

CONNECTIONS

online

FREE TO DISTRIBUTE

Read online, or print to share and freely distribute in church, and among your neighbors and friends. Printed versions can be multiple pages on letter paper, or printed as a four-page booklet on 11x17 paper.

After printing, fold with this page on the outside, tab the open sides with bits of tape to keep it together, then place a mailing label and first-class stamp on the photo below (stamp at lower edge, mailing label as if the rest of the photo were an envelope).

SOLA
www.solapublishing.com

P.O. Box 855
Graham, NC 27253
612-216-2055 or 888-887-9840



Sweet Water of Baptism

Essay by Rev. Dr. Marney Fritts




There is an unusual phrase in the Small Catechism that is quickly passed over: “It is not water that does these things, but *God’s Word with the water* and our trust in this word.” What are we saying here, “God’s Word with the water”? It is an unusual way of speaking, to put it mildly. Is this just a symbolic phraseology? God forbid! Does it mean something like putting the Bible near the baptismal font that makes it a sacrament? Not quite. Certainly, it doesn’t mean placing the Bible in the water for baptisms! So, what is it to have God’s Word *with* the water?

I have heard more than once that “water baptism” — meant to be derogatory — is invalid because our sin isn’t something you can just wash off like dirt! I agree, the problem of sin is much deeper than, say, the dirt found on the feet of children who’ve been playing outside or the grease found in the fingerprint grooves of a diesel mechanic. But this baptism that Christ commands us to bestow in the Great Commission is not just a soapy water or a strong solvent. No doubt, there is a confusion when baptism is seen as just a bath or mere ritual. It is because as sinners we have attempted to separate the Word from the water ... or God’s Word was simply not with the water in the first place. And water by itself is, in fact, no baptism at all.

In the Large Catechism, Luther writes about dealing with similar spirits in his day, the Anabaptists, who cried, “How can a handful of water help the soul?” He makes the point in a sermon on baptism that it is not a “dog’s bath”! Water from a dog’s bath cannot wash the soul! However, in the sweet water of baptism, God’s word of promise, who is Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin, is preached with the water and into the ears of the baptized, and so, it becomes what Luther

calls a “soul bath.” In Titus 3 it is called the “washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.” This sweet water of baptism is a life-giving water, the true *aqua vitae* (water of life), because Christ, with his bag of promises, the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the devil, and everlasting salvation, has entered the water *for you*.

Prepositions are small but important words. The Small Catechism uses the word “with” in the explanation. This is used along with other important prepositions like “in” and “under” in the Lutheran Confessions to convey the real presence of Christ in the sacraments. In the sweet water of baptism, Jesus Christ, who is true God and true Man, has placed himself in the water so that he may both drown our problems of sin, death, the devil, and our old sinful self and then buoy up a new life through the promise of the forgiveness of sin, the defeat of the devil, resurrection from the dead, and life eternal.

Try as we might, we cannot unlink Christ from his promises and the means by which he has chosen to bestow them upon us. Christ has never been separated from your baptismal water, from you. And this is why baptismal water is so sweet, because we strive daily to take charge of our future and in so doing, lose trust in the One who has secured our future. Our wandering hearts, in small ways and in large ways, stray from our Lord and distract our itching ears with other self-justifying words we prefer to hear. Nevertheless, Christ Jesus remains faithful to you in in the water of life, your sweet water of baptism. 

Rev. Dr. Marney A. Fritts of Maple Valley, Washington, is a married mother of two teens, pastor of Tahoma Lutheran Church, systematic theology instructor for Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary, and Theology Coordinator for the Augustana District of LCMC.

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



PSALM 14

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." When we read this first verse of Psalm 14, we may begin to conjure up images of clowns and court jesters. It's a convenient translation that would allow us to dismiss atheism as a silly, frivolous thought, but unfortunately for smug believers, the word "*nabal*" is not quite captured by "fool." To be a *nabal* is to observe the evidence and make a miscalculation. The *nabal* looks out on the world and sees an abundance of wickedness. Evil-doers abound. Not one does good. All have fallen short. With such peril around every corner, the *nabal* decides then that God must not exist because how could he allow this to happen? And the *nabal* lives accordingly.

But if the Psalmist insists that there is not even one person doing good, then who is this generation of the righteous? Someone looking down their nose at the wretched sinners from a tower of their own good deeds? By no means. The righteous are those who have looked at the wickedness of this world and their own hearts, and recognized that suffering is wrought not by an absence of God, but by our present sin. The righteous are those who cry out for our God to save us from the suffering inflicted upon us and the suffering we inflict upon ourselves. The righteous are those who have looked honestly at the world and concluded that our salvation is found in God.

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 with group discussion.

1. What about the world tempts you to become a *nabal*?
2. How does God's presence, action, and word help you rest in righteousness?
3. How are you convicted by the word of judgment in this psalm? How are you comforted by the word of hope in this psalm?
4. What does it mean to rely on the righteousness of God rather than our own righteousness?

PRAYER

Holy Father, you are the giver and sustainer of righteousness. Protect us from foolishness, that we may have our eyes open to your grace and redemption, which we receive through your beloved son, Jesus Christ, 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](#).

CLICK TO VISIT WORLDWIDE PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH
Bedford, Texas
888-551-7254
[thenalc.org](#)

SAINT PAUL LUTHERAN SEMINARY
314-497-2400 • [semllc.org](#)
CLICK HERE FOR
SIMUL
The Journal of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary

TRICKY QUESTIONS
THE STUFF THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE
Augustana District Confirmation Retreat
2/27 - 3/1 | [augustanadistrict.org/events](#)

THE HARVEST IS WAITING
WORLD MISSION PRAYER LEAGUE
[wmpl.org](#)

The Master's Institute
White Bear Lake, Minnesota
651-765-9756
[miseminary.com](#)

Make LCBI Your Lutheran Discipleship Boarding School
LCBI
Gr 9-12 Canada

Lutheran Church of South Sudan
[lcss.church](#)

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE
Lutherans For Life exists to equip Lutherans and their neighbors to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life.
[lutheransforlife.org](#)

Journey VBS: The Adventures of Paul



Ministry Partner Focus

CONTACT

To learn more about the content or how this kit could be used in your congregation, contact Rev. Teresa Peters, Director of Youth and Family Ministries for the North American Lutheran Church, at tpeters@thenalc.org.

PURCHASE

Journey: The Adventures of Paul is a fully downloadable kit for \$99.99 ([Item V-3110](#), [solapublishing.com](#)). The full kit includes a Director's Guide, all the individual station guides, reproducibles, registration form, promotional posters, logos, safety recommendations, and more. Some elements are available as separate products; call 888-887-9840 for information.

Looking for a Vacation Bible School that is biblically rich, kid-engaging, and realistic for your volunteers and budget? The North American Lutheran Church Youth and Family Ministry Team is thrilled to share a brand-new curriculum: "Journey: The Adventures of Paul."

This VBS walks kids through the Book of Acts and introduces them to the dramatic story of Saul, a man determined to stop Christianity — until he meets the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. That encounter changes everything. Saul becomes Paul, and the former persecutor becomes one of the Church's greatest apostles. Through Paul's adventures, children learn that Jesus still changes lives, strengthens faith, still calls them by grace, and sends his people to share the Good News.

Even better: this VBS is designed to be simple to decorate and easy to supply. Most of what you need can be found in your church supply cupboard or picked up at the dollar store — without sacrificing quality or depth. Within this VBS kit you have a variety of station choices: Music with five original songs, sheet music, MP3s, games and actions; Opening and Closing Assemblies with skits; Bible Stories; Camp Skills; Science; Art; Games; and Snacks. In addition, this VBS provides options to be orchestrated for one day, a few days or a full week.



Children can learn and engage with up to five Bible accounts and memorable themes:

- Session 1: Blinded by the Light — Acts 9:1-19
- Session 2: Singing in the Dark — Acts 16:16-34
- Session 3: Stay Alert — Acts 20:7-12
- Session 4: Letters of Love — 1 Corinthians 1:1-31
- Session 5: All Hands on Deck — Acts 27:1-44

If this sounds like a good fit for your congregation, this fully downloadable VBS — "Journey: The Adventures of Paul" — is available from Sola Publishing.

The author, **Rev. Teresa E. Peters** of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, is the Director of Youth and Family Ministries for the North American Lutheran Church.

CLICK TO VISIT WORLDWIDE PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

Thinking biblically about religion, politics and culture with Pr. Chad Kyler. Brought to you by Sola Publishing.

NEW BLOG

revdonajohnson@gmail.com

Albuquerque, New Mexico
505-994-3278
sonetwork.org

STANDING FIRM
ILT.edu (605) 692-9337

February 2025

CONNECTIONS
online

Ads are clickable when viewed in a browser or reader. Email knelson@solapublishing.com to place an ad in upcoming issues of Connections Online.

Milford, IA 51351
1-800-OKOBOJI
okoboji.org

Biblical Lutheran
Educational & Devotional Resources

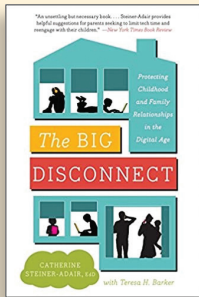
Minneapolis, Minnesota
763-412-2010
ambassadorpublications.org

General Santos City, Philippines
937-304-8110
naomisheartmission.org



DEVOTIONS

Seasoned Hope: There is a Way Forward by Chris Brekke contains 99 reflections on the everyday life of faith. Full-color images accompany Scripture text and prayers, plus a daily challenge question. Contents and sample devotions available on the product page. Softcover, 300 pages. [Item D-B150, \\$14.99, solapublishing.com](#)



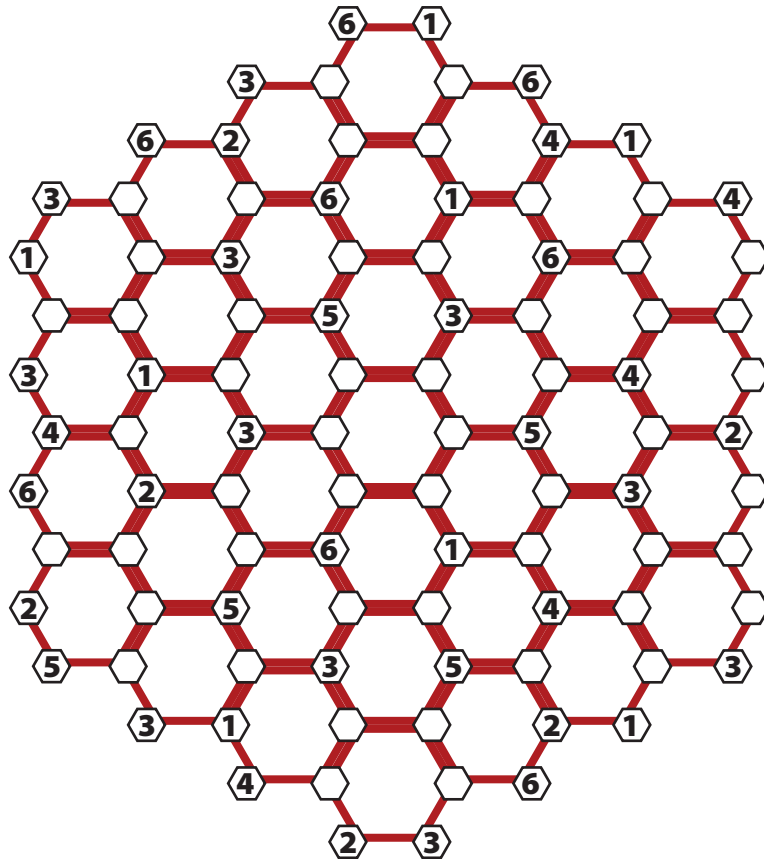
FAMILY + SCREENS

The Big Disconnect takes an in-depth look at how the Internet and the digital revolution are profoundly changing childhood and family dynamics. By Catherine Steiner-Adair. Hardcover, 375 pages. [Item Q-5211, \\$21.75, solapublishing.com](#)

... AND A GAME

Exercise your brain with a round of hexagon sudoku! Fill the remaining circles with integers from 1 to 6 so that the six vertices in each hexagon are numbered differently.

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



CLICK TO VISIT WORLDWIDE PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

Luther House of Study

\$300/MONTH ONLINE M.DIV.

FREE MINISTRY RESOURCES

LHOS.ORG



Join us on a life changing mission trip to South Africa!

Beyond the River Academy

715-296-0797
beyondtheriveracademy.org