

Don't worry, God comes down to us

When I was young I had a unique experience of growing up in several different Christian traditions and church communities.

This experience sparked in me an interest of religion and led me to ask questions concerning the Christian faith. I listened to all the different teachings that were being instructed in the various churches.

One of the first teachings I picked up on was that we are all born sinners and needed to ask Jesus for forgiveness. I was taught that lying, stealing, cheating, cursing, etc., was not only bad but that they were sins.

And if you sinned you needed to ask for forgiveness, because if you didn't you couldn't enter heaven.

Therefore, at a young age, this caused a deep sense of fear and shame. I truly wanted to be forgiven and saved. Who doesn't want to go to heaven?

In hindsight, this installed a relatively unhealthy obsession with trying to make sure I was forgiven and saved. I was fearful that Jesus would come again and I wouldn't have asked for enough forgiveness.

I feared that I would be locked out of the heavenly gates. As a child this deeply bothered me.

So, as I aged, I kept listening to what was being preached at the different churches I attended — seeking answers to my doubts and fears.

When I finally settled into a single faith community and entered confirmation, I inquired about this longtime concern of mine to my late mentor, Pastor Mark Anderson,

of Crosslake Lutheran Church.

The response was simple but profound. He explained that God always comes down. There is nothing that we can do to make our way up to God.

It is God's grace, love and forgiveness that is freely given to us and ensures us of our salvation. Not of our own doing but a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This tiny bit of wisdom freed my fearful soul. My childhood angst concerning whether I would ever be worthy enough was removed.

And I have carried this life-changing wisdom with me ever since, returning to this truth any time I have my doubts.

There is nothing that we can say or do that can exclude us from the love of God. That is the radical and profound nature of the Good News that Jesus shares with us all.

There is no work or charity that can make us righteous. No specific tithe that can grant us salvation. No prayer that can magically save us.

Often you hear certain Christians calling on people to pray, "Jesus, I repent of my sins. Come in my heart. I believe in you. I want you to be my Lord and Savior."

I prayed this prayer incisively as a child, yet gained no consolation. All this prayer does is centers it around yourself and your desires, thus becomes works righteousness.

Rather in this reframed thinking, it's not about us. We have been freely given salvation and forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Nothing more.

We don't deserve this gift, but it is ours to have, for God always comes down and meets us where we are.

Austin Nelson, of Minneapolis and Crosslake, is a pastor, church historian and Pequot Lakes High School graduate.



AUSTIN NELSON

Faith in Action volunteers promote quality of life

HACKENSACK — People in Cass County have a heart for service and caring for their neighbors. It is no surprise to find many special individuals who care enough to volunteer their time and talents to help others.

In 2022, 98 Faith in Action volunteers helped 372 individuals throughout Cass County (up 8%), including 169 new people.

Volunteers filled 2,918 requests for services and gave over 9,000 hours of assistance.

Volunteers drove over 107,656 miles to transport people and provided 2,131 rides (up 10%).

And yet, studies show that only 20% of Minnesota residents have ever volunteered in their community.

According to the Minnesota Association of Volunteer Administration, over 60% of emergency food, activities for youth, firefighting and transportation for older adults is reported to be done primarily through volunteers in rural communities.

Volunteers add significantly to our quality of life in rural Minnesota, and it is easy to get connected to volunteer opportunities.

A locally supported, nonprofit organization, Faith in Action for Cass County connects community volunteers to provide nonmedical, neighborly assistance to seniors, the disabled and people in



Contributed / Theresa Eclov

Faith in Action for Cass County volunteer Denny Ganz delivers meals and provides occasional rides in the Hackensack area.

need throughout Cass County.

Faith in Action volunteers provide transportation, friendly visiting, respite for caregivers, light homemaking and chores, and basic home repair, and they build accessibility ramps.

Volunteers can choose how, when and how much they want to volunteer. They receive scheduling coordination, training, liability insurance, recognition, mileage reimbursement and the smiles and joy of being with and helping others.

For more information about Faith in Action volunteer services or volunteering, call 218-675-5435 or visit www.faithinactioncass.com.

Area churches to participate in Lenten food shelf challenge

PEQUOT LAKES — Feb. 22, Ash Wednesday, will bring the season of Lent, and seven area churches will once again work cooperatively to help local food shelves.

The following churches will be involved:

► Crosslake Lutheran Church.

► Grace United Methodist Church, Pequot Lakes.

► Lutheran Church of the Cross, Nisswa.

► St. Alice Catholic Church, Pequot Lakes.

► St. Christopher Catholic Church.

olic Church, Nisswa.

► Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Pequot Lakes.

From Feb. 22 to April 2 (Palm Sunday), the public is invited to contribute both food and funds to help restock food shelves in Crosslake and Pequot Lakes.

SENIOR MEALS

served with low-fat milk.

Feb. 6-10

► **Monday:** Liver or pepper steak, buttered boiled potatoes, stewed tomatoes, dinner roll with margarine, dessert.

► **Tuesday:** Biscuits and sausage gravy, roasted potatoes, cinnamon apple slices, dessert.

► **Wednesday:** Ginger citrus chicken, rice pilaf, peas and carrots, peaches, bread with margarine.

► **Thursday:** Sloppy Joe on a bun, potato wedges, vegetarian baked beans, banana or fresh fruit, cookie.

► **Friday:** Baked fish, macaroni and cheese, broccoli florets, pears, Jell-O with whipped topping.

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