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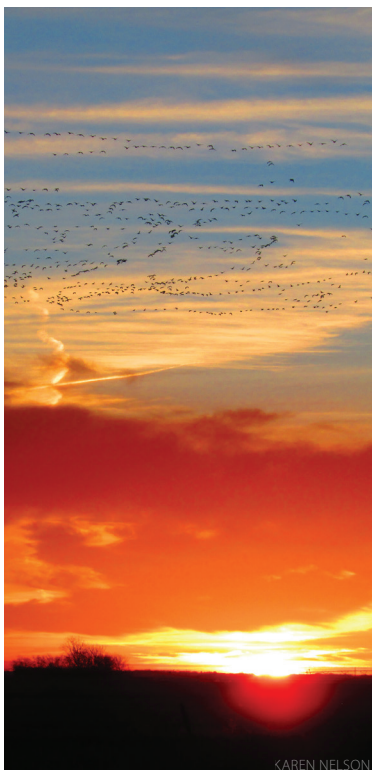
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KAREN NELSON

Denying Jesus



Essay by Rick Quast

God has been teaching us patience. Just as the winter was very late in leaving our area this year, so was Easter very late in arriving. We are still only a few days into the church season of Easter. Holy Week and all its heartbreak and joy are still a vivid recollection.

Simon Peter, not knowing that his master and teacher was about to die, offered to lay down his life for Jesus. In the relative safety of the upper room, with bread and wine and a warm fire, Peter was absolutely sure that he would stand beside Jesus no matter what happened, but when push came to shove and he realized that he might also be in grave danger, Peter denied knowing Jesus — not once, but three times! Despite this, Jesus commissioned Peter and the other disciples to carry on his work.

If you are like me, you realize much too often that you have denied Jesus. It may not even seem that you have sinned — offhandedly repeating “harmless” gossip, avoiding dubious-looking people on the street, raising your voice in anger, neglecting loved ones because you are “too busy.” All of these things and more are a denial of Jesus. Atheists deny Jesus as a matter of course, but when we Christians deny Jesus, we tend to feel guilty and unworthy — because we are guilty — we are unworthy! If that were the end of the story, our lives would be a very dark place indeed.

But the darkness has not overcome! The end of the story has not yet been written. Christ is risen!

Jesus looks past our weakness and our penchant for denial. He sees only the gift which God has given to all of us. Even if we have not yet discovered our specific gift, we can be assured that God will allow that to happen when his time is right — on his time, not ours. He hears our prayers of repentance and allows the light of the risen Lord to overcome



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“Peter said to him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ Jesus answered ... ‘Very truly I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.’”

John 13:37-38

“Again (the third time) Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.”

John 18:27

“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.’”

Matthew 28:5-6a

the darkness in our minds and our hearts.

We are but mere mortals, and we will deny Jesus yet again. But as long as we ask God for forgiveness, the Light of Christ will continue to illuminate our path through the darkness, and we will never be forgotten or forsaken or denied. **W**

Rick Quast is a member of [Shepherd King Lutheran Church](#), a North American Lutheran Church congregation in Calgary, Alberta.

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



On Easter morning, Christians around the world gathered for worship as the sun began to creep over the horizon — some gathered in parks, some gathered on church lawns, but the luckiest of them gathered in graveyards. In a place the world has marked as a place of death and grief, they gathered to proclaim new life and triumph. As the sun rose in the sky and they heard the promise of the Son risen from the dead, they saw the stones of the saints in the land and the new light of their beautiful inheritance. In that moment, they knew what Peter knew when he proclaimed the Gospel at Pentecost, what Paul knew when he testified at Antioch, and what David knew when he first prayed to the Lord, “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol.” You will not abandon us to death.

Psalm 16 paints an all-consuming image of trusting in God. David proclaims that he has no good apart from refuge in the Lord. Everything good upon his horizon and everything good in his life has come from the fulfillment of God’s promises — an inheritance first given to his ancestors, and now lived out through him. These blessings do not hinge on David’s wisdom or righteousness, but rather God’s own trustworthiness. Faith is not a feeling of joy or a warm and fuzzy moment or even perfect obedience.

*The Lord is my chosen portion
and my cup; you hold my lot.
The lines have fallen for me in
pleasant places; indeed, I have a
beautiful inheritance.*

Psalm 16:5-6

Faith is the realization that what God says is true. It is true when we struggle to believe it, as our brother Thomas did. It is true when we deny it, as our brother Peter did. It is true when we are overcome by grief and fear, as the myrrh bearers were. But despite our unworthiness, disobedience, and fragility, it is true. We have inherited the cup of forgiveness. We have received the inheritance of forgiveness. Our Lord has faced the grave so we shall instead receive the pleasures of his pierced right hand forevermore.

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. Have you ever attended a sunrise

service? How does the symbolism of the sunrise reflect the Resurrection? How does holding these services in graveyards symbolize the Resurrection?

2. David writes that the Lord is his “chosen portion and cup.” What does it mean to receive your sustenance from the Lord? How do the ideas of trust and sustenance relate to each other?

3. An inheritance is something passed from one person to the next upon death. How is our faith an inheritance from our ancestors? How is our faith an inheritance from Christ?

4. How is the path of life revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

PRAYER

Holy Father, you have honored your promises from age to age. We give you thanks for the inheritance of eternal life we have received through your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us the wisdom to rest in the refuge of your holy Word and trust in the reality of your faithfulness. 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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We Need Each Other



Ministry Partner Focus

GATHERINGS

The Augustana District is a non-geographic network of 106 (and growing) Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ congregations across the United States. Supported by a part-time staff of seven, the district is deeply committed to its three core values: Church, theology, and missions. To learn more about upcoming gatherings, visit the events page at www.augustanadistrict.org. Their next events include the Men's Gathering at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Hutchinson, Minnesota, on April 18, followed by the First Call Pastors Retreat (April 23-24) and the District Convention (April 25), both at Mt. Carmel Ministries near Alexandria, Minnesota.

I often think back to one of my first Easters as a pastor. It was April 2020. Fresh into ministry, I found myself proclaiming the Resurrection to a socially distanced church. Even more disorienting, I couldn't turn to mentors for guidance because they had never navigated a moment like this either.

While we are now several years removed from those early dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects remain. The world has reopened, but connections have not fully recovered. Pastors still experience seclusion. Congregations, many smaller than before, feel like islands. Many leaders who faithfully carried the weight of those years now find themselves burned out.

In this ministry landscape, an important question remains: How can we be accountable to one another if we don't truly know one another? As a district not defined by location but by relationship, the Augustana District has made intentional connection a priority. Our seven yearly gatherings — men's and women's events, high school and confirmation camps, a theological convocation, first call pastors retreat, and district convention — are more than dates on a calendar. They are opportunities for renewal, shared wisdom, and mutual consolation. They are simple, tangible reminders that none of us serves alone. We have also expanded livestream options so that those unable to attend in person




AUGUSTANA DISTRICT
THEOLOGY | CHURCH | MISSION

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12

can still participate and remain connected.

If these past years have taught us anything, it is this: We need one another. The Christian life is not lived in isolation, but together, gathered around Word and Sacrament, strengthened, and sent out for the sake of the world. Augustana District events are open to the entire association, not just our member congregations. We invite you to join us, to share your joys and challenges, and to be part of this life together. 

Rev. Aaron Deutsch is an LCMC-certified pastor at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota, and serves as the Augustana District Coordinator.

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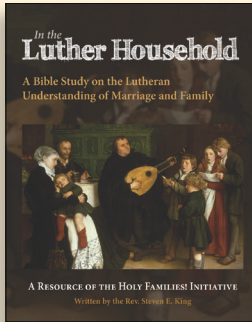
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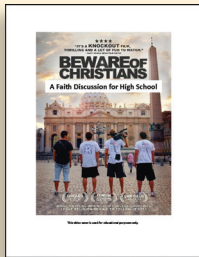


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FAITH AT HOME

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FILM DISCUSSION

Beware of Christians is a downloadable PDF by Laura Arndt for discussion of various hot topics with high school students. Based on the content of the Riot Studios movie of the same name. [Item Y-3015, \\$14.99, solapublishing.com](#)

... AND A GAME

A kangaroo word is one that has a synonym within its normal spelling. The main word and the shorter synonym both are spelled in the main word's existing letter sequence. Try your hand at these kangaroo words in a game written by Ben L. O'Dell.

BLOSSOMS
B L O O M S

EVACUATE
_ _ _ _ _

ENCOURAGE
_ _ _ _ _

PROSECUTE
_ _ _ _

REGULATES
_ _ _ _ _

RAPSCALLION
_ _ _ _ _

INDOLENT
_ _ _ _ _

PRATTLE
_ _ _ _ _

DIVERSIFIED
_ _ _ _ _

RAMPAGE
_ _ _ _ _

MATCHES
_ _ _ _ _

PERAMBULATE
_ _ _ _ _

PINIONED
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_ _ _ _

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Prodigal
THE ROAD HOME