

CONNECTIONS online

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The Re-Beginning

Essay by the Rev. Dr. Steven King



In my many years of teaching Confirmation in the parish setting, I can call to mind a number of bright and outstanding young students, several of whom went on to serve in professional ministry. I can also remember many more who were perhaps less academically “outstanding” but reflected a sincere and genuine faith that was evident in the way they lived and spoke of God as part of the larger fellowship of the Church.

One particular young man comes to mind. We had been talking in class about the goals and aspirations these young people had as they looked forward to the years to come. Some were very clear about what they wanted in terms of education and career, and the whole conversation took on a distinct “you have the power to accomplish whatever you set your mind to” vibe. After hearing the intentions of his fellow classmates, when it was this one young man’s turn to speak, he simply said somewhat humorously, “Yeah, well ... I just want to be a regular person.”

I can’t say what exactly he had in mind, or if he was thinking the same thing I thought when I heard it, but I informally adopted this young man’s statement as my own personal motto: “I just want to be a regular person.”

With the close of 2024, Sola Publishing has published the last printed issue of Connections magazine, and this is the first issue of a new periodical we are calling Connections Online. For 16 years, the magazine served an important function, true to its name in holding together faithful people, many of whom were in a time of transition moving from one church body to another. In some cases, people were introduced for the first time to the many faithful independent mission organizations and service ministries among us (some new, some old) that were not directly under the auspices of a denomination. Connections readers are people who come from different backgrounds and pieties within

the larger Lutheran landscape. We have made many new friends. My hope is that Connections has been one small part of making that happen.

One of the things that I have liked most about Connections over the years is how the magazine has always focused on a specific target audience — the regular down-to-earth people in the pew that make up our congregations (as well as those who might not be found so regularly in the pew). As a pastor, I know there are many fine theological journals out there, often published by professors and seminary faculty from whom I have very much benefited over the years. But the vision for Connections has always been for something different, not directed only at those with a formal theological education but primarily for the laity and the “regular” people of our congregations.

It brings to mind a quote from Martin Luther that I first heard many years ago. In manner similar to that young confirmand’s statement above, this has also been a sentiment I’ve kept with me over my years as a pastor. Luther wrote:

“When I preach, I adapt myself to the circumstances of the common people. I don’t look at the doctors and masters, of whom scarcely forty are present, but I look at the hundred or the thousand young people and children. It’s to them that I devote myself, for they, too, need to understand. If the others don’t want to listen, they can leave.”

Luther ended with this advice to preachers: “Therefore ... take pains to be simple and direct; don’t consider those who claim to be learned; but be a preacher to the unschooled youth and suckling” (Luther’s Works 54, p. 235).

Not only do I want to be a “regular person” in my own life, but as a pastor, I want to preach to regular people in their lives as well. This is not to say that theological and biblical

Continued on the back page

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



PSALM 1

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the
counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of
sinners, nor sits in the
seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the
law of the Lord, and on
his law he meditates
day and night.
He is like a tree planted
by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its
season, and its leaf
does not wither.
In all that he does, he
prosper.
The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that
the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked
will not stand in the
judgment, nor sinners
in the congregation of
the righteous;
for the Lord knows the
way of the righteous,
but the way of the
wicked will perish.

Psalm 1 is a fitting start to the whole book in that it speaks to the reason one might read the psalms in the first place.

The psalms were composed by many different authors, some of whom we do not know, over about 900 years. We read them as meaningful poetry — more like entries in a personal journal rather than as writings on doctrine. In many ways, this makes the psalms very accessible for the casual reader as well as for study.

The heading for Psalm 1 in the ESV is “The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked.” As a resource for prayer and reflection by a person of faith, the psalm shows us that there are two very different directions we can go in life — one that leads to destruction and another that leads to life. Yet, like the tree the farmer plants by streams of water in the hope that it would bear fruit, we know that it is only in God alone that we have the grace to believe, and it is his own Word that makes it so.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read the Psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for your own personal devotion or in a short Bible study session with group discussion.

1. Notice the verbs in verse 1: Walks, stands, sits. How do these words refer to a pattern of living,

a personal creed or confession, as well as a foundation for life?

2. What are some circumstances under which you might experience “delight” (v. 2)? What connotation or shade of meaning does this word have that is more than just to speak of something you “like”?
3. Jesus said to his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (John 15:16a). What do you think he means?
4. In what sense is Psalm 1 less “here is what you must do” and more “here is what you get to do”? Who makes all this possible? Why is that important to remember?

PRAYER

Lord God, you alone give us faith and the grace for our faith to flourish. We thank you that in spite of our sin and weakness, you allow us to grow and bear fruit, that our lives would have meaning and purpose and that our trust would always be in you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The author of this installment, **Rev. Dr. Steven E. King** of Graham, North Carolina, is executive director and managing editor of Sola Publishing.

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LUTHERANS FOR LIFE
Lutherans For Life exists to equip Lutherans and their neighbors to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life.
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LEARN MORE

Lutherans For Life (lutheransforlife.org) has, since 1979, upheld 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)

Lutherans for Life

Ministry Partner Focus by Rev. Michael Salemink



The year 2025 will bring terminal diagnoses, infertility, surprise pregnancies, unborn babies scheduled for abortion (over 73 million abortions world-wide in 2024), children awaiting adoption, mothers experiencing pressure to terminate (and fathers believing lies about it), persons with disabilities hearing euthanasia praised, senior citizens considering physician-assisted suicide, and general anxiety.

Yet the whole world needs — like never before — to remember and rejoice in the sanctity of life! Humankind needs to hear and see and feel and believe the Gospel — that Almighty God creates, redeems, and calls every human life as his own precious treasure, from fertilization to forever, for the sake of Jesus Christ the Savior.

Our mission at Lutherans For Life is to help equip you to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life — speaking with courage and compassion! This truth and love are still changing hearts and saving lives!

We also long for a world where age, appearance, and ability do not determine a person's worth. Abortion, assisted suicide, and embryo experimentation invite prejudice, discrimination, and injustice.

Even social ills such as poverty, inequality, illiteracy, bullying, abuse, addiction, and divorce only amount to symptoms. The real and root problem is human sinfulness — and no government or public initiative can save us from ourselves.

We have a better Savior and a greater salva-

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

John 10:10

tion. Our Heavenly Father takes responsibility for all evils and makes restitution for all wrongs. His presence relieves fears, and his promises heal from suffering. His forgiving grace brings infinite sanctity and fundamental significance to every member of our one human race and species.

At Lutherans For Life we are connecting the Gospel to people and the Word of God to life issues through speaking and preaching and presenting both in-person and online, through a dynamic website (lutheransforlife.org), video, printed resources, and through our Y4Life outreach to high school and college students (y4life.org and yaforlife.org). The 20 of us at Lutherans For Life multiply ourselves with volunteers in all fifty states (our state federations, Life Teams, Life Chapters, Life Advocates) to put the sanctity of life into practice for over 200,000 individuals every year!

For the sake of our nation, we speak words of warning. For the sake of our neighbors, we speak words of winning over. For the sake of our brothers and sisters, for the sake of the communion of saints, for the sake of the Gospel mission, we will not fall silent. And we will not sit still.

Michael W. Salemink is executive director of Lutherans For Life.

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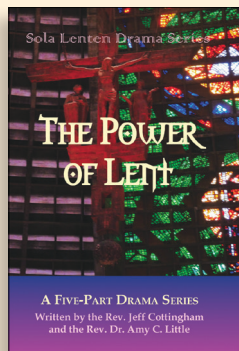
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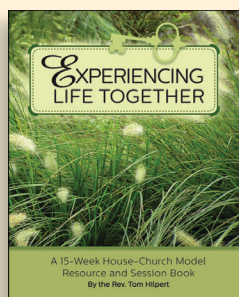
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"The Power of Lent" by Rev. Jeff Cottingham and Dr. Amy C. Little is a five-part drama series. Each week, two characters bear witness to what they saw, heard, and felt in Jesus' Passion. Scripture texts, theme introductions and discussion questions are provided. [Item D-1150, \\$9.99, solapublishing.com](#)



SAMPLE PAGES

"Experiencing Life Together" by Rev. Tom Hilpert is a 15-week house-church curriculum designed for pastors, layleaders and churches interested in a taste of what church in the home is really like. [Item E-4010, \\$12.99, solapublishing.com](#)


THE RE-BEGINNING ... continued from page 1

issues are something I avoid, but rather that I want to make sure the most important things are kept at the center. I want to continue to point people to Jesus Christ and the present and eternal promises he has provided to sustain us day after day. This same vision has been shared by all the editors of Connections, from the founder, Pastor Kent Groethe, to Pastor Mark Ryman, and more recently, our current editor Karen Nelson.

With Connections Online, we intend to continue focusing on the practical dimensions of our life together as believers. Many of your favorite authors and contributors will continue to write articles, devotions, and features — as they have in the past — seeking to

show how the Word of God informs our understanding of God, ourselves, and the world around us.

Connections Online is free to any individuals or churches that would like to be on our email list. Congregations are welcome to share the monthly link with their members, friends, and neighbors, or print hard copies for those who need it. It is our hope that it will serve as an evangelism tool as well as an outreach to homebound members!

May God continue to bless our journey together as we look forward to the future of our ministry and service in the name of Christ! 

Steven E. King of Graham, North Carolina, is executive director and managing editor of Sola Publishing.

... AND A GAME

Refresh your addition skills and see if you can develop a strategy to win at this math game called Joris Squares. Find a friend, two pencils and two sheets of paper to begin.

First, each person draws a 3-by-3 box, like enclosed tic-tac-toe, and without showing the other person, writes numbers in each corner. Use any numbers you want. Repeats are OK.

7		3
11		2

6		8
4		8

Second, both of you copy the numbers from the other person's corners to your side spaces, in any order. The goal is to make the sums of each line be as close to the same as possible.

7	4	3
8		8
11	6	2

6	2	8
11		7
4	3	8

Third, put a number in your center square. Choose carefully! Think about how the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines of numbers will add up depending on what you pick.

7	4	3
8	5	8
11	6	2

6	2	8
11	4	7
4	3	8

Count up the points! A sum pair is 2, three of a kind is 3, and so on. Play more to see if there's a good strategy. What if all your corners are the same, or if you use bigger numbers?

