the resurrection from the dead. Some might be identifying with individual problems; others might be thanking God that their congregation is not as bad as others, or find it hard to believe a single congregation could have all of these problems. Yet this is exactly the situation Saint Paul encountered as a pastor in Corinth.





**Remembering the promises of Jesus and capturing Jesus in His promises will sustain the weary pastor, his family, and the congregation he serves. The cross is not easy to bear, but each cross serves the good the Lord intended. Jesus is faithful to His word and He has bound Himself to His promises. Jesus will never fail you.**

Pastors with troubled congregations are often tempted to curse the sheep that the Lord has entrusted them to shepherd. Yet notice how Saint Paul greets his troubled congregation, “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...” (1 Cor. 1:2). Saint Paul believes that the holy Christian church exists in Corinth and he calls them “saints.” With these words Paul is making a confession of faith just as in the Creed. A pastor under the cross needs to confess the Creed, “I believe in the holy Christian church and the communion of saints ...” He needs to be reminded of the promises of Jesus that both the church and the saints are located where the Gospel is proclaimed and where His forgiving gifts are bestowed.

Another temptation a pastor in crisis experiences is to lose his faith in the promises given to him by Jesus. At ordination a candidate hears the words and promises of Jesus: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you ...” (John 15:16), “And surely I will be with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). When crisis comes in the parish, it is easy to forget that the Lord chose the pastor for that congregation. Both the pastor and the parish forget this promise of Jesus. At times both may feel as if Jesus is not with them but has abandoned them.

There is no greater temptation than to doubt the promises of Jesus; likewise, there is no way to survive the cross than to cling to the promises of Jesus. In fact, the pastor in crisis chases after Jesus and captures Him in the promises He gave him as a Christian in Holy Baptism and as a pastor in Holy Ordination. Jesus loves to be captured in His promises.

A counter-intuitive promise that our Lord has made is that our sufferings, trials, and crosses were predestined before the foundation of the world for us so that nothing would happen in our lives

that could take us from Jesus. This is what we confess in Formula of Concord IX and is what Saint Paul wrote in Romans 8, that all things work for good. In the course of the trials we face in our lives and in our vocations, the Lord conforms us into the image of His Son, that is, He puts to death our sinful nature and removes whatever is in our lives that would take us away from Him. We have His promise that no trial, suffering, or cross will take us away from Him.

Saint Paul also shows how to approach difficult problems in the congregation. The simple answer is a proper division of the Law and the Gospel. The art is to preach the Gospel to the weak, to those Christians who haven’t been taught and are resisting because something the pastor says is new or threatening to them. To the strong, to those who know, Saint Paul preaches the Law. Ultimately, through patience, love, and teaching the pastor suffers with his sheep as they work through the trials and problems set before the congregation.

Remembering the promises of Jesus and capturing Jesus in His promises will sustain the weary pastor, his family, and the congregation he serves. The cross is not easy to bear, but each cross serves the good the Lord intended. Jesus is faithful to His word and He has bound Himself to His promises. Jesus will never fail you. 🏴‍☠️

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