



St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN  
April, 2020 *Fortress*

## Death is Swallowed Up!

"Man, what a big mouth!" That phrase, "big mouth" (which I'm sure has been used to describe me once or twice before), can mean several things. Usually it's a reference to one who talks too much or especially to one who makes big boasts. But "big mouth" is also a reference to a variety of fish, like the bigmouth goby and the bigmouth buffalo fish, who, as their names imply, have big mouths and swallow their prey whole.

This month, as we celebrate the victory that Jesus won for us on Easter, we rejoice that that *Easter* has a big mouth! It swallows its prey—Death—whole, in one big gulp. Here's Paul's description of this big-mouthed Easter as in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57...

***<sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup> "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Do you like how the apostle describes us the way we are right now? We are perishable. Like the eggs that get rotten or the milk that sours, our bodies, our very selves are in a state of decay (whether we get a virus or not). In fact, we need to bathe regularly to keep the smell of decay from offending others around us. Cut off the circulation for only a short time and gangrene sets in. These bodies of ours are born to die.

*Why* are our bodies so subject to death? Is this how God planned it? No. Not at all. It's because of sin. ***"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."*** God's perfect law lays down the standard for which we are to live. Summarized briefly, it says "Love God perfectly above all else and love your neighbor, that is, everyone else around you, as much as you love yourself."

The problem is that though we see the bulls-eye we're aiming for, we miss the mark. In fact, all too often we miss the target altogether. That's what sin is. Even if you try to be loving to everyone else all the time, selfishness creeps in, and you choose to serve yourselves rather than God. So do I. And for one failure to keep God's law, for one missed opportunity to proclaim God's love to others by word or by deed, for one good thing left undone, for one sin no matter how small it may seem, we are less than perfect. And the many sins we commit daily give death its sting.

Play with a scorpion and you're bound to get stung. Play with sin and selfishness and the stinger is a lot bigger than a scorpion's. Death hits hard. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, he followed through on his promise: that because they ate from the tree which he had forbidden, they would surely die. From dust we've all been made and to dust we will return. Death is chasing all of us, eager to devour us and swallow us whole. And its appetite is never satisfied. Like a sniper it will pick us off one by one. For our sin we are perishable, mortal, dying. And if left to ourselves, that physical death ends in eternal death in hell where the living dead cannot die.

In a popular movie from a few years ago the heroes of the story were in a submarine of sorts fleeing a giant sea monster, right on their tail, ready to devour them in one quick gulp. But just as it grabbed their sub in its teeth, an even bigger sea monster grabbed the first and they made their escape. Likewise, as powerful and consuming as death is, our risen Savior wants us to know that there's something even bigger than death that has the final word. Death itself is swallowed whole by Easter.

When Jesus went to the cross, he took every one of your sins on himself. He swallowed them whole into himself. And as he endured hell itself on that cross in payment for your sins, he took every one of those sins away. They are all forgiven and covered. Not a one of them will be counted against you. And so, even though you and I will still die a physical death, we won't die forever in hell like we deserve. Because of Easter, Death has lost its sting. It's been swallowed up in victory.

A young family was taking a road trip to visit family in another state. When the sun was shining, the windows were down, but as the sprinkles started to hit, the windows went up. Seconds later chaos broke out in the back seat! A bee that had been pinned in the back window by the wind, was now free to terrorize the kids. While still driving, dad quickly reached back and grabbed the bee with his hand. But soon he let go and the bee flew out of his hands into the backseat again. The kids panic resumed until dad explained that the bee couldn't hurt them anymore. He had no more stinger. The stinger was stuck in the palm of dad's hand. The stinger didn't just vanish, but was spent on someone else.

Death's sting didn't just disappear, but was spent on Jesus. You know Jesus could have left the cross anytime he wanted. But he didn't because his hand was clamped down on the fury of hell to rob Death of its stinger. Now Death can buzz and annoy, but it can't really hurt us. The stinger's gone! Rejoice, dear friends! Because of Jesus' perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection, Death has lost its sting! Happy Easter!

In Him, Pastor Rob Guenther

## Church Library News

Easter this year is April 12, but at this point (March yet) we may not be able to be in church on that day to celebrate, due to the pandemic that has closed so many places, even schools and churches. We know that God is still in control of everything, but are we learning the lesson He is teaching?

Reading is a good way to keep busy while "sheltering in place." The church building should be open for anyone to check out a book from the church library. Call ahead to check for sure.

We have two new books to add to the library. One is called "Amazing Grace" and is a biography of William Wilberforce, a man in Britain in the early 1800's and the fight against slavery. Wilberforce was a friend of John Newton, the man who wrote Amazing Grace, the song we all love. Newton had been a slave ship captain before he changed to be against slavery.

The second new book is a second copy of Daniel Deutschlander's study of "The Narrow Lutheran Middle." Some of you may have a copy, but it is very interesting reading. It is so easy to fall into a "ditch" on either side of a doctrine taught in the Bible.

Remember also that there are many children's books on the subject of Jesus at the first Easter, in our church library.

Have a good Easter, knowing Jesus IS alive, and is preparing a place for us in heaven.

LeiLani Rahn  
Church Librarian

## April Sermon Texts

Apr. 1	Luke 23:43	The Promising Word
Apr. 5	Matthew 21:1-11	The King of Life Rides on to His Death
Apr. 9	1 Corinthians 11:23-28	Given and Shed for You
Apr. 10	John 19:30	The Fulfilled Word
Apr. 12	Matthew 28:1-10	Who's Afraid of Easter?
Apr. 19	Acts 2:14a, 22-32	Inspired Sermons: Peter
Apr. 22	Confirmation Examination Service	
Apr. 26	Luke 24:13-35	Walk with Us Lord Jesus

## Upcoming Bible Classes

Sundays at 9:30 am	Book of Isaiah	Paul Koelpin
Thursdays at 10:30 am	Picture Your Victory: Revelation	Pastor Rob Guenther
Thursdays at 7:00 pm	Colossians	Pastor Jeffrey Bovee
Fridays at 6:30 am	"On Giving Advice to God Part 2"	Pastor Rob Guenther
Fridays at 9:30 am	I Apologize	Pastor Rob Guenther

# Council Digest

The church council met on Tuesday, March 17. A summary of reports and action from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Membership changes approved

Transfers In

Jon Beadell from St. John's, Redwood Falls, MN

Sarah Logston from Beautiful Savior, Hillsboro, OR

Cheyenne Murdock from St. Stephens, Adrian, MI

Transfers Out

Isaac and Beth Bodjanac to King of Kings, Clifton Park, NY

Claire Boeder to Trinity, Belle Plaine, MN

Marcia Hermanson to Calvary, Sheboygan, WI

Release

Karen Blaschko

Ministrations

Baptism

15 Mar      Johanna Lynn Schaefer

President Thiesfeldt led a finance focus group conducted as a part of *Ministry Review 2020* prior to the regular council meeting. Past and current members of our finance teams participated in a review of our congregational mission statement and constitution from the perspective of financial management, reporting, and stewardship.

Pastor Guenther currently is wrapping up a five-week Sunday morning Bible class on the St. John's mission statement. Each session has included an open forum to gather input on a different aspect of our congregation's mission for the *Ministry Review 2020*.

Pastor Bovee reported that New Ulm Public School District 88 has requested the use of St. John's during the current COVID-19 situation as an alternate location for the distribution of packaged lunches and school materials. Permission was granted.

Much of the meeting centered on developing a COVID-19 response plan for the congregation. In keeping with local guidelines to limit gatherings to ten people and to maintain appropriate social distancing, the council agreed by consensus that face-to-face worship services would be suspended at least through the end of March. Lenten suppers previously had been cancelled; boards and committees may meet at the discretion of the group leader. By the time you read this, additional information will have been distributed on the status of planned events and activities for the month of April. In the meantime, expanded efforts to maintain contact with our members through email, our website, social media, etc. are in place. Worship and fellowship opportunities at a distance are being offered in the same way.

Trustee Scott Deters reported that the board is investigating plans to increase campus security by installing web cameras, through increased monitoring of key distribution, and installation of electronic door locks in some areas of the building. The dumpster on our property is being used by unauthorized individuals; steps are being taken to curtail the activity.

Pastor Guenther, reporting as a delegate of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, noted that the MVL capital campaign *Building Upon the Rock* has been suspended because of the COVID-19 situation and related impact upon the economy. The situation will be carefully monitored in the coming weeks and months to determine if and when the much-needed campaign can be resumed.

Realizing the great need for future pastors and teachers in the face of rising higher education costs, a recommendation from the Board of Youth and Education to raise our annual support of ministerial students at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from \$250 to \$500 effective with the 2020-21 school year was approved. We pray that our members will continue to be generous in their use of the special envelopes designated for this purpose.

The remainder of the meeting was used to hear reports from Deacon Brad Price, Board of Evangelism Chair Bill Pekrul, Board of Stewardship Chair Dan Borgwardt, and Board of Youth and Education Chair Heath Dobberpuhl on their work related to *Ministry Review 2020*. The remaining board and committee reports will follow at a meeting in the near future. In the meantime, a congregational survey is being developed for distribution sometime during the month of April to gather feedback on various aspects of our mission in preparation for the development of a strategic plan.

The following schedule was set for future meetings:

- Next regular council meeting -  
Tuesday, April 14, 7:00 pm
- Next voters' meeting –  
Tuesday, April 28, 7:00 pm

Submitted by Steven Thiesfeldt,  
Congregational chairman

## Our Synod at Work

### WELS Annual Report: Called to Prepare

Last month we began highlighting information that is contained in the WELS Annual Report to its members for 2020 and indicated that we would be continuing to highlight information in the next few months. For this column we will take a look at the section entitled “Called to Prepare.” Other sections in the report are entitled “Called to Proclaim,” “Called to Serve,” and “Called to Support” and we will highlight them in future columns.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is located in Mequon, Wisconsin, and prepares men to begin pastoral ministry by providing them with spiritual, theological, and professional training. In 2019 there were 26 men who graduated from the Seminary. During their time at the seminary, students have several opportunities to serve in a variety of ministries and to experience other cultures to help prepare them for future calls.

The seminary also provides pastors with opportunities for continued growth in all their callings through its institute, Grow in Grace. The Grow in Grace programs offer continuing education courses, a mentoring initiative for new graduates, a clearinghouse of resources for pastors, and an annual retreat for pastors who are celebrating milestones in their ministries.

Professor Earle Treptow was installed as the new president of the Seminary in August of 2019. He brings a wealth of solid Lutheran parish experience to the work. Professor Paul Wendland, the seminary's former president, transitioned back into a full-time teaching role on the seminary's faculty.

Martin Luther College's mission is to train a corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified to meet the ministry needs of WELS by (1) preparing men for pastoral training; (2) preparing men and women for serve as teachers and staff ministers; (3) preparing men and women for other church ministries; (4) preparing international students for ministry in partnership with WELS mission fields; and (5) providing programs of continuing education. MLC is engaged in a two-year capital campaign called “Equipping Christian Witnesses” to raise funds for student recruitment, student financial aid, and student facilities.

WELS also has preparatory schools: Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan, and Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin. These schools prepare high school students for future service as pastors, teachers, and staff ministers. In the current school year, Michigan Lutheran Seminary has 196 students and Luther Preparatory School has 402 students.

Next month we will take a look at the section entitled “Called to Proclaim.”

Gerald Woodley

## **St. Paul’s Lutheran School**

[splnewulm.org/school/](http://splnewulm.org/school/)

### **BoCD Work** (SP Board of Child Discipleship)

The BOCD met during a short meeting to work on some things in regard to ongoing work of the board. However, the primary focus was on decisions for the school in connection with COVID-19. The school was closed from Tuesday, March 17 through March 27 to allow teachers to plan for distance learning. As governmental restrictions updated daily, information was sent to parents via the School Reach service for texting and phone calls. Information that needs to go out will continue to use that communication service. If there is something that is considered to inform congregational members, it will be included in weekly bulletins and emails.

All school activities such as musicals and concerts have been cancelled at this point. If and when school resumes, decisions for future events will be determined at that time.

As we continue to trust in God for all things, we focus on His Word and on his promises and encourage our students, parents and members to continue to do the same. The best thing we can do for our children is to read His Word together daily and model for them the trust of the explanation of the 1st Commandment: We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

### **Divine Call**

Mr. Nick Kressin received a Call to teach at St. John Lutheran School in Milwaukee, WI. Please keep Mr. Kressin in your prayers. There has been no decision on the call at the writing of this report.

### **K-Round-up**

Kindergarten Round-up took place the end of February and was well attended. If there are families that missed the Round-up event, you can call the school office for details or pre-registration. (354-2326) St. John’s Congregation encourages all of our families with kindergarten aged children to enroll their children at St. Paul’s School where children hear the Word of God each day and each subject is taught in light of God’s Word.

### **K-12 Assistance Envelope**

If you haven't used the envelope in your offering envelope box for K-12 Education Assistance, consider using it. Your gifts help support families who send or want to send their children to St. Paul's Lutheran School or MVL, but are unable financially to do so. Distributions are given prior to Registration Day for St. Paul's School following a review of Applications for Tuition Assistance submitted before June 30th at the school. If there are families that find that they are in need of extra assistance, please contact our Bd. of Education Chairman, Heath Dobberpuhl.

**Calendar** All Dates are tentative at this point and will be confirmed or cancelled via weekly announcements.

Respectfully Submitted,  
James Dretske  
jdretske@splnewulm.org

## **Archives**

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow!

For the past decade Bob Krueger has served St. John's as congregational archivist. In each newsletter, Bob highlighted God's loving kindness to us by documenting the history of our church and schools. Early in January, Bob received the goal of every Christian's earthly pilgrimage - Jesus' gift of everlasting life. The reward of grace is fitting for a man who chronicled the history of God's grace to all of us at St. John's!

Recently, St. John's has asked me to act as archivist. I have begun to investigate the archives of our congregation, but I have only scratched the surface. I would also like to interview any members who would like to share what they remember about St. John's. If you have pictures, documents or memories, please feel free to leave them in my church mailbox or call me at (507) 217-7119.

In the upcoming newsletters and bulletins, I look forward to sharing with you vignettes of the Lord's work among us.

St. John's Lutheran should also be anticipating our 75th anniversary in 2023. If our Savior does not return before then, our platinum anniversary will afford yet another opportunity to marvel at his patience and proclaim his love.

Wayne Laitinen

## **Sending Offerings through Bill Pay**

Several members of St. John's have asked if there is a way for them to make their weekly offerings automatically either online or by an automatic bank transaction.

St. John's is investigating our online giving options, but are not yet ready to receive online gifts. For the time being, we suggest that our members consider using your bank's online Bill Pay service to make weekly or monthly gifts to St. John's.

If you have questions about using Bill Pay to make donations, please contact Financial Secretary Mike Thom at 507-217-7671.

## **Handbell Choir**

If you'd like to be a part of something musical but you have limited vocal ability, then the new Handbell Choir is for you! If you're not good at reading notes or rhythm, I can teach you!

Practices will be in the church basement beginning at 6-7 pm on Wednesdays.

Please indicate your willingness to join the Handbell Choir by email to Becky Berg: [rberg@mvlhs.org](mailto:rberg@mvlhs.org)

## **MLC Ladies Auxiliary**

The MLC Food Bank continues to serve students with families. The Food Bank depends on the contributions of our churches, organizations and individuals.

Acceptable donations include non-perishable food items, personal and household cleaning items and monetary gifts. Gift cards for local stores are used by the Food Bank manager, Judy Gosdeck, to purchase items needed to fill the shelves.

Students who have families can make use of the Food Bank once a month.

Thank you for your support and donations in the past. Please continue to support the Food Bank. A donation box is located in the church narthex along with a list of items. Checks should be made out to: Martin Luther College Food Bank.

Contact person: Jeneane Thiesfeldt 507-240-4523  
[thiesfjm@gmail.com](mailto:thiesfjm@gmail.com)

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**Church Service on T.V.**

**Mondays: 6 pm**

**Tuesdays: 1 pm**

**Thursdays: 10 am**

**on**

**Comcast Channel 14**

**NU Telecom Channel 3**