

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEWSLETTER JULY 2007

EDITORIAL

LUTHERAN WORSHIP TODAY

There are many issues that face us as Confessional Lutherans in Australia. As we endeavour to be faithful to God and His Word, we need to know how to defend the faith and contend for the truth against the many challenges we face in our post-modern culture.

A seminar to be held at Marburg on July 21 & 22 will help us to do just that, and we hope that many of our readers will attend. Pastor Daniel Preus, a confessional Lutheran from *The Luther Academy*, (USA) has been invited by Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Marburg to lead their annual *Christian Interest Seminar*. He will address the topics of "*Lutheran Worship and Identity*."

Today, many in Australian Lutheranism contend that the liturgical worship and hymnody of the Lutheran Church is an impediment to the proclamation of the Gospel. Scores of churches in our land are discarding the church's liturgical heritage for non liturgical, so called, "contemporary" worship. Pastor Preus will show us some of the potential consequences of abandoning Lutheran liturgical worship, and lead us through an evangelical assessment of one or two "typical" contemporary services. He will also demonstrate the ways in which worship forms and shapes our faith, communicates the real presence of Jesus Christ, and brings justification (by grace alone through faith) to us, and much more.

Lutherans who may not understand why we worship the way we do, will learn something of the Scriptural basis for this practice, and grow in appreciation of how the liturgy preserves and promotes the Gospel. Lutheran worship will be the focus of the Saturday sessions, and on the Sunday afternoon, following our combined AELC service and community luncheon, the focus will be on the "*World-Wide Confessional Lutheran Scene*."

Sometimes we confessional Lutherans might wonder whether we know how to do mission anymore. Pastor Preus in his extensive travels throughout the world has visited churches like ours in places such as Central America, Chile, United States, Scandinavia, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and can bring us up to date information on how the mission of the church is going. What he has to say is very attention-grabbing. He will pass on to us how Lutheranism can best be spread in light of the paradigm shift from the old ways of doing mission work to what will be done in the future. The Gospel is indeed being proclaimed very effectively by

confessional Lutheran Churches throughout the world. We can hear and learn from that!

Pastor Preus will also have the inside story as to what is actually happening in the Missouri Synod, because he is flying to us directly from their 3-yearly General Convention.

But some may wonder whether we can trust such a speaker. The answer is yes, without a doubt, for *The Luther Academy*, to which Pastor Preus belongs, is dedicated to promoting the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is summarised in the Augsburg Confession and expounded in the Book of Concord. It publishes truly orthodox Lutheran materials, such as the 13 volume *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series they have developed; and a journal called *LOGIA* that deals with current issues of theology and practice. They conduct conferences on a regular basis. (These include the *Congress on the Lutheran Confessions* in Chicago and the *Pieper Lectures* at St. Louis.) They are also committed to creating and developing relations among confessional Lutherans in the United States and throughout the world for the purpose of promoting the doctrine and practice of historical Lutheranism. (Conferences have been held in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and West Africa, and serious consideration is being given to starting work in South America, South Africa, Indonesia and the Philippines.)

We welcome you all to Marburg on July 21 & 22 to join with us in growing in our understanding of important matters facing Lutherans in Australia, so that through the use of God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions we will be better able to stand firm in the Gospel and promote it. Come for the Saturday, stay overnight with a billet, (just phone your request through to Pastor Hampel, 07 54679222 and we'll see what we can do), then join us for the Sunday as well.

PSALM 139 AND ESCR

On Sunday, the 1st of July, Mrs Joy Wurst, the Queensland President for Lutherans for Life was invited to speak to members of the Downs Parish, on the evils of embryonic stem cell research and cloning.

Late last year, a bill was passed in the Federal Senate giving the go ahead for such research to begin. The governments of New South Wales and Victoria have since passed this bill, and it is soon to be debated in Queensland. It is expected to go before the other states and territories as well.

Of course, we need to understand how unethical

embryonic stem cell research is (ESCR), since it destroys tiny, developing human beings. Psalm 139 tells of God's Judgment against such practice.

Quite often you hear scientists and doctors speaking of a 'foetus.' They prefer to say that an unborn child up to the age of eight weeks is nothing more than a mass of tissue or a part of the mother.

Psalm 139 begins: "O LORD, You have examined me, and You know me." God's knowledge of us goes far beyond what we know about ourselves. David writes, "You alone know when I sit down and when I rise. You have understood my thoughts from far away. You have been measuring off my path and my reclining, and You have been familiar with all my ways. For before there is any utterance on my tongue, look, O LORD, You have known it completely. You have clasped me behind and in front, and You have laid Your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is unattainable, I cannot reach it."

God knows our thoughts even before we have become clear about them. He knows everything we undertake, and the way in which we carry everything out. He knows our words before we speak them. Individual human beings have worth because God has made them, and because God knows them intimately and completely. God keeps them under scrutiny. This clearly also implies that our bodies and lives are not simply our own to do with what we please. God's knowledge is greater than we can fathom.

David writes about himself before his birth in verse 13: "You have acquired my inmost parts. You covered me up in my mother's womb." He recognises that as an adult he is the same person as he was in his mother's womb. Before birth and after birth he has been the one continuum. David compares God's creative skill to that of a weaver who puts materials together skilfully. The development of a tiny human is marvellous. God put us together in the womb, and has been intimately involved all along the way. It is plainly impossible to speak about the unborn infant as if it were not a human person or a just part of the mother. The Hebrew for "inmost parts" is, literally, "kidneys." God has known us long before we were conscious, and before we knew Him.

David continues, "I praise You, because I have been fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and my soul knows that very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo, and all my members were being written in Your book. The days were being formed before one of them came into being." God has created our lives and He has also witnessed our formation closely in the dark of the womb. Here again David affirms that the unborn baby in the womb and the mature person

are the same individual. The "I" and "me" is the same person. From the point of conception the person has not been part of the mother, or mere foetal tissue, but the same person, known and cared for by God. Even common sense tells us that if the unborn baby is killed through embryonic stem cell research, it is prevented from reaching its full potential, quite apart from the grim reality that this is one a form of murder, the murder of a close relative. There should be no talk about child-abuse that leaves aside the killing of defenceless children in the womb!

This psalm places our own origin in perspective. We cannot fully understand ourselves as God's creatures. We contemplate ourselves with amazement at God's design, and it is our duty to thank and praise God for all His wonders, and not merely His creation in general, but also the creation of our individual human lives. Modern technology has been able to follow the development of a baby partly by ultra-sound. However, God has always been watching us. God knows and sees His on-going creative action, even when He allows human parents to play their part in it, as co-creators with Him of new human life.

God has also ordained how long our lives are going to be from before we were born. God keeps His decisions, as if they were written up in His register.

David continues: "How difficult for me are Your intentions, O God! How numerous is their total amount! If I were to count them, they would outnumber grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with You." We see God's thoughts expressed in what He has done. If we tried to comprehend God's thoughts and deeds we would be driven asleep from exhaustion. Waking up makes us aware again that God is still present with us. It is not only that God knows about us, but He has also made human beings for a close relationship with Himself. This is so, whether people are healthy, unborn, handicapped, or unwell. God wants close communion between Himself and individual human beings. He has created each individual, and keeps, knows, and loves each one, and wants them to have fellowship with Him as His own redeemed people.

In the final section of the psalm David's own dedication to God makes him aware of people who oppose God, and he includes people who are bloodthirsty. He says, "I wish, O God, that You would kill wicked people, and that bloodthirsty people would go away from me! They are speaking against You with evil intent. Your enemies have been misusing Your name. Should I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? Should I not loathe Your adversaries? I have hated them with extreme antipathy. They have become my enemies."

God is patient with wicked people. Although their end will come at last, David is uneasy that God is so patient with them. David does not, however, consider that it is his own duty, in his zeal for God, to slay the wicked.

Similarly, those who oppose embryonic stem cell research because it is murder dare not take the lives of the researchers into their own hands. However, this section should be applied to powerful people in our society who have enacted legislation contrary to God's creative activity and His desire for love and communion with His creatures. God does not approve of what they have done. If they do not repent, God will punish them. That is certain.

Those who try to be faithful to God are often misrepresented and criticised. When they are attacked, the attack is really against God's name. David writes here as a loyal subordinate ruler under God, his own King, and expresses his own opposition to what God's enemies are doing.

David's psalm ends with a request to God to test him. The heart was regarded as the centre of the human being. That was the place from which feelings, emotions, thoughts, motives, plans, and deeds derived. This should be a reminder to those who promote life-issues to examine whether their own intentions and motives are pure. They must pray to God to keep them faithful in every way. David concludes: "Examine me, O God, and know my heart! Test me! Know my disquieting thoughts, and see if there is any offensive way in me! Moreover, lead me in the way everlasting!"

From the perspective of the New Testament we remember that the Son of God Himself became a part of our created world, and entered it through conception and human birth. We have eternal life through the incarnate Son of God. His free salvation is the motive and the power for all we think, plan, and do as Christians, that this includes our the way we express concern for the sanctity of human life.

A NEW PASTOR IN THE AELC



By the grace of God, *Eternal Word Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bethania, (Qld)* the newest congregation of the *AELC*, now has its own pastor. On Sunday 17th of June, during the Divine Service at Trinity, Marburg, Seminary Student Owen Ohlson was ordained into the 'Office of the Holy Ministry.'

The church was full as the members of the Marburg Parish gathered to celebrate this wonderful occasion. The entire Bethania congregation were present along with six new members from Esk and many friends and relatives of the Ohlson's. Visitors from Hivesville, and the Downs parishes also came to witness this historic event.

In keeping with the encouragement given in our confession, that... "*it is helpful, so far as can be done, to*

honour the ministry of the Word with every kind of praise" (*Apology XIII, 13*), Pastors Priebbenow, Ziebell and Hampel were in attendance to lend their support. (Pastor Grieger would have been there too had not his doctor advised him to stay home for health reasons.)

The pastors and pastor-elect walked in to the sound of a church full of joyful people lifting their voices in full-bodied praise to God for His goodness to them. Pastor Mark Hampel preached the sermon which was on Jonah, the runaway prophet. He pointed out that we are all tempted to run away from the call God has given us at our Baptism, and vowed to uphold on such occasions as at our confirmation or on the day of a pastor's ordination. Elijah ran away, Jesus' disciples ran away, and Jonah ran away, but God calls them and us back to Himself, giving us His Word and Sacrament to strengthen and renew us for our life of service. It is not easy to be faithful to our calling, but there is great joy to be found in doing so. That is the experience of faithful pastors and Christians. It is also a great comfort for every Christian to realise that there is One who will never run from us, our Lord Jesus. He will always seek us through His Word to bring us through death to new life again and again.

Pastor Hampel led the rite of ordination, and we all heard Owen boldly made his promises to uphold the authority of Scripture, the Confessions, and the seal of the Confessional and to faithfully fulfil the work of the ministry. Pastor Priebbenow and Ziebell greeted Owen with words of Scriptural encouragement. We prayed for Owen, the choir sang "Now Thank We all our God" and Owen then proceeded to lead the church in prayer in his new office as a minister of Christ's church. He then went on to very commendably chant the liturgy and fittingly presided over the Sacrament of the Altar.

Greetings from various congregations, Pastor Vern Grieger, Pastor Neil Guthrig, the chairman of the AELC Seminary committee, and others were given, table grace was sung and the congregation personally greeted the new pastor, (and the other pastors) on the way out of church.

A lovely community lunch was then served under a fig tree. A great day was had by all.

The following Thursday Owen was duly installed as pastor of the Bethania congregation to the great joy of the 25 or so strong congregation gathered for the Divine Service.

Let us all continue to pray for our new pastor as he continues his theological studies for a further two years. Let us also continue to pray for more labourers for the vineyard. The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.

WORSHIP SERVICE

The dictionary definition of worship is honouring or revering a supernatural being or power. This revering is

normally done with sacred ceremonies. This is the common understanding of the word “worship.” Clearly, though, the emphasis in this definition is on what we do for God. We honour God. We adore Him. We praise Him through appropriate ceremonies.

The problem is that this dictionary definition is opposed to the Biblical and historic Lutheran understanding of worship. The usual definition makes worship primarily our action. Certainly it is our action in part. We do praise and adore Him through prayer and song. But that is not the main thing of worship, nor the first thing. The main thing and the first thing of worship is what God gives to us.

The rhythm of our worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gives His gifts, and together we receive and extol them. Worship is first and foremost God speaking His Word to us. It is God’s action and not ours. Then we respond in faith and devotion. But even our responding is His action: our faith and praise is possible only by His grace (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:17; Ps. 51:15).

This understanding of worship is very different than the usual one. That is why we call the chief gathering of Christians on Sunday morning the Divine Service. Not because (as is commonly thought) we are serving God, but because God is serving us. In the Divine Service on Sunday morning God serves us through His Word and Sacraments. Only after first receiving these treasures through faith, do we then respond with our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise (Heb. 13).

So there, in the very name we have given to worship, i.e., Service, is the answer to the question we’ve been asking. The main thing happening in worship is God serving us!

REPORT FROM ETERNAL WORD, BETHANIA

Since the great and awesome day of Ordination, (June 17) things have been somewhat busy around the little congregation at Bethania. On Thursday night, the 21st of June, Pastor Mark Hampel installed Owen Ohlson as Pastor of Eternal Word, Bethania. Pastor Peter Ziebell assisted. It was a chilly night on the back veranda, but this night was warmed by the hearts of members and visitors who attended.

Three adults under adult instruction at Fairhaven, Blacksoil (a respite care centre and home for mentally and intellectually disabled) were received into membership of Eternal Word on the 29th of June, and another at the Mental Health Unit, Ipswich Hospital, on the same day. Last Sunday my brother-in-law David Patterson was also received into membership, after adult catechesis.

We have another member living in a nursing home at Pimpama whom I commune now (relieving Pastor Hampel) and another elderly man under adult catechesis instruction at a nursing home in Beenleigh. Nigel, a friend,

another adult chap who has been coming to Pastor Hampel’s Bible Studies and worship on a Thursday night, has also started catechism instruction, and on Sunday 8 July, I had the wonderful blessing of baptising my grandson Seth, here at Eternal Word.

We are continuing with an all-age Sunday School after worship on most Sundays and Pastor Hampel will continue to take services and Bible Studies on a Thursday evening once a month; a real blessing and help to me while I am studying.

The Thursday night Divine Service has become a standard practice (although once a month). It was started by Pastor Hampel about four years ago as a means for him to visit and bring Word and Sacrament to my wife and me when we first left the LCA. It has also been an alternative especially for working people with irregular calendars.

My wife has been kept busy as well with a Ladies group once a month, and provides Sunday School for little ones, when they come. She also does a bulk of the printing and is helping me to brush up on some computer skills.

We had to replace our printer which literally broke a wheel and refused to work anymore. We replaced it quickly with a similar one, but we have since also been given a gift of a Laser copier that we hope to have up and running soon. (God willing!)

Sometime soon we do hope to be involved with some mission work at Lowood; it’s on the calendar but we haven’t started yet. There’s always regular letterbox drops throughout the local neighbourhoods to be done too; no limit to letterboxes in the suburbs!

Pastor Clarence Priebbenow will be spending some time with me shortly, to get me going on the next part of my studies.

Praying together with you that through the Holy Spirit we can continue His work wherever He leads.

Your brother in Christ

Pastor Owen Ohlson.

We appreciate receiving Letters to the Editor. If you would like to comment on anything, please let us know.

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