

# CONNECTIONS online

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BRUCE LAM, PIXABAY

## *The Reach of the Word*

Essay by Rev. Lou Hesse



Jim Nestingen once told me one just never knows the “reach” of one’s ministry. He told of the time when, as a young pastor serving a small church in Coos Bay, Oregon, he noticed a lot of the vehicles that frequented his church, plus others, were regularly parked at one particular house. Upon investigation, it turned out it was the home of a one of his parishioners — a hairdresser. Jim told me that hairdressers, like bartenders and pastors, are people who tend to hear confessions. People share things in those contexts that often are not open to the public initially. Jim talked to his hairdresser parishioner and recommended she add absolute to her skills. He said it wasn’t long and there was a steady stream of new faces coming to the church because this one woman was speaking a word that needed to be heard.

I was recently reminded of this when one of my church members, a retired hairdresser, died after a bout with cancer. The memorial service was well attended, as she and her husband were both respected as solid, trustworthy, and helpful members of the community. The Gospel was proclaimed, and discussions in the fellowship time told me “ears to hear” had been present. I have found funerals and memorial services to be places where the hunger for a word that speaks of the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God to sinners is particularly well-received.

Earlier that same week, a family requested baptism for two children for the upcoming Sunday, apologizing for the short notice. The designated sponsor happened to be visiting from his home in the Midwest. I will always drop everything for the opportunity to baptize, so of course we did. On the spur of the moment afterward, the children’s mother said her aunt was having a barbecue and invited Debbie and me to join them. I rarely turn that kind of invitation down, so we went for hamburgers and fellowship. When we arrived, the

hostess — whom I have known for close to 40 years — said she would like me to pray for her mother, who had been placed on hospice care.

As we were getting ready to leave, the hostess pulled me aside and made it clear she wanted me to pray over her mother before we left the house, as in Right Now! Little did I know the hospice care had begun that day, and the dear lady was asleep in a back bedroom.

The whole family gathered where she slept. I took her hand in mine and, calling her by name, I identified myself and said, “I am here to remind you that you are a child of God. Years ago someone made the sign of the cross over your forehead and over your chest,” as I traced the cross with my finger on her forehead and over her chest. Then I brushed her hair gently and said, “They baptized you with water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus claimed you as his own in that action. You are a sheep of his flock. He has taken away your sin; you do not have it anymore. You belong to him and will be with him shortly.” I then said a prayer and had those present join me in the Lord’s Prayer. As a granddaughter was stroking her other hand, I told her and her mother (and anyone who was listening) that anyone can and should remind her of her baptism often, for whatever time she has left. There were more than a few tears shed.

One never knows the reach of the Word of God and when someone needs to hear it. These friends and acquaintances are members of the Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Lutheran denominations, with probably a smattering of Baptist and possibly even a Mormon or two in the group, too. I take great comfort and delight that they insisted on pulling that Word out of me that day. One just never knows when the Holy Spirit will do his work. 

Rev. Lou Hesse of Moses Lake, Washington, is pastor of [Living Word Lutheran Church](#).

# Journey Through the Psalms

## Mini Bible Study Installment



### PSALM 20:1-5

May the Lord answer you  
in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the  
God of Jacob protect  
you!  
May he send you help  
from the sanctuary and  
give you support from  
Zion!  
May he remember all your  
offerings and regard  
with favor your burnt  
sacrifices! *Selah*  
May he grant you your  
heart's desire and fulfill  
all your plans!  
May we shout for joy over  
your salvation, and in  
the name of our God  
set up our banners!  
May the Lord fulfill all your  
petitions!

**M**y friend Pastor Kevin says that every older pastor has their tiny crusades. They become fixated on the proper direction for presiding or get irritated by moments of silence that don't stretch long enough. Personally, he's decided that in retirement, he plans to sit in the back of congregations with a sandwich board that says "The benediction is not a 'may.' It's a promise."

There's a place in our life for the "mays", and the Psalmist reminds us today that there is no shame in calling upon the Lord for our specific longings. We cry out that we may be delivered from earthly peril. We pray that we may receive earthly blessings with a gracious heart. We know that at any moment, we may experience the desires of our heart, receiving them from God's own hands.

But Pastor Kevin and the Psalmist are both right to remind us that when the Lord does choose to act, he is not a God of "may." He is a God of certainty, of power, and of promise. This we know: When the Lord answers us, he does it from his throne and with authority. This we know: When the Lord pursues victory, it is absolute. This we know: The king upon the throne is the same king who delivers us and causes even sin and death to fall to their knees. This is the Lord who blesses us. This is the Lord who keeps us. This is the Lord whose face shines down on us. May there never be doubt in your heart about the joyful certainty of God's true promise.

### FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

*Read the psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for your own personal devotions or in a short Bible study session.*

1. What kinds of prayers are "may" prayers? Why do we still go to the Lord when the outcome is uncertain or undecided?
2. Think about a biblical figure who prays before the Lord. How does God honor his promises to them? What hope does that provide them?
3. What can we be certain about when we pray? How do we maintain hope when these promises are not fulfilled immediately?
4. What promises does God make to his people? Be specific. If these things are guaranteed, why do we still pray about them?
5. How do God's promises provide hope and joy?

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we live in a world of uncertainty, but the promise of our deliverance at your hands is never in doubt. Allow us to rest in this sure and certain hope as we wait for its fulfillment in the return of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. 

The author of this installment, **Rev. Taylor Rister-Stempniak** of Fresno, California, is pastor of [Immanuel Lutheran Church in the community of Easton](#).

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### LEARN MORE

[Lutherans For Life](#) upholds the value of life affirmed by the resurrected Christ. We educate congregations on life issues with a Gospel perspective, equipping Lutherans and their neighbors to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life.

**Our Mission:** Equipping Lutherans and their neighbors to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life.

**Our Vision:** Every Lutheran, both individually and in community, upholding the God-given value of human life and influencing society to do the same.

Our Word of Hope hotline counselors can help anxiety, depression, and abuse as well as post-abortion grief and guilt. ([word-of-hope.org](#), 888-217-8679, [info@word-of-hope.org](#)).

Our gracious Triune God has endowed every single human life with immeasurable value by creating us in his image and redeeming us to himself by the blood of his Son. Yet, the sad reality is that, despite the ongoing efforts of Christians and non-Christians alike, there are still many people who hold a low view of human life and see death as the answer to many of life's problems.

Since our founding in 1977 and incorporation in 1979, Lutherans For Life has served as a pan-Lutheran ministry dedicated to connecting Holy Scripture and Lutheran doctrine to sanctity-of-life issues. Our vision is that every Lutheran — individually and in community — would uphold the God-given value of human life and influence society to do the same.

Through education, networking, and resourcing, LFL equips individuals and congregations to speak God's truth and demonstrate Christ's love in celebrating every human life from fertilization to eternity. Our ministry addresses life issues such as surprise pregnancy, post-abortion healing, disability, sexuality and gender, suicide prevention, terminal illness, and bioethics.

The center of our work and our message is always the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The life issues we face are but symptoms of a greater problem: mankind's sinfulness and separation



**LUTHERANS  
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*"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly ..."*

John 10:10b

from our God, the only solution to which is the forgiveness Jesus won for us by His death and resurrection and offered to the world in the Gospel.

Recognizing that every life is precious to God motivates us not only to protect and defend the earthly lives of each one of our neighbors but to reach out to them with the love of Jesus Christ in the hope that every person might know him and find true life, that is, everlasting life in communion with God and his Church.

Find out more at [lutheransforlife.org](#), [y4life.org](#), [word-of-hope.org](#). 

**Rev. Dr. Aric Fenske** is the executive director of Lutherans For Life.

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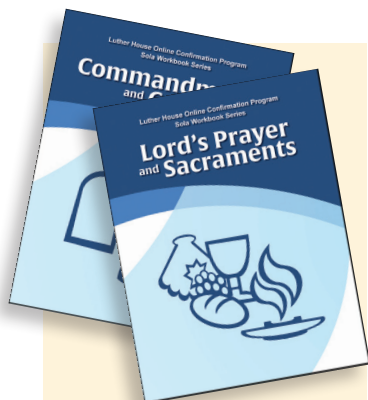
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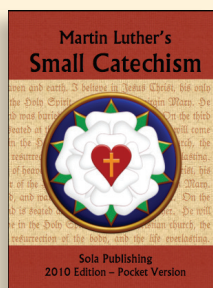
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## ... AND A GAME

Grab a friend and a couple markers to play this area control game called Stained Glass. Taking turns, color in a pane. A corner of your pane can touch a pane of your opponent's color, but sides of the pane cannot. You can color in a pane that shares a side with one of your own color, but you may want to save that for the end of the game. The last person able to fill in a pane is the winner. Play again! Just draw a window shape, then add lines to create a variety of glass pane sections.

Reading Connections Online in your browser? [Try this jigsaw puzzle](#) from Rev. Mark Ryman.

