

# From the Pastor's Desk

## Why Lutheran?

About half of the membership of Shepherd of the Hills was born Lutheran and the other half chose to become Lutheran at some point in life. Why become Lutheran? What makes Lutheranism unique and attractive?

During the past year, the Council has been using *Reclaiming the "L" Word - Renewing the Church from its Lutheran Core*, by Kelly Fryer for the education part of our meetings. A main thrust of the book is this:

Fryer states: *God always comes down. God always comes down. There is never anything we can do to turn that arrow around and make our way up to God.*



*God came down in Jesus. And God still comes down, in the bread and in the wine, in the water and in the fellowship of believers. God ALWAYS comes down.*

When Fryer spoke with a group of very diverse Lutherans, including African-Americans, Asian-Americans, American Indians and others, some indicated how hard it was to be Lutheran in a church that is predominately white, middle class, and northern European. After listening to their stories, she asked, "So why do you want to BE Lutheran? Here are their responses:

*No other church is so clear about a God who loves me just as I am. No other church is so clear about what it means to be saved, not because of anything that I do or am, but by grace through faith alone. She goes on to say, In other words, Lutherans know, down in their souls, that God always comes down. God comes down to meet us when we are rich and when we are poor, when we are black and when we are white, when we are broken and when we are whole.*

She goes on to point out five guiding principles of Lutheranism:

1. **Jesus is Lord.** The earliest creed was simply "Jesus is Lord". *If "Jesus is Lord" means, first of all, that I'm not Lord, it also means that I don't have to be, either. And, for that, we should all be very thankful. If Jesus is Lord, we will find ourselves surprised when he comes to us in unexpected ways—on the cross, in the hungry, the sick, those in prison, the outcasts, and in Holy Communion.*
2. **Everyone is Welcome.** *Here is the flat-out truth of Guiding Principle #2. Jesus, the Lord, welcomed everybody, especially the foreigner, the excluded, the sad, lonely and hurting. That got him in trouble with the religious leaders of his day more than anything else. If Jesus welcomed them, so must we.*
3. **Love Changes People.** *People aren't really changed by rulebooks, lectures or laws. What really changes people is our love, the love of God through Jesus Christ.*
4. **Everybody has something to offer.** *The renewal of our church hinges on a rediscovery of the important Lutheran idea that Everybody Has Something To Offer. The reformers called it "The Priesthood of all Believers."*
5. **The World Needs What We Have.** *Maybe the very hardest thing for us Christians to get our heads around these days is the idea that the church does not exist to meet our needs. If we are really "the Body of Christ", that means we are the flesh and blood that Jesus is using to get stuff done. Who are we here for? If we are all about ourselves, then we are going to be in trouble every time.*

Attempting to earn God's grace is an exercise in futility where one will always be left wanting. On the other hand, the Lutheran understanding of grace can appear to trivialize Christian activity for fear of trying to work our way to heaven. Notice that Fryer's five statements bring together both God's amazing grace and our need to roll up our sleeves. Regarding faith and good works, Luther used the analogy of a fruit tree. He said the job of a fruit tree to produce fruit, but, the fruit is produced by the grace of God. It is the nature of a healthy tree to produce fruit. Similarly, Fryer calls us to faith—Jesus is Lord. And to produce fruit—everyone is welcome, love changes people, everyone has something to offer, and the world needs what we have.

This Lent, let's celebrate God's amazing grace and let it flow through us in fruitful service. Please note Lenten opportunities for spiritual growth during Wednesday evening soup/sandwich and services.

**Pastor Bob**

## Adult Education

Meets at 9:30pm in the Fellowship Hall. Everyone is invited to participate.

For discussion, we will be using "The Wired Word", an ecumenical on-line resource, which addresses current events in the news and how they intersect with faith. If you would like to receive the topics the week before via email, please let Pastor Bob know (rkippley@yahoo.com).

**March 4th *Haggard Admits To Immoral Behavior*** Ted Haggard, pastor and founder of the 14,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, admitted in a letter to the congregation that he was guilty of sexual immorality. (To be held in the Sanctuary because of Pancake / Sausage breakfast.)

**March 11th *Christian Group Urges Troop Build Up, War Without Restrictions***. Christian views on war have tended to fall into three broad categories: pacifism (refusal to fight), a just war (qualified participation) and crusade (no-holds barred participation, sometimes with the conviction that God is on our side).

**March 18th *Nearly 1,000 Accept Blasphemy Challenge*** During December and January, nearly 1,000 youth and young adults responded to a "Blasphemy Challenge" jointly issued by filmmaker Brian Flemming, director of the anti-religion documentary *The God Who Wasn't There*, and Brian Sapiet, co-founder of the atheist Web site *RationalResponders.com*.

**March 25th *God Wants You To Be Rich, Say Some Preachers*** The cover story in the September 18 issue of *TIME* is titled "Does God Want You to Be Rich?" It reports a theme in the preaching of certain megachurch and television evangelists that "one of God's top priorities is to shower blessings on Christians in this lifetime."

## Bereavement Group

Pastor Bob will be leading a bereavement group for anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. The meetings will be in his office from 11:00—12:00 noon on the following Wednesdays: March 21st, 28th, and April 4th. This is open to anyone, member or non-member, interest in understanding the pain involved when a loved one dies. Please call the office at 275-6797 by March 12th to register or email [office@sothlutheran.com](mailto:office@sothlutheran.com).

## Council Retreat

The Council will be meeting on Saturday, March 3rd from 9:00 AM—Noon at Pastor Bob and Joan's home for a short retreat. We will be discussing the importance of having a dynamic vision of how our congregation can more effectively carry out its mission: ***Inviting, Growing and Serving through Christian Relationships***. Please keep the members of your Council in prayer.

## First Holy Communion Classes

There will be a First Communion Class for parents and children who would like to begin receiving Holy Communion (2nd grade and older) on Wednesday evening, March 21st from 6:30—8:00 PM. During this time we will discuss Holy Communion and set the date for students to make their First Holy Communion.