

THE CROSSWORD

March 2023

A PUBLICATION OF HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Vol. LXVI, No. 4

HIDDEN TREASURES

from Pastor Nathan Erb

To say Trevor was excited for his birthday was an understatement. He was turning 16, and all he could think about for the past year was a promise his grandfather had made to him: that upon successfully completing his driving test, he would give him a car.

Not only did Trevor make sure he showed up to driving classes on time and paid attention so he could get a good grade, he would jump at any chance he got to practice driving—even if it was just doing circles in the church parking lot.

The day arrived, and Trevor passed his test with flying colors. He made sure to call his grandfather the minute he left the DMV to tell him the good news (and to serve as a subtle reminder of the gift he was going to get)!

“I’ll be there tomorrow!” said Trevor’s grandfather. “How about you take me out for the first spin, and I’ll also treat you to a burger!?”

Trevor could hardly sleep as he thought about what his new ride

would be. From the time his grandfather had offered the gift, Trevor was also looking at car magazines, checking out websites, and constructing in his mind an image of what his new car would look like—and what the look on his friends’ faces would be when they saw him cruising up to school the next day.

To say Trevor was disappointed would be an understatement. Grandpa showed up the next day in his 15-year-old sedan. This wasn’t what Trevor had hoped for. It certainly wasn’t what he wanted. In fact, Trevor was so upset by the “maneuver” his grandfather pulled that he flat-out rejected the car.

“It’s not what I want, Grandpa; I can’t drive around in this thing.” And so he turned around and left his grandfather standing there in disbelief.

Because this car wasn’t on his top ten list and because he rejected the gift, Trevor missed out on some other really great opportunities. He would miss out on a burger and

fries and some quality time with his grandfather. He would miss out on (even though it wasn’t the style of his choice) having a vehicle that could have taken him on all kinds of great experiences around town and longer road trips with friends.

But perhaps the most devastating part of all this was that Trevor wouldn’t have the chance to give the first ride to his grandfather, who was looking forward to an exciting journey with his beloved grandson.

Holy Cross is at the beginning of something different. There will be things we will do that aren’t what’s been done before. Some things will be new. Some things you may appreciate, while others you may not like. This is all part of change, which is necessary in order to grow.

But one thing you will always receive is the true gift of God. You will hear the gospel proclaimed, and you will receive forgiveness of sins. You will be reminded of your

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PRESIDENT'S JOURNAL

from Kerry Geffert

The 2022 Annual Voters' Meeting is behind us, and now the work begins. My deepest appreciation to those who came out for the meeting. Your support of the revisions to our Constitution and Bylaws positions us to begin a new chapter – one that we pray leads to greater member involvement and growth of our congregation.

The newly constituted Board of Directors held its first meeting to begin the process of implementing the groups called for in the new structure. Despite our best efforts, we found ourselves slipping into planning that was more tactical than strategic. Change is hard. It takes practice and an open mind.

To remind myself that change is possible, I created a list of some of the things that have changed at Holy Cross since my family joined in 1995:

Christmas Tree – it used to be real, cut from the church property.

Christmas Decorations – the sanctuary was decorated with real pine wreaths and garlands.

Lent/Easter – the cross behind the altar was draped in three different cloths during these seasons. The standing wooden cross and the cross for nails and butterflies were added later.

Ushers – they were men only. And they were dressed in business attire.

LWML Sunday – the one, annual Sunday when women participated as ushers, readers, and acolytes.

Ascension Day – we held an evening service. Also on New Year's Eve.

Amen – the ending of every hymn.

Stewardship Sunday – each person/family declared their planned giving for the year with a form deposited in a collection box – during a church service.

Offering Envelopes – cash and checks were all we knew.

Confirmation – confirmands dressed in white robes and read their essays before the congregation. (Anyone remember when confirmands went before the congregation to be tested?)

Meal functions – we used real china.

Healing Services – on the 5th Sunday of a month. These came and went during my time.

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Sunday Worship | 10:00 a.m.

Bible Class | 9:00 a.m.

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THE
CROSSWORD

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THE WORD OF LIFE

from Cliff Schrock

In this supplement to Pastor Erb's monthly focus on a Bible Verse of the Month, the March theme is "Joyful Givers," with the Biblical reference from 2 Corinthians, Chapter 9.

In the establishment of the Christian church after Jesus' ascension to heaven, one of the prominent traits of each community of Believers was what is commonly referred to as a free-will offering. No one thought of themselves as greater than any other Believer, and all gave freely from what they had and put it in one common collection. This equality of sharing from one's possessions to make a singular communal offering also extended to the distribution from it so that wherever a need was felt help was freely given.

We can assume that this act of love to each other was done with complete piece of mind, but was it done with joy? The Apostle Paul had been very active in the City of Corinth. The church that was begun there was vigorous and growing well, that is until disruptors came and put doubt into the Christians' heads about Paul's authority. Paul had tried to quell that diversion in 1 Corinthians, but when more persuasion was needed, he wrote what has become the second letter to the Corinthians.

Specifically, from Chapter 8:1 to 9:15, he wrote about "the collection of the saints," and used the Macedonian

churches as an example of people who gave according to their means and even beyond their extreme poverty. Amazingly, Paul said the Corinthian Christians begged to be able to contribute in this manner. He urged them to continue this spirit of giving just as they also excelled in their faith, their dialogue, and their desire to learn.

Paul concludes this line of thinking with the Bible focus for March with Chapter 9, Verse 7; it's a commentary on the theme, "we reap what we sow." Verse 6 says,

"The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Then in Paul's focus in Verse 7 he writes, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Paul uses a common principle – the more seed farmers plant in their fields, the more crops they reap at harvest – and applies it to the Christian spiritual world, including giving. The meaning is clear: God promises that those who liberally share of their own abundance will themselves reap abundantly from God's kingdom. And sharing

abundantly is made easier when we do it with cheer, realizing the abundance to come.

Prayer: *Dear God, the idea of being a cheerful giver is difficult for us to embrace. We would much rather cheerfully think of ourselves. Help us to perceive the benefit of cheerful giving and how it pleases You and helps further Your kingdom. Amen.*

EACH ONE
MUST GIVE
AS HE HAS DECIDED
IN HIS HEART,
NOT RELUCTANTLY
OR UNDER COMPULSION,
FOR GOD LOVES
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2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

Lawn care – handled exclusively by the men of the congregation.

Giving Statements – they were handwritten, and issued quarterly.

Newsletter – mailed to every household every month.

Casual clothing – more of the exception than the rule.

Recorded services – recorded on cassette tapes for the shut-ins only.

Depending on with whom you're talking, they may view these changes as good or bad. Events and activities come and go. Culture and society change. Those who have been members of Holy Cross longer than I can certainly list additional changes since they joined. Others with shorter tenures may be scratching their heads unable to relate to much of my list.

And that's a key point. Change is relative. It's not a change for you if you joined after the change had occurred. As far as many of our current members know, we've always had an artificial tree at Advent/Christmas.

And when you made the decision to join Holy Cross, you based your decision on what you saw and experienced at that time, not on "the way it used to be."

Change is inevitable. That's not to imply you – or I – like all the changes. But it's not about me. It's about Holy Cross and our community of believers. Fortunately, God has given us the ability to discern and adapt. How is God leading us so that we can care for current members, welcome new members and continue to share the Gospel? It's a tricky balance, but as we answer this question, we'll better understand where change can, should, and should not, occur. +

Board note – We have openings on the Board for a Vice President and at least one Director. The Vice President position is our primary bridge to staff-related matters. The Director position is a generalist position that provides guidance and oversight together with the entire Board.

If you're interested in serving on our Board of Directors, or to get more information, send an email to president@holycrosstrumbull.com.

NOTEWORTHY

News, Notes, & Acknowledgements from the Holy Cross Community

FROM THE WORSHIP TEAM

The Lenten Season is upon us. Let us devote time for self-reflection and consideration of Christ's suffering and sacrifice as we prepare to celebrate our Lord's Resurrection at Easter. Our Lenten season began with an Ash Wednesday prayer service on February 22, and will continue with midweek prayer services on Wednesdays in March at 7:00 pm.

We love to hear from you!

If you have any news, notes, or acknowledgments that you'd like to share with the congregation...please let us know! Submissions are due by the 10th of the month preceding the edition date. Email office@holycrosstrumbull.com



BUILDING BLOCKS

from Holy Cross Christian Preschool

The month of March will begin with our **favorite Dr. Seuss books!** We will continue the month with an exploration of clouds, rain, rainbows, wind and shadows. We will then learn all about the many wonderful birds that God created. At the end of the month, we will be eagerly waiting for spring!

Our Bible stories for the month are: The Ten Lepers, Jesus Calms a Storm, The Lord's Prayer, and Jesus Rides Into Jerusalem.

Science activities will include many **experiments involving rainbows!** The children will make rainbows in a jar, find out what happens when you put

together food coloring, milk and oil, and make a rainbow with melted jellybeans!

On March 20, our school will be closed for **Parent and Teacher Conferences.** We look forward to speaking with the parents to let them know how much their children are progressing.

LOOKING FOR A GREAT PRESCHOOL?

Registration for the 2023-2024 school year is ongoing, with both full-time and part-time options. Class sizes are limited. Please recommend us to your family and friends! Contact Michele Glennon, at 203-268-6471 or preschool@holycrosstrumbull.com.

HIDDEN TREASURES

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baptism. You will eat and drink the eternal life God gives in the body and blood of Christ. You will be supported and encouraged by the members of the body of Christ.

AS WE STEP INTO THESE CHANGES, I ASK A FEW THINGS OF YOU.

Be open to something different. Not everything new is better, and not everything old is good, but as we seek to be faithful to the gifts of the church, the packaging might look different.

Be patient. We will have failures along the way, but these are necessary to help us grow.

Be diligent in praying. All of us, ultimately, want the same thing for Holy Cross: to be a vibrant community of faith that is growing. Remember, our job is planting and watering; God gives growth. So keep constant in prayer, be open to receiving wisdom from God, and have the

courage to step forward, keeping our eyes on Christ and our hearts toward our neighbors.

There is a happy ending to our story about Trevor. His grandfather was a patient and understanding man. He followed his grandson into the house, gave him a hug, and told him he understood his disappointment. But he asked Trevor to trust him and drive where he told him to go. And it just so happens that Grandpa was planning to take Trevor—in that old beat-up car—to the dealership, where he would drive away with something even better than he could have imagined in the first place.

Lord God, thank you for the gifts of life and salvation you give to us. As we step forward into something different, let us keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and trust that you will lead us in all that we do. Use our congregation to plant seeds of faith and truth in our community, that you might grow your kingdom in this place. +

Want to Grow as a Christian? Go Back to the Start.

While he sat in class, the young man's frustration was evident, and when class ended, he was at the podium before I closed my laptop. He wanted to meet as soon as possible. In the lecture, I'd said, "We don't add works to faith in Jesus. We stand before God, from first to last, justified in Christ alone. We never get past faith, and our righteousness is never properly ours—it's always in Christ."

I'd said, "If we measure God's faithful word to us in Christ only by the presence or absence of works, then despair or delusion will follow."

We set up a meeting for the next day. I assumed the young man was angry, but I was wrong. After a few moments in my office, his eyes began to tear up. "I haven't had assurance for as long as I can remember," he said. "I never feel like I do enough, and I know that one day I'll give an account before God."

"Do you think God justifies you in Christ?" I asked, "That he forgives your sins and gives you Christ as your righteousness?"

"Yes," he said.

"Do you think God does that only to get things started but will one day add your works to the mix to see if you really qualify?"

"No. But I live like I do."

We confess justification by faith in Christ, yet practically the pressure is on to perform, to serve more, to love more, to be more.

As Craig A. Parton puts it, there seems always to be an "evangelical urge to do more."

In Galatians 3:1–3, Paul makes clear that when leveraged for identity or standing before God, all manner of works, virtues, and practices are evil enchantments. The Christian life isn't about moving onward and upward from the cross. Instead, we should go back to the start.

Double Edge of Evidence

Let's be clear: Saving faith flows outward in works of love for God and others. We're saved by faith alone, but our faith is not alone.

Whether good or bad, a tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 12:33). Love and obedience are signs of saving faith.

Moreover, none of us serve others enough, but that's not the issue at stake in Galatians 3. We confess justification by faith in Christ, yet practically the pressure is on to perform, to serve more, love more, to be more.

The question here is if we'll fall into the dangerous trap of finding assurance, or establishing our identity, in what we do or if we'll find it in Christ.

Problems can arise in the relationship between works and assurance because we love hard evidence, things we can see and

point to. We love our own accomplishments, the things that set us apart as really committed Christians. This is a stumbling block. It's easy to begin with Christ crucified and the Spirit but then be lured,

"We confess justification by faith in Christ, yet practically the pressure is on to perform, to serve more, to love more, to be more."

trance-like, away from the cross and back to finding assurance in our effort. Even when Paul looked at his own life of faith, he looked away from himself by saying “no longer I . . . but Christ” (Gal. 2:20).

To the Galatians who succumbed to the temptation to find assurance in effort, Paul asked a series of questions. Let’s consider two of them.

1. “Who has bewitched you?” (Gal. 3:1).

According to Paul, adding works to the cross of Christ isn’t a minor mistake. It means being led astray as though under a spell. False teachers lured the Galatians away from the apostolic gospel, essentially saying, “Yes, you have Jesus, but you need to add works of the law.” They “bewitched” or “cast an evil eye” on the Galatians. In chapter 2, however, Paul says no one can be justified before God by doing the law but only through faith in Christ (2:16). By falling under the enchantment of works, the Galatians lost sight of the Savior.

2. “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

He’s not talking about “getting saved” by works. He’s rebuking dependence on the flesh for progress in the Christian life. With “flesh,” Paul links dependence on works to a power and realm opposite to Christ and his Spirit.

Adding to the cross means falling back under a curse (3:10). While we must be conformed to Christ and live lives worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1), the Christian life isn’t about proving or displaying our justification through our doing. We’re not justified by God in Christ and given the Spirit so we can put the cross in our rearview mirror. Growth in the Christian life isn’t progressing from the cross. We must constantly confess our sin—including our self-justifying tendencies—and return daily to the cross.

But What About . . . ?

I know what you’re thinking. Doesn’t Paul say “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5) and “Let each one test his own work” (Gal. 6:4)? Don’t these texts teach us works are necessary? Don’t they encourage us to measure our progress?

Yes, works are necessary, but we must distinguish works added to the cross from works that flow from it (Eph 2:10). Yes, Paul also commends self-examination, but the most important self-test isn’t found in evidence of progress.

It’s in going back to the start and asking, “Am I believing? Am I trusting Christ?” After all, faith is both a gift and obedience, not merely a launching pad for obedience (John 6:29; Rom. 1:5).

“We’re not justified by God in Christ and given the Spirit so we can put the cross in our rearview mirror.”

We’re not justified by God in Christ and given the Spirit so we can put the cross in our rearview mirror.

Do you want to grow in Christ? Know that Paul’s questions in Galatians 3 are for you too. I doubt you feel pressure to add circumcision or other Mosaic ceremonies to your faith. But rooting our Christian identity and assurance in any works, God’s good law included, means aligning ourselves with the flesh. It’s starting with Christ who fulfilled the law for us then seeking to finish by another power.

Do you want to grow as a Christian? Know that Jesus stands before you every day in his gospel word. He’s calling you back to the start. Believe, confess, and repent. Return to the cross.

Written by Brian Vickers | The Gospel Coalition

Used by Permission. Original article can be found at www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/grow-christian-go-back/

A Study in Acts

from Cliff Schrock

ACTS 22:1-30

With our study of Acts now just a few chapters from concluding, we are in that part of the book that shows two progressions going on. The first is that the church grew and expanded to the ends of the earth. The second is that the church's Good News was recognized as universal and for everyone. After you have read Chapter 22, please pick up with the following analysis.

As Chapter 21 had ended, Paul and his fellow travelers were in Jerusalem and Paul is under great duress. Jewish zealots, demanding strict observance of the law of Moses, kept inciting the crowd with slanderous accusations. Paul was assaulted but the melee stopped when the tribune and soldiers came upon the scene. The tribune could not make sense of the attack and brought Paul to the barracks. But while he was still outside, Paul asked the tribune to allow him to speak to the crowd. When the people quieted down, Paul began speaking to them in Hebrew. Chapter 22 goes right into his address at Verse 1.

Paul urges them to listen to his defense, and because he's speaking in Hebrew, he has their full attention. He provides a brief bio of his life, how he grew up Jewish and had been a persecutor of those who followed the Way. Paul's inspiring retelling of his transformation on the road to Damascus shows that even though Paul had not seen Jesus while He was in His ministry, he did see Jesus after His resurrection.

Paul tells his conversion in full, culminating with Jesus' commission to him of going to see the Gentiles, a command that began him on his missionary journeys. We can imagine how spellbinding Paul must have been at spotlight moments such as this because normally after honest testimony to a gathering – as it was with Peter, too – the oratory was sufficient enough to quiet the crowd. This time, however, at this point the crowd was holding firm in its anger and there was shouting that Paul should be done away with and not be allowed to live. Perhaps Paul's reference to being told by Jesus to go far away to the Gentiles sent the Jewish zealots over the edge and back to their cries for death.

The tribune, who did not know Paul was a Roman citizen at this point, ordered that Paul be flogged, which, oddly, was being used as a way to elicit the truth from Paul but which also, we know, was used as punishment and could even cause death.

But after being tied up, Paul was able to use his citizenship to his advantage. He said to a centurion that it wasn't legal to flog a Roman citizen who hadn't been condemned yet. When the centurion said to the tribune that they were about to flog a Roman, the tribune came to Paul and directly asked him if he was, indeed, a Roman citizen. Paul said he was born a citizen; this was in contrast to the tribune, who had to pay a large amount of money to be one. Paul's status startled the tribune and those who had bound Paul. They were afraid for the offense they had caused because by law a Roman citizen could not be whipped or put to death without having the right of appeal to the emperor. After an appeal was approved, nothing more could be done to the accused until the emperor had ruled on the appeal. While waiting for a ruling, the accused could remain in jail, lodge with a friend, be housed by a soldier or even allowed to live in his own place of lodging.

After these developments, the tribune wanted the process to go through proper channels so he released Paul the next day and ordered that the chief priests and the full council meet. Paul was brought down to stand before them, which leaves us with another cliffhanger as we go into Chapter 23. +

Sources | Harper Study Bible; The Everyday Bible: New Testament; Egermeier's Bible Story Book; The Acts of the Apostles, Neal M. Flanagan.

Next Month: Acts, Chapter 23, which describes the trial of Paul before the council and a conspiracy that was devised that would ultimately kill Paul.

Celebrating this Month

MARCH

It's fun to be recognized on your special day! Even more so, it's special to know others are praying for you. It is our hope that as you spend time in daily prayer, you will remember your fellow Holy Cross members on their special day.

BIRTHDAYS

Date Name

1	Cheryl Connic
2	Valerie Huydic
3	Caitlyn Dale
3	Loralai Dale
3	Karl Dale
3	Mia McDonald
7	Julie Sjoblom
9	Nicole Benson-Ayisi
10	Anna Mae Berger
10	Laura Dowling
10	Donna Rodriguez
12	Taylor Van Wart-Szinavel
13	Christopher Danne
13	Gabriella Ely
13	James Ely
15	Madison Herr-Feeney
15	Gary Jackson
15	Ryan Van Wart
16	DJ Broadbin
17	Gary Messerschmitt
24	Danny Nyitrai
25	Parker Deloge
26	Nicole Ramirez
28	Andrew Struzik

BAPTISM BIRTHDAYS

Gio Broadbin
Ann Brueggemann
Dylan Chirgwin
Cheryl Connic
John Connic
Lauren Gagliardi
Lillian Gagliardi
Christine Halls
Chad Helminger
Jesse Kravecs
Brandon Matthews
Riley Riccio
Donna Rodriguez
Mary Ann Schiller
Julie Sjoblom
Ronald Sjoblom
David Skoog
Emily Struzik

If there is someone that should be on one of these lists, but isn't...please alert the office so we can update our records!